

DebConf7, Edinburgh

December 7, 2007

EIGHTH ANNUAL DEBIAN CONFERENCE
Final Report



DebConf7

Edinburgh, Scotland

17–23 June 2007

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Introduction

DebConf7 took place in Edinburgh, Scotland, from Sunday 17 to Saturday 23 June 2007. It was preceded by DebCamp - a smaller, less formal event giving an opportunity for group work on Debian projects - and Debian Day, a self-contained conference aimed at Debian users and others interested in learning more about free software.

DebConf is the Debian Project's developer conference. In addition to a full schedule of technical, social and policy talks, DebConf provides an opportunity for developers, contributors and other interested people to meet in person and work together more closely. It has taken place annually since 2000 in locations as varied as Canada, Finland and Brazil. DebConf7 took place in central Edinburgh, within the UNESCO World Heritage site.

Over 400 people took part in this year's conference: listening to the talks; discussing development issues; working closely with their fellow developers. And, of course, enjoying themselves.

This report hopes to provide some insight into DebConf for those who were unable to attend. It will cover the major parts of DebConf and provide a look at the work of the organising team. It will also include the personal impressions of some of the attendees.



DebConf7 group photo

From the DPL

DebConf has always been the best opportunity for Debian developers to meet in person, share their work and make collective decisions. This year's edition was no exception, and delivered its share of productive collaboration.

Having vowed to further improve internal and external communication, and having been able to attend DebConf with my leader's hat, I was truly amazed at how face-to-face meetings could sweep away the issues with trust and latency usually inherent in Internet-based teamwork. Many pending internal decisions were unblocked after mere minutes of discussion.

...has always been the best opportunity for Debian developers to meet in person, share their work and make collective decisions.

When it comes to external collaborations, there are of course our sponsors, who unsurprisingly are generally users or contributors to Debian itself. In addition, other distributions were well represented, with numerous Ubuntu developers, as well as attendees and lecturers from the Gentoo project and the OpenSolaris-based Nexenta project, amongst others.

...would like to thank everyone, sponsors and volunteers,...

A mention should be made of the wonderful work of the video team: the talks and workshops were streamed live, and are still available for viewing by anyone that missed them, or would like to see them again.



I would like to thank everyone, sponsors and volunteers, for devoting so much time and so many resources to making DebConf possible. And I am also grateful to all the participants who were ready to spend a couple of weeks helping Debian and its two priorities: users and Free Software.

*Sam Hocevar
Debian Project Leader*

Debian Day

Introduction

Immediately prior to the main conference, an open day was held in order to give some more information about Debian to the general public. The event was announced through a large number of channels, getting coverage in the national IT press. 154 people pre-registered for the event with around 100 turning up on the day.



The event consisted of a series of seven talks, in order to cover many of the areas of the Debian project. In addition, demonstrations of Debian and some of its applications were shown in a separate room, and a collection of CDs and DVDs were handed out to attendees. All of the talks held during the day were broadcast live over the Internet, and slides and recordings are all available on www.debianday.org.

Programme

The day opened with Andreas Tille, a Debian Developer, giving an introduction to why free software is important to Debian. Following this Andreas Ehn and Andreas Schuldei of Spotify AB explained how they use Debian for their deployment infrastructure and the benefits this

brings them. Finally before a lunch break, Knut Yrvin gave an upbeat report on the DebianEdu project and Skolelinux's success in providing free software to education.

After lunch, Bdale Garbee of Hewlett Packard gave a run-through of the history of the relationship between HP and Debian, concluding with an update on the official support of Debian on their ProLiant industry standard server family. Nick Mailer of The Positive Internet Company gave an insightful presentation on free software from the perspective of law and free markets. Chris Halls from Credativ Ltd explained how free software fits into today's enterprise infrastructure, and how they use this to provide services to customers.

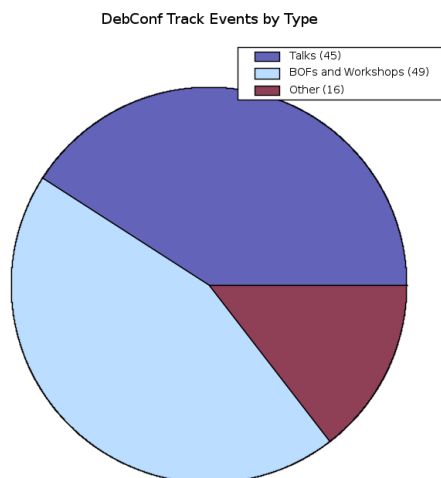
Finally, Patrick Harvie MSP (Member of the Scottish Parliament) expounded on his views on the importance of free software. In particular, he stated that free software should be discussed as part of the national curriculum.

In general, the event was well received by those who attended. Feedback forms were filled in by a large number of those attending, and the comments will be taken into account as we strive to make next year's event even better.

Talks

Facts and Figures

The DebConf 7 Call for Papers resulted in nearly 200 events being registered in Pentabarf (the conference management system). In the end, 128 of these took place during the period of the conference (others being combined, duplicates or in a small number of cases rejected).



Informally, many more events took place outside of the main schedule, meaning that the two talk rooms and two BoF rooms were in pretty much constant use throughout the conference period.

Examples

These are descriptions of just some of the talks. Summarising all of them would take nearly as long as the conference itself!

Bits from the DPL

The first main talk of the conference came from Anthony Towns and Sam Hocevar. Anthony, as the former DPL, gave a review of his time in office and the various projects with which he had

been involved. Sam, as the current DPL, then gave an overview of his platform and what he hoped to accomplish during his period as the DPL. This was the third year in which there has been a DPL report during DebConf and the rating of 90% importance which those who rated the talk gave indicates the value of the event.

