The glory that was Greece

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There is a rumour going around that there will be some sort of sporting event in Athens later this year. I guess that is the reason for the ABC's interest in things Hellenic. Regular listeners to Radio National will have noticed that they have a series of features with the general title 'Greek Imprints', exploring that country's contribution to arts and science. Another aspect of the whole program is their Winged Sandals website at http://wingedsandals.com/, a joint collaboration with the University of Melbourne. It is directed at children and provides both high- and low-bandwidth options. The site has a great look and has been very well put together.

Collectively speaking

OK, there is more to this site that just a listing of collective nouns for various animals, but that is what trivia buffs would be most interested in. http://www.anapsid.org/beastly.html also gives you plurals, the sounds that they make, the names of males and females, and also what you might call their cubs, kits, joeys, grubs, codlings and so on.

Google, definitely

Yet another cute trick from Google is the way that you can search for definitions. If 'definition' is one of the keywords in a search, Google will try to find a site where the other word or words are defined. If it finds one, the first item in the search results will be labelled 'Web definitions for <keyword>', with a link to an authoritative site.

You will be hearing more about this

The Opera Web browser has a well-deserved reputation for being ahead of the game in many areas. The new version, to be released in the next couple of months, will incorporate IBM's Embedded ViaVoice speech technology. Opera users will be able to hear their favourite web pages read to them, and be able to interact with voice enabled web forms. One downside to this development is the possibility that people will be able to surf the web whilst driving to work. On the other hand, the Opera Show presentation tool can use the new technology to enable voice commands to move backwards and forwards through the slides. There is more information at http://www.opera.com/pressreleases/en/2004/03/23/.

Proper names

What is in a name? Not necessarily a lot, but pronunciation can be a problem. Dictionaries usually provide an adequate guide for common words, but where can you turn to for names? Well, the Library of Congress has made a good start with a guide to pronunciation of names of public figures at http://www.loc.gov/nls/other/sayhow.html. There is a slight bias toward US notables, but you will find plenty of politicians, artists and entertainers from different cultures and other eras.

... and you're out?

The profession of website builder has only been around for a decade or so, but in that time we have been able to build up a sizeable body of experience, lore and myth — much of which is thankfully under constant review. One of the core beliefs is in the 'three click' rule: that a user must be able to find what they need in three clicks from the home page, or they will leave. There's been an investigation of this one at http://www.uie.com/articles/three_click_rule/ and the result bears out what I have long suspected: that many users will keep clicking until they find what they are looking for, or until they are convinced that it is not there. We are all different, of course, but the belief in this rule has caused some websites to become incredibly complicated (and virtually useless) as they try to get thousands of pages within those magical three clicks.

Tim Bray on the move

In my last column, I reported on Tim Bray's essays on search engines. It has just been announced that he has taken up a new role with Sun Microsystems, where he expected to expand his interests from searching and XML (of which he was one of the 'authors') to Web services, with special emphasis on new applications for blogs and RSS technology.

... and another follow-up

Also featured in the previous column were recent conferences in Geneva and Southampton, where Colin Steele was a participant. He was interviewed for the UK Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) website, in which he gave an overview of Australian e-publishing and the challenges facing those involved in digital preservation. See it at http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=interview_anu_news_.

Global education portals report

education.au limited has completed its second research project on global gateways and portals about education and training, and the final report (175 pages) is now available at http://www.educationau.edu.au/research/global_gateways_v3.pdf. This is an update of the 2001 report, and it indicates considerable movement in the online services that education and training departments are providing. The report is in four parts, comprising issues of methodology, site and literature searches, an annotated bibliography, and a summary of government education sites globally.

More on internet governance

In a further follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society, the United Nations has conducted a two-day Global Forum on internet governance. The Forum concluded that the current system of internet governance seems to be working well, but the question is how to better co-ordinate the work of specialised bodies and ensure the involvement of all stakeholders. However, the forum did continue to emphasise the different attitudes between richer and poorer countries, with the former being generally happy with the status quo and the latter wanting a bigger say in governance of the internet. There is more about the Forum at http://www.unicttaskforce.org/.

Free online tool for knowledge sharing

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Knowledge Media Lab has released a new tool to help educators document and share their work and knowledge online. The KEEP (Knowledge, Exchange, Exhibit and Presentation) Toolkit provides educators and students with a means to easily organise and display their work online in ways that can be shared with others taking advantage of the internet and multimedia. Details are at http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/newsroom/press_releases/04.03.1.htm.

Australian Policy Online

Having trouble locating reports and other research material on Australian social and cultural policy? It can be difficult and time-consuming, but have a look at http://www.apo.org.au/. Australian Policy Online (a product of the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University of Technology) aims to improve the provision of information, with the latest news and reports from leading Australian research centres.

RSS and blogs

Edu_RSS is a Canadian site at http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/xml/edu_rss.cgi that retrieves weblogs in the field of education and provides a one-stop spot where you can find them. The feeds are presented in seven different XML formats as well as HTML. And if you are new to the whole world of RSS, this posting on The Shifted Librarian blog 'Helping RSS newbies find relevant feeds' at http://www.theshiftedlibrarian.com/2004/03/24.html#a5402 will be useful.

Accessibility Toolbar

The Accessible Information Solutions team at the National Information and Library Service has developed a toolbar containing a range of tools to assist in checking aspects of accessibility in an HTML document, such as simulating the experience of different us-ers. It will not give you an absolute rating of a pages' accessibility but it will give some level of guidance on how the document might perform. Details of its functions and instructions for downloading are at http://www.nils.org.au/ais/web/resources/toolbar/.

I've got you under my skin

There is a US National Library of Medicine exhibit at http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/dreamanatomy/. I remember being impressed with their Visible Human project about eight years ago; this one is almost as attractive. It features a collection of images of human anatomy — real and imagined — from the 16th century to the present day. There is also an interesting set of descriptions of each of the technologies used in production of these images: from woodcuts through to X-ray and digital imaging.

LC on digitisation

The Library of Congress has announced that this year it will start to implement a national strategy for preserving digital materials, with the first task being to define a technical architecture. They will do this by testing six alternative approaches, based on a collection of digital materials covering the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Once the architecture has been selected, they will work with technical experts from NASA and other labs to develop a working prototype. It is no surprise that intellectual property issues, not technical ones, are proving to be the thorniest problems.

LC goes to the movies

The Library of Congress is working on a database portal for motion pictures and video images, providing a gateway to the world's moving-image collections. They will be working with three major US universities to provide a way of directing users to libraries, museums, archives and production companies throughout he world, with information on how to download video or order tapes. The website for the project is at http://gondolin.rutgers.edu/MIC.

Where there is a will ...

Documents Online at http://www.documentsonline.pro.gov.uk/ is a service provided by the UK National Archives to give online access to their collection of digitised public records, including both academic and genealogical sources. The latest offering is Famous Original Wills, including those of William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and Sir Stamford Raffles. A small charge applies to view the documents, so have a look — you might find something to your advantage! ∎

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