

IT Corner – March 2003

Internet Service Provider Clarification

In the last issue I listed the various Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and associated charges indicating that the some of charges were an “monthly unlimited access cost”. The charges indicated are for unlimited access to the Internet but you must also pay for the local phone call required for each of the various ISPs listed (much like the situation in the UK). My understanding is that the cost for a local phone call is about 10D per hour so your total cost for using a dial-up Internet account would be the monthly charge of the ISP **PLUS** whatever phone charges you incur during the month when connecting to your account (at 10D per hour).

Rebirth of a Laptop

In the previous newsletter I related the ongoing saga of my laptop which, on last note, had been scheduled to be serviced when I returned to the UK to visit at Christmas. To summarize, when I turned on the computer it would refuse to start Microsoft Windows and that is about it (despite having, on advice of the manufacturer, replaced the hard disk).

To continue the saga, I did indeed return to the UK with the laptop which was a bit troubling because the airports have been known to request passengers to turn on their laptops to demonstrate that it is a laptop and not some other terrorist device. Nonetheless I escaped security without having to turn on the machine (which would have demonstrated being a brick rather than a computer) and about two days into my holiday I journeyed to the back and beyond of Boston Manor in London to deliver the computer for repair. This was a slight journey on the Picadilly Line and also involved about a 15-minute walk from the station to the IBM service offices. From there they delivered it to Scotland (the only place capable of repairing laptops, it seems) for repair.

The next day I was told that the laptop needed a new CMOS battery. Now, if you know anything about computers you will realize that this is a part that costs roughly £5 and is simple to replace. But, not in a laptop and particularly, not an IBM laptop. IBM charge a minimum labour and service cost on top of any part costs so I ended up with a cost of about £150 to replace a battery. Oh dear.

After having recovered from the shock of this expense to my Visa bill, a few days later my laptop was ready for pick-up in London so off I again trekked to Boston Manor to pick it up. Sure enough, it was working fine although since I had purchased a new hard disk it had no operating system (Microsoft Windows) or any programs. So, I set about over the next few days installing everything all over again.

And here it is. I am using it to type up this article and it is working fine, although I am noticing that the battery is not fully charging (only to about 8%) which is a sign that the battery needs replacing...

“Volunteers in Gambia” Web Group

There seems to have been a lot of misunderstanding about this group that was set-up by Philip Bell soon after arriving last year. After the recent discussion about volunteer communication it was suggested that volunteers should start using some sort of electronic means of communication – this group is ideal for this.

All volunteers are invited to sign-up (Philip will be happy to approve your request) and the content includes (amongst other things):

- Dates of important events (movies, VSO activities, etc)
- Pictures of various parts of the country/various VSO activities/various VSO volunteers and staff

- SPF documentation including all forms and the constitution
- List of DVDs owned by volunteers

Though the content is really dependant upon what members of the group want to have on it. All of this is provided by Yahoo! Groups *free of charge* – Yahoo! is hoping you will read the advertisements they put at the top of the group’s pages when you access the group information. Yes, this is the same company that offers free e-mail accounts as well.

The group consists of a web site that you can visit at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/volsingambia> where you will be asked for a username and password (click the appropriate link if you do not have one and then you will be asked to create one – it is all free of charge). Once Philip has approved your application to the group you will receive any e-mails addressed to the group (volsingambia@groups.yahoo.com) as well as having access to the web site (which includes an archive of all messages ever sent to the group). The advantage to this is that you do NOT need to stay on the Internet for a long time to get the information from this group – just read your e-mail!

We have been limiting the membership to volunteers only so this is a good forum to discuss issues relating to VSO and operational matters as well – or, even better, to share experiences and information from our lives here in The Gambia. I would encourage everyone to sign up as the more people that join the more useful it becomes.

News

- I returned from the UK with a good number of DVDs that I am more than willing to loan out, please take a look at the list on the “Volunteers in The Gambia” group site for a complete list (or e-mail me)
- Internet, as you may be aware, is now available in the resource centre at the office for (I believe) 15D per hour, I would encourage all that use this to PLEASE pay this fee as it will encourage VSO to keep this facility available
- M.P Trading on Kairaba Avenue (beside Harry’s) offers great prices on mice, keyboards, blank CDs and other computer equipment – be sure to check them out before you call Quantum or some other group. My department at DoSH&SW have had no problems with their equipment (despite the incredibly cheap price) and the salesman are quite good with returns of anything that is found to be defective
- I have been adding newer computer magazines to the resource centre as they become available – be sure to check them out
- As normal the “Steve Rice Computer Fix-It Service” operates at the cost of one meal per problem fixed (cost negotiable)

As per normal, let me know if there are any topics you would like me to discuss/address in this column.

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