

Cyber Sunrise Over Addis Ababa

by Daniel Jacob

There has been and there shall be lots of talk about all that's available from the coming Internet. Readers of this week's issue are already familiar with what's to come -so let's turn our attention then to how we can start, even now, exploring this world within worlds.

Access to Internet services in Addis Ababa is available to anyone with three essential ingredients: 1) A computer 2) A Modem (to use a computer over telephone lines) 3) A telephone. With this a person may contact by telephone (51-45-34) the PADIS computer bulletin board known as "The Hornet". From the Hornet a person would retrieve by computer two final ingredients: A web browser (your "car" for driving on the information super highway), and the "winsock" communications software (to make your computer think the phone line is an Internet line). Those who contact the Hornet will find step-by-step instructions for how to proceed.

With the web browser ("Netscape" is the most well-known) the Internet explorer (called a "surfer") would call back to the Hornet. From the Hornet the surfer will be able to view 3 World Wide Web services and retrieve new software by FTP.

FTP is a file transmission and retrieval system for sending and receive items like software between computers on the Internet. Following Email, the World Wide Web, or just "web" or "WWW", is the greatest utility that the Internet provides. With Email a person composing a document is required to mail it to each person he or she wishes to read it. With WWW the document is never sent to anyone, the document may remain on the composer's computer and anyone wishing to read it is welcome to come (electronically) and do so. This saves a lot of trouble when there might be thousands or millions of people who may wish to read!

Navigating the Internet through the web is a lot like reading a big electronic magazine. You will view in your web browser pages of text and pictures (sometimes sounds and movies but less often) that you can read at your leisure. Turning pages will then be done through the keyboard or by the computer "mouse". Only now when you change pages you may also have changed computers. The new computer that you read the next page from may be located around the world. The magazine reader may not even realize that they have change to another computer on the other side of the planet. This is the "magic of the Internet" and of the "cyberspace" we have journeyed through by changing pages and computers. At its best, distance loses its relevance in cyberspace. All going well, flipping between computers (like flipping pages) is as fast and invisible to the surfer as working on their own computer in the comforts of their home.

The Web is often used interchangeably with the term "Internet" though this is a misnomer. The two are quite different. The Internet is merely a network that connects networks of computers. Physically it is a collection of cables and open satellite links. This is much the same as our "world wide" telephone network only that we are ultimately connecting computers and not telephones. The Web is then a service we can use over this network. Voice communication is one type of service people use on the telephone network, but sending and receiving faxes is another kind of service we can use on the same network. The Web is just one of many services we can use the Internet for.

So, what do you see when one computer calls another over Internet? Web surfers in Addis Ababa who call The Hornet will have three web services available to them. As you might expect the ECA web pages are available to the public. Also, the UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia is "on line". Finally, the "Ethiopia On Line" web service is a popular location.

Ethiopia On Line is a web server for non-UN materials. There you will find such interesting sites as "The Addis Ababa Home Page", "The Ethiopian Scientific Society Home Page", "The Abyssinia Cyberspace Gateway", "The Addis Tribune Home Page" and the ESS 1996 Telecom Conference proceedings. Coming soon will be Microsoft's very own "Mungo Park" adventure magazine which has been tracking the Tekeze River Expedition -previously inaccessible within Ethiopia. By the way, a "Home Page" if we have not mentioned it is an organization's self-presentation to the Internet community -like a fancy brochure explaining what an organization is about or what products a company might sell.

Even without installing the special web browsing software on your home PC, the ECA web services are accessible with the limitation of "text only" viewing -meaning no pictures can be transmitted.

Is This Really the Internet?

In a word:- "no". Visitors to the ECA's web sites will experience the services of the Internet but only from the computers within the ECA compound. The ECA will not be able to provide access to the outside Internet -only the ETA will have the authority to do so. However, new materials from the outside Internet will be downloaded and made available to the Ethiopian surfer from within the ECA compound. This limited glimpse of the truly "World Wide" Internet should still be enjoyable to the average user.

The same procedures and software will be used through the ETA service when it becomes available. The main difference being the telephone number you will call and the unlimited number of web sites available. These external web sites may also be downloaded by ECA and ETA email subscribers through "Agora" web servers that will retrieve and email back the web sites you request. This is the best approach for people wanting to view web in the outside world without the added cost of a full internet subscription. Visit The Hornet for a list of Agora web-by-email addresses.

It's Better to Give Than Receive

Not only can you read Internet materials at The Hornet -you may also publish! The Hornet has always been the community's public electronic communications area in Ethiopia. This spirit and service continues with the latest form of electronic communication -the World Wide Web. The Ethiopia On Line web service is available to organizations, companies and the interested to publish WWW materials for the public to browse and enjoy. Materials published at Ethiopia On Line will also be available to the surfers outside of Ethiopia.

The Addis Tribune has for two months lead the way of Ethiopian companies in this latest communications frontier. All are invited to come see what the Addis Tribune has done to present Ethiopia to the world and to follow their lead in bringing Ethiopia to the Internet!