HACKING THE HIGHLANDS

Killin saw plenty of penguins in August when approximately 80 geeks gathered for this year's Linux Beer Hike in the Scottish Highlands.

BY HEIKE JURZIK

The seventh annual "Linux Bier Wanderung" (also known as "Linux Beer Hike") [1]) took place from August 6th to 14th in Killin [2], Stirlingshire in Scotland. Around 80 Linux and Free Software enthusiasts, families, and friends from more than a dozen different countries turned up and spent a fantastic week together.

Highland Hiking

Nestled in the middle of some of the most spectacular scenery in Scotland, Killin turned out to be an ideal location for the various hikes and excursions. While some went on hikes to Ben Lawers (one of Scotland's highest mountains), the Glencoe pass, and the Schiehallion Scramble, rumors say that a group of geeks discovered a monster during a boat trip on nearby Loch Tay.

Other hikes included a visit to the Atlas Brewery in Kinlochleven and trips to various whisky distilleries – not to mention some serious rock climbing on top of the roof of McLaren Hall to set up an access point for the wireless Internet connection.

Hacking the Hall

Internet access turned out to be a problem at first, since the planned DSL line was not available in time. But the LBW would not be the LBW if the geeks had not found a creative solution: Some attendees with rock climbing gear put an access point and an omnidirectional antenna on top of the roof of the hall. From a house in Killin with a bi-directional satellite connection (which unfortunately was not in direct line of sight of the hall) they pulled a very long cable (about 150 meters) up the field, providing power over Ethernet for a simple bridge with a parabolic dish antenna, which was pointing at the hall.

Throughout the week there were talks on a variety of subjects, such as "Introduction to Python," "Self-made Linux Kernels," "Linux and Lego," "Ruby on

Rails," and "Homebrewing and Beer Bread." One of the highlights was the "Bandwidth over Wet String" contest: people often refer to their network connection as a piece of wet string, usually when it is unreliable. In this contest, the geeks were asked to use a wet string to transfer more than 5 GB of data. A lot of creative designs were presented (including a case made of Lego to hold a hard disk), but in the end, the prize went to someone who transferred 2.2 Tbps by swinging two hard disks in a bag.

Figure 1: Penguins in the highlands – not an uncommon view in Killin.

Not Just Pizza

The talk on homebrewing and breadmaking resulted in some fantastic homemade baguettes, which were happily consumed during the International Potluck. For this event, people brought food or drinks that represented their home countries. The kitchen looked like a battlefield, but the result was a very impressive buffet that included a Tux cake.

The Linux Bier Wanderung 2005 was a huge success greatly enjoyed by every hacker, hiker, and monster hunter. ■

The Linux Bier Wanderung

The Linux Bier Wanderung (LBW) is an entirely volunteer-run event funded by a combination of donations from the attendees for the cost of the hall and Internet access, together with sponsorship from companies eager to promote the international meeting of Open Source users.

This year's event was kindly sponsored by the Open Source Consortium [4], Galileo Computing, and John Costello, a previous attendee who couldn't make it this year.

Figure 2: Transferring data over a piece of wet string – the geeks found some creative solutions.

INFO

[1] LBW Info: http://linuxbierwanderung.org/

[2] LBW in Killin: http://lbw2005.ziggur.at/

[3] More pictures from the last LBW: http://lbwpictures.killefiz.de

[4] http://www.opensourceconsortium.