LiMux - Debian desktops in the city of Munich

Jan-Marek Glogowski and Florian Maier discussed the LiMux project: the Munich local government's undertaking to move all of their desktops over to using Free Software for both operating system and office software. They are also developing all of their new internal applications to be OS independent. Jan-Marek and Florian went into more detail about the logistics of their migration, including training for large numbers of users, automated installation using FAI and configuration based around LDAP, all running on top of a Debian Sarge base.

From Concept to Concrete: Hardware, from design to product

Daniel Silverstone and Vincent Sanders gave a talk aimed at trying to educate the audience of (mainly) software developers about the trials and tribulations of developing hardware. This entertaining talk covered the process of developing hardware all the way from defining a products key features and architecture through to actually manufacturing PCBs on a real production line, complete with both handouts and real-world examples.

Development

With so many Debian developers in one place it would be hard to stop them doing technical work. During the conference, development work continued for Debian and other open source projects. This took two forms - developers gathered in the hacking labs working on code, and Birds of a Feather sessions (BoFs), where developers interested in one area discussing and working on issues together.

BoFs

Much of the work during DebConf was started at BoF sessions. Getting developers together makes design, discussion and decision making much easier than over IRC or via a mailing list, letting developers go home with ideas and plans. The fruits of this year's development discussions have yet to be picked - users will see them in Lenny and subsequent releases.

Debian Installer

The Debian Installer team is one of the largest and most distributed teams in Debian. The team took full advantage of the opportunity to hold a number of face to face BoF sessions, covering a range of organisational and technical topics, to great effect — Jérémy Bobbio, one of the Debian Installer developers, said

I can't emphasise how important it is to have these face to face meetings.

DebConf also saw the team working together on a range of features for the installer including on the new live CD based installer, implementing initial support for Serial ATA RAID, support for the very latest 2.6 kernels and improvements to the cdebconf user interface code.

Solving social problems via a social committee

As Debian grows, more social interaction problems are starting to show up - the more people we have talking only via mailing lists, IRC and other electronic communication channels, the more likely it is that disagreements turn into arguments and arguments turn into flame wars. There is a proposal to create a Social Committee, a group tasked to help reduce these conflicts by simple moderation and (where necessary) to decide how to resolve personal conflicts.

DebConf was an opportunity for to have many of the interested parties get together; a great deal of progress was made, and a general agreement was thrashed out about the shape and powers of a Social Committee.

Arm port BOF

The Arm port of Debian has several issues that needed discussing. There are significant ABI changes coming that will affect Debian, and plans were needed to cope with that. Some of the currently-supported machine types will no longer be supported, and the ramifications of that were not immediately obvious. The logistics of

the ABI change and how to support users and developers through this major upheaval needed planning, and also how to manage and upgrade the build machines that would be needed.

A lot of the key players in the Arm development community were at DebConf, so it made a great deal of sense to use this opportunity for a meeting.

i18n BoFs

During DebConf, a series of Internationalisation BoF sessions were held, led by Christian Perrier. These covered various topics including the release goals of the i18n team for Lenny, the future of the Debian Description Translation Project and the concept of tdebs (additional package files containing translation information). As was noted in Christian's submission for these events

The meeting of the i18n contributors in September 2006 in Extremadura showed that collective work and brainstorming sessions can lead to great results. We now need to do more technical work in setting up the i18n server for Debian and make it a key part of the lenny release process. Setting up daily meetings of all people involved in i18n and present at DebConf7 will help making this progress

This again underlines the importance of in-person meetings to the Debian project.

Other Development

Keith Packard, Xorg, and laptops

Subtle bugs that only manifest themselves on particular hardware platforms are always a difficult issue to diagnose and fix. DebConf

provided a unique opportunity for developers to run their software on hardware manifesting the reported bugs, and therefore to finally debug problems. One of the best examples of this is Keith Packard's roaming Xrandr repair shop. Keith was finally able to test various new features on several chipsets that he had previously not had access to, and as a happy side effect, many attendees now have laptops that work much better than before DebConf.

Release management software

Another welcome feature which was developed and deployed during DebConf was support for the use of versioning information from the bug tracking system in the Debian release management software. This allows the release team and maintainers to keep better track of which problems, easing the release management process and helping bring critical fixes to users testing development versions of Debian. Steinar H. Gunderson, who drove this development, emphasised the importance of bringing so many key developers together saying

The code to do this was straightforward — it was mostly a matter of getting all the right people together to coordinate the deployment of the changes.

Social

Day Trip to Bute



The DebConf day trip provides an opportunity for attendees to get to see more of the country and relax together away from computers. This year the day trip took 154 conference attendees across Scotland to the Isle of Bute with a brief visit to Glasgow, seeing much of central Scotland due to travelling by train and ferry. Feedback from the attendees who went on the day trip was very positive.

Tom Marble¹

Wednesday was the Day Trip to the Isle of Bute. This was great for the fantastic scenery (see my pix from DebConf7 and the Day Trip). In a continuing example of why attending these conferences is great I got to spend some time discussing the future of Xorg with Debian's maintainer, David Nusinow. We talked about how to work around the infamous XCB bug with Java and also about the future of X including OpenGL support.

¹<http://blogs.sun.com/tmarble/entry/debconf7>

Ian Jackson²

On Wednesday 153-ish of us departed Edinburgh for a day trip to the Isle of Bute. For reasons to do with railway ticketing (!) we had to organise ourselves into groups of 4. We had a good trip there on the train and ferry - packing into a normally-empty service out of Edinburgh whose nominal seating capacity was 150.

