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Linux and Free Software enjoyed continuing success throughout 2005. We saw a growing number of government initiatives aimed at making the switch to Open Source, a very public adoption of Open Document formats by the US State of Massachusetts, and a defeat for software patents in the European Union (for now at least). We've also seen the continued trend for major corporations to throw their weight behind the Linux community. IBM were just one of several companies that announced they would be releasing parts of their massive patent portfolio under Open Source friendly terms. This subsequently fed into an OSDL clearing house, appropriately named the Patent Commons <http://www.patentcommons.org/>.

In the wider world, the US\$ 100 Laptop project has begun to make some real

Community Notes

THE YEAR WAS 2005

progress. The MIT Media Lab announced that they will be running Linux on the windup laptops, due in part to its minimal requirements and the ability to customize parts of a Linux operating system for the low-powered, technically challenging devices. The US\$ 100 Laptop project was not the only group to see the power of Linux on small embedded devices. Nokia announced and later launched their 770 Internet Tablet device, which has been a success beyond even Nokia's expectations – especially now that the tablets have hit the gadget-obsessed US market (check them out in CompUSA). This author does not leave home without his 770 and has found it invaluable on those long haul flights – especially when using inflight wifi connectivity somewhere over the Atlantic.

One thing that the past year has shown is that our community is formed from a strong and robust network of individuals and corporations that continues to grow. This growth is not without its problems. Over the past year, several Linux User Groups around the world have had to publicly deal with clashes between the long established technorati and newcomers seeking new direction. In one case, this author observed a group of users publicly disowning their local LUG and forming their own private club in order to avoid the petty bickering that had begun to plague the existing group. Such issues are just beginning to affect many of the older groups as they figure out how to cope with inevitable expansion. Many have now created separate fora for newcomers while they get up to speed, but such segregation only works for just so long.

Flying Around the World

Over the past year, this author has – in his quest for general Linux enlighten-

ment – managed a total of 45 flights across three continents and sub-continents. I've had a tea party in Boston with BLU LUG members (I'm British, so think about the historical irony there for a moment) and curry in Bombay with the Mumbai Linux User's Group. I have traveled thousands of miles by car, train, boat, and plane with Linux users from around the world. My journey has enabled me to meet many of the different groups in person, and I have enjoyed seeing the wider community from different perspectives. Drop me a line if you'd like me to invade your local group sometime.

January began with a couple of trips to France and Germany. I hooked up with a bunch of embedded hackers in Munich and enjoyed fine Bavarian cuisine. Since I don't speak much German, I don't generally get involved with German speaking LUGs, but I have been continually impressed with the pervasive nature of Linux all around the country. On several occasions over the past year alone, I've encountered airport security personnel who discussed the finer points of their favorite Linux distribution (many people I meet seem to prefer Mandriva, which I've always found a somewhat bizarre preference over OpenSuse) whilst supposedly verifying I wasn't some kind of covert cyber penguin terrorist. (I'm not; I'm an overt Linux evangelist.)

Ontario and East US

I spent February traveling around parts of Ontario and the eastern United States. Having been to the OLS (Ottawa Linux Symposium) for the past few years, I've fallen in love with local area and wanted to discover what a real Canadian winter is really like – it's cold, but not without merit compared with our continually



Figure 1: The Canadian winter was cold, but hardly dreary.

dark and dreary British weather. I swung by the February OCLUG meeting and listened to a couple of talks on the status of real time support in Linux for industrial machinery.

OCLUG is certainly one of the larger and more organized groups around – and they enjoy a good drink after their meetings.

After a few days hanging around Canada, I embarked on a road trip with OLS organizer Andrew Hutton and another local resident down to Boston for the LinuxWorld Expo. We hung out in Boston for a few days and hooked up with a bunch of local hackers – people from Redhat, Novell, Sun, and elsewhere.

A few of us got together and swung by an unofficial LinuxWorld meetup organized by the local BLU LUG, which provided me with an opportunity for an impromptu tour of the MIT campus. BLU is certainly a friendly bunch. The group seems to be mostly driven by the fine efforts of folks like John Abreau and David Kramer, who also know the local micro-brew pubs pretty well.

The BLU mailing list is fairly representative of the larger US LUGs. I also regularly follow the postings on the major “international” groups such as SVLUG (Silicon Valley LUG) and NYLUG (New York LUG), which, incidentally, has very lively and interesting IRC channels too. Just like the larger groups, BLU is

backed by an official organization. In non-European groups, it’s much more common to form an official structure that handles managerial tasks. The mailing list handles discussions ranging from serial console configuration issues through debugging kernel panics or even simply how to get a system up and running.