Bute was very pretty. The group I was in went a-wandering over a hill and through some footpaths, taking a very scenic and empty route to Loch Fad. We were the first to get there and enjoyed the scenery and quiet. A little after that we noticed the arrival of a horde of DebConf attendees at the other end of the dam - and they had bought a huge pile of provisions and set about a picnic which they kindly invited us to share.

Patty Langasek³

Daytrip Organiser

At first, I thought this was a thankless, hard job. And, hard it is. Absolutely. However, I've received such an outpouring of gratitude and appreciation from most of the attendees that I honestly feel my hard work was worth it. It paid off, and I believe they all had a chance to relax, enjoy each others' company and *have fun*.

²<http://lists.debian.org/debian-project/2007/06/msg00285.html>

³<http://fvinnash.livejournal.com/202289.html>

Céilidh

Given the location of the conference, the organisers decided that there would be a departure from tradition at this DebConf. Instead of the traditional formal dinner, a Céilidh was held, helped along by pizza sponsored by Google and drinks sponsored by Sun Microsystems. A local band was hired for the evening and the main talk room was emptied of chairs and technical equipment in order to provide a dancing area.

Before long the band had been augmented on stage by several conference attendees including Wouter Verhelst on the flute and Heike Jurzik on the fiddle as the dancing and socialising continued into the late evening. One of the major highlights of the evening was the arrival of several developers in the newly designed and produced Debian kilts. . .



Tartan

The Debian Tartan is yet another demonstration of what can be achieved when you combine an, on the face of it foolish, idea with well motivated people who lack an imagination for the problems that might be involved.

What started out as an off the cuff remark on IRC rapidly snowballed into: over a dozen people willing to spend their own money on kilts, skirts, ties, etc.; weavers being instructed to make sure that the pattern is arranged so that the Morse Code reads properly (yes, you read that correctly, this is a tartan that is based around the Morse Code for DEBIAN); over £6000 being injected into the traditional crafts economy of Edinburgh; and a new design being entered into the Scottish Tartans World Register as tartan number 3210.

The kilts were finished just in time for DebCamp, so several of the organisers wore their kilts around Edinburgh for the fortnight, resulting in many confused tourists wanting their photos taken with “Real Scots”.

**...this is a tartan that is based
around the Morse Code for
DEBIAN...**

The Tartan Design: The two shades of red that make up the majority of the sett reflect the red Debian Swirl Logo. The blue is an homage

to Captain Blue-Eyes, the earlier "deranged chicken" logo. The black and yellow are a nod towards Tux, the Linux penguin logo, as is the white, which (as mentioned) spells out DEBIAN in Morse code (with a correct 1:3 ratio for dots to dashes, and for the pauses in and between letters).

The tartan looks fairly conventional, but it is unusual (although not unique) in that it is mirror-symmetrical on only one diagonal. This is to avoid reversing the MORSE section which would otherwise spell ANIVEU.

You can expect to see people wearing the kilts at Debian, and other Free Software events, in the coming months and years. If you're interested in being one of them, feel free to add yourself to the table of people attempting to achieve critical mass for a second order, available on the DebConf wiki⁴.

...expect to see people wearing the kilts at Debian, and other Free Software events...

Of course, while this started out as a somewhat frivolous idea, it proved an effective hook when punting stories to the press, with several articles being published about DebConf as a result. One article in The Register⁵ resulted in the number of registrations for Debian Day almost doubling overnight. Press interest continues after the event, and the stories that have appeared paint DebConf in a very positive light.

Tore Repairs an Organ

In a somewhat bizarre twist to events, the church hall used as a night venue contained a pipe organ,

⁴http://wiki.debconf.org/wiki/DebConf7/Tartan#Second_Order

⁵http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/06/12/edinburgh_geeks_debian/

which had been derelict for several decades. The electrics were damaged, pipes were bent and the keys had been painted together with gold paint. As a demonstration of the resourcefulness of DebConf attendees, Tore Sinding Bekkedal and a number of other delegates worked tirelessly through the night to restore the organ to a working state.

Thanks to a lot of loving attention, and a copious helping of gaffer tape, they successfully repaired the organ and held an impromptu recital in celebration. Following its restoration, word spread and night time music sessions grew as other delegates who had brought instruments with them joined the group. The venue owners thanked DebConf profusely after the event and now plan to host their own performances with the restored instrument.



Concert at the night venue

People

In this section we present comments and feedback from DebConf attendees, some in the form of excerpts of blog posts and some feedback which was given personally. Thank you to everyone in this section for allowing us to quote them.

Personal Impressions

Martin F. Krafft⁶

DebConf7 has been unlike other DebConfes for me in two respects: this was the first time I actually went to DebCamp, the week leading up to the conference, which is designated to teams and individuals with development goals to achieve during the week. And I was also actively involved in the organisation of the conference, which was unexpected, but a very good experience I am not going to miss next year.

My goal for the conference was netconf and I made good progress until I ran into a wall on Tuesday and had to back off and rethink my design. Reinhart Tartler and Enrico Zini dedicated their time to listen to my design and the problems and helped me clear the mess up and helped me reduce complexity and converge on a straight-forward, event-based design.

Somewhere in the middle of the conference, Keith Packard took hostage of (and fixed parts of) my broken X40 laptop, but that's the meat of another story. And on some other night, our leader Sam, in his official capacity as

DPL, presented me with the instantiation of my innermost desires as consolation for my hospital stay: a pony. Just look at that smile!



Martin and his pony

I'll be back in Argentina, unless something goes seriously wrong. And I'll be on the orga-team again. Thanks to everyone who made DebConf7 possible. I am proud to have been able to contribute, but the real work was done by a few others. You know who you are.

David Nusinow⁷

My first DebConf was probably the best single week of my entire life. Yeah, it was that awesome.

I got the privilege of giving my talk and BoF to fairly full audiences, particularly the former. The BoF was on maintaining packages with git. I didn't expect more than 10 people to show, but more than 5 times that did express interest, so many that they moved it to the main lecture hall instead of the small discussion room that it

⁶http://blog.madduck.net/debian/2007.06.25_debconf7

⁷<http://gravityboy.livejournal.com/35787.html>

was going to be in originally. I hadn't really planned out how to handle an audience like that, and while I managed to get other people in the audience talking (thanks in particular to Madduck, MadCoder, and keithp for adding so much to the discussion) I felt like I had to fumble through a lot of it. That's the nature of a BoF I guess. I also gave a talk on my plans for the XSF for the Lenny release. I'll talk about that stuff in future blog posts (some of which are overdue) but I will say that it was surprisingly well attended given that it was scheduled for 9:45 am after one of the usual nights of drinking and hacking until dawn.

... DebConf was probably the best single week of my entire life...

I won't talk about all the stuff that happened, because that would just take too long. The most important thing was that I got to see a number of old friends again and spend more time with them in one run than ever before. That alone was really enormous for me. On top of that was the pleasure of finally meeting so many people in person. I met a few XSF members finally, including Julien Cristau, my partner in crime. There's no way I could possibly list everyone that I'm so thankful to have finally met. There was one very memorable evening in the night venue where it was largely the same crowd who's usually in #debian-devel when I'm on, and we all just couldn't stop cracking jokes and laughing (not to mention ITP'ing absurd programs). There was another night when Old World Cambridge collided with New World Cambridge, and much Pimm's was had by (almost) all. There was staying up until 5 in the morning and stumbling back to the hostel in the dawn to try and get some sleep before running back to the conference. The most delightful thing about all this was that so many people I already knew and loved were

there, and everyone who I hadn't met in person before turned out to be even better in real life. It was like a week of the purest joy.

I have to echo others and give a big thank you to the organizers. You guys did a great job, and really made a great conference out of it. I learned a lot, laughed even more, and drank even more than that and I can't wait to do it again.

*Martin Ferrari*⁸

Finally I'm at Teviot, keeping up with mail and hacking a little. The place is wonderful, as is the hostel. The whole city seems taken from a fairy tale.

This is the first time I've also attended DebCamp, and it was very useful. I managed to do what I planned, that is talk with many people who are working on debian-cd, debian-installer and custom-cdds.

*Chris Lamb*⁹

DebConf 7 was just awesome: It was great to meet up with hendry, daniel, otavio and marco from the Debian Live crew, as well as countless others.

*Eric Dorland*¹⁰

DebConf 7 was fantastic, doubly so since I got to share it. My BoF was not that popular (which is what I expected) but people were interested and audience participation was high, so I was pleased. I sort of divided my time between the conference and being a tourist, so I hope no one felt like I was ignoring them. Edinburgh was an amazing city, really very beautiful. It felt good to be connected with this place (my mother was born in Perth, not too far away).

⁸<http://howtorecognise.mine.nu/2007/07/09/index.html>

⁹<http://www.chris-lamb.co.uk/blog/2007/07/17/updates/>

¹⁰<http://ze-dinosaur.livejournal.com/18405.html>

*Tom Marble*¹¹

In a continuing example of why attending these conferences is great I got to spend some time discussing the future of Xorg with Debian's maintainer, David Nusinow. We talked about how to work around the infamous XCB bug with Java and also about the future of X including OpenGL support.

*Martin Man*¹²

The seventh annual Debian Conference has been organized in the beautiful city of Edinburgh. And not only that, the conference venue is located just next to the city center, in a old comfortable and friendly place that has got its own atmosphere.

I have met here a lot of really interesting (and famous — in the world of Debian/GNU Linux) people. My impression is that the atmosphere was just amazing, very friendly, open, productive,...

*Andrew Pollock*¹³

So DebConf 7 has been good. Very good. I suck at writing up such events, but I found it a great opportunity to hack on my packages. I got my laptop setup so I could work moderately effectively offline (there's still more I can do), and I was able to work on the DHCP 3 packages fairly heavily.

Due to various talks about git, I've also gotten over my fear of it, and had a play. It still fries my brane big time, but at least I've had a play.

...Debian developers could be heard discussing the finer points of programs they maintain and use and ways things could be improved...

¹¹<http://blogs.sun.com/tmarble/entry/debconf7>

¹²<http://martinman.net/2007/06/19/debconf-2007-edinburgh-scotland/>

¹³http://blog.andrew.net.au/2007/06/23/dc7_package_work

*David Graham*¹⁴

Throughout the conference, socialising Debian developers could be heard discussing the finer points of programs they maintain and use and ways things could be improved. Sometimes a laptop would open and something would get fixed on the spot.

Michael Schultheiss

DebConf 7 was the first DebConf I attended. I had an excellent time and attended numerous informative and interesting talks. The day trip to the Isle of Bute was great fun as well. Although I missed participating in the SPI panel on Sunday, June 17, I did make it to Edinburgh in time for the first ever in-person SPI board meeting on Monday, June 18. It was a great experience. I enjoyed meeting the SPI board members in person as well as Debian Developers and enthusiasts. I look forward to attending

¹⁴<http://www.linux.com/feature/115188>

additional DebConfs in the future and encourage everyone to experience DebConf - they won't regret it!