This organizational structure reflects the wide membership from which the group is formed – Linux enthusiasts from the young to the not so young, and

in all forms of employment, are represented.

Back to Brussels

FOSDEM took place at the end of February at the usual time and place – just in time for me to get back from Boston and get on a train. The FOSDEM really is the major pan-European technical/social event of the year for Free and Open Source developers. Everyone who is anyone turns up at this event, which is interspersed heavily with large quantities of good Belgian beer. I once again hung out in the Embedded room and skipped out on much of the more mainstream conference tracks – the whole event is much larger than can possibly be taken in by one person.

The Pacific Side

USENIX 2005 took place in Anaheim, California in April of 2005, and I swung by for a few days of this 30-year-old event. Ted T’so (one of the original Linux kernel folks) gave an excellent tutorial day on kernel development, which was both reasonably priced and also well attended. Of those present were Matt Weber and Eric Gaumer, two local residents who later showed me what Linux hackers in Anaheim get up to. They’re fanatical fans of a radio show recorded by a bunch of British friends, LUG Radio <http://www.lugradio.org/>, so I called up show host Jono Bacon for an



Figure 2: Southern California was host to the USENIX conference.



Figure 3: In Portland I took a mystery bike ride.

(expensive) transatlantic cellphone chat with two of his more distant fans.

The remainder of USENIX was a massively successful conference. Presentations were too many to name individually, but I recall being impressed by the work in progress reports from various Google engineers hacking on personal projects (for example, a bandwidth throttler that works entirely in userspace thanks to C library hacks), as well as the enthusiasm of the Open Solaris crowd. Liane, Bart and others even entertained a lively (and admittedly somewhat drunken) discussion on interrupts and memory management at the hotel in the early hours of the morning.

More Travels

In the summer of 2005, I attended the 7th annual OLS (Ottawa Linux Symposium). A couple of us were organized enough to take the scenic route by rail from Vancouver to Ottawa. Over the course of several days, we discussed all manner of quasi-Linux related topics and bumped into a few Linux using fellow passengers – including one sysadmin from Toronto, who joined us for an impromptu laptop screening of the cult movie classic “Sneakers” in the buffet car. OLS was every bit as educational as it was edutainment.

There were fantastic talks at OLS on topics from embedded devices to real time. Greg Kroah-Hartman gave one particularly memorable tutorial on USB programming, complete with a free USB temperature sensor for everyone who attended, so that they could further test and develop the example code pre-

sented. Dave Jones gave an excellent keynote presentation, which effortlessly mixed the serious topic of documentation and good testing with carefully timed images of his stuffed monkey collection in various bizarre poses. Apparently, Dave had recently had a dream in which he was piloting a burning spaceship in an effort to save a stuffed monkey from almost certain

destruction. Just be thankful this guy is on our side.

Recovering from an unofficial whiskey tasting evening, I journeyed on to OSCON on the West Coast. Many of the folks who had been at the earlier USENIX were able to provide updates on their progress over the months between. This included the work that lead up to the final release of Open Solaris at around the same time. While in Portland, I was able to meet up with a variety of the local Linux community (Portland really is the center of the Linux universe, at least in the US), and I even went on a midnight mystery bike ride with a bunch of embedded hackers. One piece of advice would be to avoid Pow-

ell's famous bookstore, unless you plan on taking up residence in Portland for an extended period of time.

Hacking Bombay

Following an amusing summer conference season, I had an opportunity to visit India in October for a friend's wedding. This gave me the opportunity to hook up with local Linux hackers in the Mumbai Linux User Group (IMLUG-Bombay, as it's officially known). These guys are pretty seriously into Linux in a big way, and it's quite amazing to think that there are almost 1,000 members. They have the full range of professionals and enthusiasts amongst a diverse group, but they have many of the same issues I have seen elsewhere.

They're into Ubuntu in a big way, and they don't seem to be having quite so much trouble with in-fighting as one might expect from a large group. Meetings take place in Barista coffeeshops (think Starbucks), and I was very happy to feel welcome at an impromptu meeting that we put together at the last minute.

A year of work interspersed with as much travel as possible has shown me how similar all of the Linux groups around the world really are. We have many of the same issues, which we can work on together as we continue onwards and upwards. Here's to another successful year in 2006. ■



Figure 4: I went to Bombay for a wedding but still had time to sample the Linux scene.