Demographics

Our conference is aimed at making Debian better, providing a proper environment where intensive work sessions can take place. Our direct target audience is, of course, the official Debian Developers (DDs) spread all around the world. Debian does, however, get important contributions from people who have not yet completed the Debian New Maintainer process, as well as from people whose strongest ties are with other, related projects. And, of course, we are interested in growing, so interested non-maintainers and volunteers are more than welcome to share with us. Together with the non-DD maintainers, over half of the attendees are already active in Debian.

participants	Status
187	Debian Developer
157	Non-maintainer but interested
81	Non-DD maintainer
31	Volunteer
26	Accompanying
8	Organiser
6	Sponsor
2	Press

The diversity in Debian can be very well represented by the food requirements expressed by the attendees. Quite a bit of planning goes into assuring that everybody gets food appropriate for their health and ethical standards:

participants	Food requirement
221	Regular
45	Vegetarian
10	Vegan (strict vegetarian)
4	Other

The unlisted people decided to eat outside of the DebConf venue.

The attendees of DebConf come from every possible corner of the world, sometimes taking

travel times of 24 hours and more just to attend this conference.

participants	Country of origin
65	United Kingdom
34	Germany
30	United States of America
22	Venezuela
14	Spain
12	France
12	Finland
10	Brazil
9	Mexico
8	Sweden
8	Argentina
7	Colombia
6	Australia
6	Norway
5	Netherlands
5	India
4	El salvador
4	Switzerland
4	Italy
3	Denmark
3	Portugal
3	Bosnia and Herzegovina
3	Austria
2	Belgium
2	Taiwan
2	Hungary
2	Greece
2	Bangladesh
2	Czechia
1	Israel
1	Croatia
1	Chile
1	Canada
1	Bolivia
1	Luxembourg
1	Japan
1	Slovenia
1	Ireland
1	New zealand
1	Latvia
1	Romania

The other attendees did not list a country of origin.

Behind the Scenes

Infrastructure

Venue



Teviot Row House

The conference was held in Teviot Row House in the centre of historic Edinburgh. Teviot Row House is the first purpose built student union building in the world, and proved to be an ideal venue. It was booked outright for the two week of the conference, providing adequate space for all attendees.

Conference sessions were run in two main large talk rooms and two smaller BoF rooms, all equipped with data projectors. Public address systems were hired and installed in both the talk rooms for for the speakers, along with radio mics in order to take questions from the audience. Stage lighting was also hired in to ensure that the speakers were visible on the video streams.

Two main hacklabs were run for the duration of the conference, providing space for up to 200 attendees. Overspill space was available in the cafeteria area or the roof terrace where wireless access was present. Due to the large number

of laptop users, additional power was supplied from Teviot's 63-amp distribution with break-outs running to each of the work tables. Cabled network connectivity was also provided to all users.

...the first purpose built student union building in the world

The venue provided a large canteen and additional cafe, which was also used as overspill hacklab space during the day as wireless access was available. Wireless access was also available on the terrace adjoining the bar on the top floor.

Overnight Venue

A night time venue was also provided so that there was a permanent base for attendees. This was held in Bristo Adventist Church Hall, provided thanks to Edinburgh University Settlement, located 100 metres from the main conference venue.

This space was divided into three levels, including a large hall and a number of smaller rooms. Adjacent to the venue was a cafe which was open during the day, providing a relaxed space where conference attendees were able to meet locals.

Catering

Teviot Row House ran a canteen providing hot food at lunch and dinner along with a selection of fruit, desserts and drinks. Several options were available at roughly £4 each,

providing substantial meals and catering for all dietary requirements. Attendees granted food sponsorship were given tokens for the two meals each day. Queuing was kept to a minimum, and the quality of food was generally highly regarded.

Outside meal times a café was open serving hot drinks and snacks. The bar on the top floor served drinks daily from mid afternoon and the adjoining roof terrace proved a big hit amongst the delegates.

Networking

Networking DebConf7 was a massive task. Four hundred delegates needed to be provided with high speed, reliable network access, via both wired and wireless networks, spread over two Byzantine venues, with limited setup and installation time. Reliability was critical, given that network would be heavily used both by the video team for live feeds and by the delegates for work, development and discussions.

Using the University network meant that we got a very reliable, very high speed uplink (100 Mbit/s full duplex symmetric) and we were put outside of the main University network, so we were reasonably open to the Internet and could run a few public services. It did add some complexity to the network setup and planning, as we had to develop a plan to ensure that attendees signed the University network Terms of Service, and we had to restrict access to the wireless network without also making it difficult for more limited hardware to join the network.

...approximately a kilometre of cable for network backbone...

The building itself had to be wired from the 2nd floor to the basement, and we ended up stringing approximately a kilometre of cable for

network backbone, largely thanks to the good people from Contextshift.co.uk who shouldered the lion's share of running and terminating the backbone links. Every room was interconnected with redundant links. This turned out to be fortunate: we did have wiring failures, but no one except the admins noticed and work continued uninterrupted.

...Using the University network meant that we got a very reliable, very high speed uplink

The backbone was a collection of managed switches interconnected by redundant LACP links, giving us an overall throughput of 2 Gbit/s on the main conference network. Generous as this sounds, we came close to maxing it out during most days. This is because rather than run several physical networks to isolate the video team, the main wired conference network and the wireless network, we used VLAN tagged networks and ran it all over the same physical trunks. While this probably saved us several kilometres of cable run, it did mean that we used the existing network fairly heavily.

For the network services, we had several machines donated by Thomas Krenn AG. The main server for the conference was again named Homer, and handled the basic infrastructure tasks of firewall, router, name service, local mirror, monitoring and so forth. Homer also handled the IRC bot that announced talks and arrivals and answered simple queries. The video team storage server was named Barney, and had 1.5 TB of storage. Lisa handled the video streaming to the Internet, and Bart and Maggie were attendee-accessible build machines.

...an overall throughput of 2 Gbit/s on the main conference network ... we came close to maxing it out during most days.

There were also several more machines brought by members of the video team to handle things like transcoding, mixing, and sending the streams to Lisa. We then used geoDNS to point people to the closest mirror on the Internet, so that people could view the streams around the world without overloading a particular server. Conference attendees were sent directly to Lisa when requesting a stream from video.debconf.org.

To make the wireless as accessible as possible while simultaneously restricting access to the network to conference attendees, we had to develop a web-based logon system for the wireless network based on several existing software projects. The logon system allowed authenticated users to use the wireless network without repeated re-logon prompts, and also allowed embedded devices without a browser interface to authenticate to use the wireless network.

...Network access in the night venue was provided using a 5.4 GHz radio network link connected to the main conference.

As has been mentioned, we had a separate night venue approximately 200 metres away. Network access was provided using a 5.4 GHz radio network link connected to the main conference. This network interconnected with the main conference network and appeared on the wireless segment, so that we did not have to worry that the wireless interlink would be intercepted and abused. Power and network cabling was again distributed throughout the building, thanks to many volunteers.

All in all, the network worked very well. Few complaints were raised, and countless people took time to give it high praise.

Sponsors

The sponsorship task for DebConf is always daunting: the conference gets bigger and more expensive every year. Our initial estimate for the required budget was about £120,000 to pay for 400 attendees. That needed to cover venue hire, food, accommodation, equipment and some travel costs. To offset that, we had continued strong support from previous sponsors - it's great to have such a loyal set of companies that want to help us each year. However, we still needed to find a lot more money to make our target.

It's great to have such a loyal set of companies that want to help us each year...

There are a growing number of companies in the UK that depend on Debian for their infrastructure and services, and talking to those companies proved very successful for us - many of them offered to help. We quickly picked up a large chunk of sponsorship from these groups. Several people also offered to help with equipment and services rather than financially, for example hosting, network setup, loans of servers, workstations and network infrastructure.

On the less positive side, we had some early problems finding contacts, both for new and existing sponsors. That meant that in some cases we may have missed out. Some of our regular previous sponsors had their own financial problems this year, so for some of them contributing to DebConf was just not an option.

As seems to be the case every year, hitting the final sponsorship target became very stressful as the conference approached. More late additions to the list of sponsors helped, and some very generous increases in the amounts already pledged from a couple of our sponsors made the difference - thanks! Our first budget estimate

was thankfully also too high, so (just!) before the conference we hit our target and went over it.

... (just!) before the conference we hit our target and went over it.

Of course, the hard work doesn't end as the conference starts — during the conference several of the sponsors were more directly involved, covering specific costs or handing out gifts to attendees: Hewlett Packard provided extra T-shirts; Sun Microsystems paid for a drinks reception on the night of the ceilidh; Google paid for pizza that night and also gave out small notebooks and keychains; the Positive Internet Company paid for “hack-snacks” in the late-night venue; O'Reilly had books and bags for all; we had lots of copies of Linux Magazine to hand out.

In conclusion: raising sponsorship money was hard but in the end it was successful. The range of companies who sponsored us, and the forms that the sponsorship took, are a sign of the wide popularity of Debian and the extensive range of uses. The team are grateful to all our sponsors, large and small, and hope that they will sponsor DebConf again. In the cases of those who sent staff along, we hope they enjoyed themselves!

Money

The task of funding DebConf is complex. The sponsorship team raises the money and the attendee sponsorship committee gives grants for travel, food and accommodation sponsorship. The task of matching these up and handling the money was done by the treasurers. In the past, DebConf has typically relied on a local free software group to provide a bank account, and therefore the ability to withdraw money, pay in cash, write checks and settle invoices. This year we did things differently - we decided to open

a UK bank account in the name of DebConf 7, and to close it when done. To do this, a limited company was set up, with members of the local team as directors.

Unfortunately, for various reasons simply setting up that bank account was much more complex and time-consuming than initially expected. To cover for the short term, use was made of the Debian UK Society's bank account. This society, set up by Debian Developers in the UK, holds money on behalf of Debian, either from donations or from sales of things like Debian CDs and T-shirts. The DebConf team are grateful to the Society for its help here.

The continuing fall in value of the US dollar compared to the pound during late 2006 and early 2007 led to more worries for the money team

...

Many attendees live in the US, and many sponsors are based there, so a lot of sponsorship was offered in US dollars rather than pounds or euros. This money was handled by Software in the Public Interest, an umbrella group that provides financial and administration services for a collection of free software projects, most noticeably Debian itself. The DebConf team would like to thank SPI for its work in handling the American side of the money task. An added issue this year was the continuing fall in value of the US dollar compared to the pound during late 2006 and early 2007 - every drop led to more worries for the money team.

... We expect a small surplus of around 8,000GBP for Argentina for DebConf8

DebConf keeps on growing every year, so naturally the budget grows to match too. The first

DebConf was held in 2000, with 30 attendees; by 2007 we had reached 400 attendees.

Year	Venue	People	Budget (USD)
2000	Bordeaux, France	30	0
2001	Bordeaux, France	50	0
2002	Toronto, Canada	90	5,000
2003	Oslo, Norway	130	25,000
2004	Porto Alegre, Brazil	150	75,000
2005	Helsinki, Finland	300	130,000
2006	Oaxtepec, Mexico	310	150,000
2007	Edinburgh, Scotland	400	180,000

The expenditure to date is as follows*:

Cost	Amount (GBP)
Accommodation	20,279.92
Travel Sponsorship	13,289.20
Venue Hire	12,245.48
Catering	8,913.93
Delegate T-Shirts	2,038.51
Equipment Hire	1,474.80
Office Stationery	1,322.97
Insurance	1,030.00
Computer expenses	851.97
Postage and Carriage	785.91
Ceilidh	550.00
Import Duty	232.56
Network infrastructure	186.83
Advertising	88.24
Total	67,369.64

* We estimate some small additional costs for Postage and Carriage, and Company Administration charges.

Income is as follows:

Source	Amount (GBP)
Sponsorship (Received)	67,282.45
Sponsorship (Invoiced)	5,000.00
Debian Seed Fund	4,961.02
DebConf6 surplus	3,717.93
Total	80961.40

The Debian Seed Fund is a fund of 10,000USD made available to DebConf through SPI to ensure smooth cashflow for the conference. This will be repaid at the close of the company. We therefore expect a small surplus of around 8,000GBP, which will be transferred to Argentina for DebConf8.

Accommodation

The task of organising accommodation for more than two hundred Debian developers in the middle of a large, historic city on a minimal budget would seem to be tricky at best. The main advantage, and a factor in the planning, is that Edinburgh is used to large numbers of non-locals descending on it for short lengths of time due to the festival. It is also a popular destination for backpackers. As a result of this, there are a large number of reasonable hostels in the city.

The accommodation team contacted many hostels, and DebConf organisers sampled several well-located ones in advance. It was hoped that we would have several offers, but in the end there were only two offers worth considering: Budget Backpackers, an Australian-themed place about ten minutes walk from Teviot House; and Cowgate Hostel, slightly further down the street. In the end we placed about a hundred and fifty attendees in BB (as Budget Backpackers came to be known), and about a hundred in Cowgate.

...As a result of this, there are a large number of reasonable hostels in the city.

The two hostels proved to be a interesting contrast. Budget Backpackers had good online reviews, and the test visits had been successful. Our experience with them at conference time was good, deserving of the highest praise possible in the computing world: "it just works". On the other hand, Cowgate had poor online reviews and had not impressed Jon Dowland when he stayed there during the September 2006 planning meeting. Only the worrying prospect of not having anywhere at all, and a loose agreement from them that they would improve their act, led to them being used at all. As it was, dealing with Cowgate took up a significant amount of the accommodation team's time, both

before and at the conference. It was a classic example of the eighty - twenty rule.

...For the organisation team, the problems stand out far more clearly than the successes.

As should probably be expected, for the organisation team the problems stand out far more clearly than the successes. This is definitely true in the case of the accommodation team, where the success of finding a place for everyone to go is almost overlooked in the the mind of the team.

A lot of people helped with the various aspects of the accommodation task. Peter Nuttall and Jon Dowland got the hostel bookings sorted. Ana Guerrero and Jonathan McDowell worked out room allocation - not an easy task, considering the many different sleep schedules, cultures and languages used by the attendees. Mark Brown took care of hotel bookings for some attendees. Many other members of the DebConf team provided ideas, suggestions and moral support, as well as being willing to work on their area in a hurry. All in all, accommodation was a hard-fought battle, and the team would like to thank all those who helped us succeed, as well as the attendees for their patience when there were hiccoughs.

Video

This year's conference had a larger video team than previous years, with more ambitious goals and greater results. Around 25 volunteers covered all aspects of production from camera operation and audio mixing, through reviewing recordings, to software development. The video team provided up to 3 live video streams from the talk and BoF rooms. Streaming was supported by relay servers in every continent except

Antarctica. Over 100 events were recorded, producing around 1 TeraByte of raw video data. Several meetings and BoFs became video conferences with remote attendees watching video streams and replying through IRC.

...Streaming was supported by relay servers in every continent except Antarctica

DebConf5 had showed the usefulness of a video mixer to switch between views of the speaker, audience and slides. This was sorely missed last year, where these all had to be covered by a single camera panning and zooming. Lacking the budget to hire hardware DV mixers, a team member developed a software mixer, `dvswitch`, to meet the basic requirements for the conference.

The video team is dependent on loaned equipment for video recording and needed to request a large number of cameras, tripods and computers to cover this year's 4 rooms. There were difficulties in using a wide variety of equipment - including cameras which didn't work properly without a tape and tripods that did not allow smooth panning - some of which arrived just before the conference started.

Team members were not expected to work full-time and most had other conference activities planned, so despite the size of the team there was often a struggle to cover all rooms. The team intends to simplify the recording software in time for next year so that recording of events in smaller rooms can be self-service rather than requiring a video team member.

After last year's problems with transcoding, measures were taken to avoid a repeat occurrence. The team extended the Pentabarf conference management system to track recordings and the events they covered, then reviewed each day's recordings and transcoded files in

the evening. It also worked with a Pentabarf developer to add support for video production roles for events, allowing team members to effectively schedule themselves and ensure that the talks were covered.

Most video recordings have now been published¹⁵, though 20 tapes remain to be converted. The recordings will be compiled into DVD videos which will be available for sale or download as in previous years.

The team is continuing development of dvswitch and the other software used for video production and workflow and intends to use them again next year. It hopes to get a grant to invest in its own A/V equipment, although it is likely to remain dependent on some loaned equipment for the foreseeable future. Following the successful use of live streams, these are likely to be more heavily publicised in future so those not attending the conference in person can be more involved.

The team is very grateful for loans of equipment from individuals and sponsoring organisations. It must also thank the network team and the many relay server operators for supporting its work and coping with several rounds of reconfiguration.

¹⁵<http://meetings-archive.debian.net/pub/debian-meetings/2007/debconf7/>

Credits

It would have been impossible to make such a large event reality without the outstanding help of a great group of volunteers – starting with those whom we can't name here, since they just volunteered during the conference to do various tasks, and ending with the core team, who started organising this year's DebConf right after the last one ended.

It's impossible to list everyone who contributed to make this event happen; there were too many contributors. We are sorry for every name we forgot to mention here:



DebConf7 Organising Team

Core Organising Team

Main Organisers	Moray Allan (moray)	Joerg Jaspert (Ganneff)
Co-Organisers	Neil McGovern (Maulkin) Steve McIntyre (Sledge)	Peter Nuttall (psn) Holger Levsen (h01ger)
Sponsor Acquisition	Steve McIntyre (Sledge) Philip Hands (fil) Andreas Schuldei (stockholm) Holger Levsen (h01ger) Joerg Jaspert (Ganneff)	Neil McGovern (Maulkin) Jimmy Kaplowitz (Hydroxide) Martin Würtele (maxx) Mark Hymers (mhy)
Website Maintenance	Neil McGovern (Maulkin)	Martin Ferrari (Tincho)

Graphical Artist	Valessio Brito (valessio)	
Admin-master / BOFH	Joerg Jaspert (Ganneff)	
Registration Coordinators	Moray Allan (moray) Joerg Jaspert (Ganneff)	Peter Nuttall (psn)
Treasury	Neil McGovern (Maulkin) Martin Würtele (maxx)	Steve McIntyre (Sledge) Philip Hands (fil)

Committees

Sponsorship Committee	Joerg Jaspert (Ganneff) Anthony Towns (aj) Holger Levsen (h01ger) Margarita Manterola (marga) Gunnar Wolf (gwolf) Neil McGovern (Maulkin) Felipe Augusto van de Wiel (faw)	Steve McIntyre (Sledge) Moray Allan (moray) Amaya Rodrigo Sastre Martin Würtele (maxx) Junichi Uekawa (dancerj) Marcela Tiznado (Asciigirl)
Academic Committee	Joerg Jaspert (Ganneff) Mark Hymers (mhy) Steve Langasek (vorlon)	Enrico Zini (enrico) Bdale Garbee (bdale)

Local Organising Team

Main Local Organisers	Kevin Campbell (kevc)	Moray Allan (moray)
Accommodation	Jon Dowland (Jon) Ana Beatriz Guerrero Lopez (ana) Jonathan McDowell (Noodles)	Peter Nuttall (psn) Philip Hands (fil)
Facilities Coordination	Kevin Campbell (kevc) Jon Dowland (Jon)	Peter Nuttall (psn)
Proceedings Editors	Mark Hymers (mhy) Steve McIntyre (Sledge)	Nattie Mayer-Hutchings (nattie) Neil McGovern (Maulkin)

Network Team

Conference Network Team	Mark Hymers (mhy)	Stephen Gran (sgran)
	Joerg Jaspert (Ganneff)	Peter Palfrader (weasel)
Network Team Helpers	Holger Levsen (h01ger)	Chris Halls (haggai)
	Faidon Liambotis (paravoid)	Steve McIntyre (Sledge)
Contextshift.co.uk	Julia Freeman (Kitty)	Willem Konyenberg (wfk)
	Chris Girling (Shish)	

Video Team

Video Team Coordinator	Holger Levsen (h01ger)	
Video Team	Ben Hutchings (Womble2)	Tore Sinding Bekkedal (toresbe)
	Dave Noble (daven)	Henning Sprang (lazyboy)
	Eric Dantan Rzewnicki (edrz)	Andrew McMillan (karora)
	Annabelle Tully (pixie)	Patrick Bueker (bluepup)
	Peter De Schrijver (p2mate)	Amaya Rodrigo (amaya)
	Damián Viano (des)	Ralph Amissah
	Juan A. Diaz (nueces)	Gunnar Wolf (gwolf)
	Wouter van Heyst (LarstiQ)	Michael Bramer (grisu)
	Tássia Camões Araújo (tassia)	Tiago Bortoletto Vaz (tiagovaz)
	Maximiliano Curia (maxy)	Kurt Roeckx (Q)
	Hector Oron (Zumbi)	at home: Herman Robak (hermanr)

Conference Time

Registration desk	Steve McIntyre (Sledge)	Kevin Campbell (kevc)
	Daniel Baumann (panthera)	Ralph Amissah (ralph)
	Mark Hymers (mhy)	Martin Ferrari (Tincho)
	Simon Law (sflaw)	Philip Hands (fil)
	Martin F. Krafft (maddock)	Jon Dowland (Jon)
	Gunnar Wolf (gwolf)	Neil McGovern (Maulkin)
	Mark Brown (broonie)	Margarita Manterola (marga)
	Ana Beatriz Guerrero Lopez (ana)	Stephen Quinney
	Andrew McMillan (karora)	Tim Retout (diocles)

	Safir Secerovic (sapphire)	Nattie Mayer-Hutchings (nattie)
	Chris Lamb (lamby)	Stephen Gran (sgran)
	Gerfried Fuchs (Rhonda)	Michael Dorrington (Mike)
	Chris Halls (haggai)	Kai Hendry
	Patty Langasek (harmony)	Benjamin Seidenberg (astronut)
Loan of equipment	Dave Noble (daven)	Kevin Campbell (kevc)
	Herman Robak (hermanr)	Ben Hutchings (Womble2)
	Gunnar Wolf (gwolf)	Julia Freeman (Kitty)
	Tim Small	Thijs Kinkhorst (kink)
	Jeroen van Wolffelaar (jvw)	Steve McIntyre (Sledge)
	Philip Hands (fil)	Moray Allan (moray)
	Eric Dantan Rzewnicki (edrz)	

LAST BUT NOT LEAST: THANK YOU ALL FOR MAKING IT POSSIBLE...



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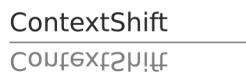
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