

FOSDEM 2004

# Weekend Chat

FOSDEM is the Free and Open Source Developers Meeting that takes place each year in Belgium's capital city of Brussels. The meeting can be split into two halves. **BY JOHN SOUTHERN**

The first half is the organized talks, lectures and tutorials which take place over a weekend. This year started with an opening speech by Tim O'Reilly of O'Reilly books. Everyone listens to the opening speech and the traditional talk by Richard Stallman.

RMS gave his traditional speech, including his Saint GNUcius sketch, where he blesses the crowd and indocorates them in the Church of Emacs.

## Talks

The lectures are split into streams to allow more of a variety. Three full streams occurred alongside a host of developer meetings. Anyone with an interest can wander in and learn about the topic or help with the development.

This year we had eight developer rooms including Debian, Tcl, KDE and Embedded Linux. A Hackers room was very popular with wireless networking.

Saturday afternoon saw an Accessibility stream which included Braille and Speech output, Gnome Onscreen Keyboard and the KDE Accessibility Project.

One of the most popular talks was in the Linux Kernel stream with Robert

Love, who talked about the kernel and its affects on the desktop. Followed by 2.6 Internals and then Hans Reiser took listeners on a tour of Reiser 4.

In the tutorials, scripting languages included Ruby and NetBeans. Everyone then met for the Free Software Award, which was won by Alan Cox, and the singing of the Free Software song.

Sunday started with streams on X and Java. In the tutorial room, rather than hour long talks, we were treated to seventeen short fifteen minute talks.

FOSDEM is unique amongst conferences. It is organized by Raphael Bauduin and his team. These are Linux fans and although volunteers, they produce a wonderfully organized event.

The talks vary. Some were very professional, others are not quite so good. At FOSDEM, this can be an advantage. These speakers are the best in their field and you would otherwise miss these topics. Some surprise, and give a real passion and enthusiasm to their subject. An example of this was Dodji Seketeli and his talk on the MView project, an xml editor for GNOME environment.

Later saw the security stream and the scripting languages deal with SmartEiffel, Perl and Ruby. Tutorials covered accessibility and Linux kernel.

Everyone finally met up for the closing talk by Jon "Maddog" Hall. Where crowd wept tears of joy.

Some community stands are present and included Mozilla Europe, OpenBSD, who went out of their way to be helpful and friendly and the FSF Europe with our President Georg Greve available for all to talk to.



Figure 2: Jon "Maddog" Hall explaining history.

## Talking

The second half of FOSDEM is just as important. It is the community activities. Those that can spare the Friday evening, meet in the Roy d'Espagne for an evening of Belgian beer.

Although the beer is wonderful, many do not drink and still go because this is where you meet up others and get a chance to chat about what everyone thinks are the important developments.

This chatting to like minded strangers, allows for the exchange of ideas and should be encouraged. As everyone is linked by Free and Open source software, you find that everyone wants to talk to you. They want to tell you of some interesting development, gossip or technique and want to know what you do and your opinions on every subject.

The Saturday evening is similar with an organized buffet and a pub meet. This cross fertilization of ideas gives FOSDEM such a strong community feel.

## Costs

Due to the absence of major commercialization, FOSDEM only has a few sponsors such as O'Reilly Books, Linux.com and Linux Magazine. Visitors are encouraged to make a donation of 25 Euros. This get you a Tee-shirt and those that donate more can get O'Reilly books, entrance to the Saturday buffet meal and a chance to win subscriptions.



Figure 1: FOSDEM 2004 was held at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB).

## INFO

- [1] Photos of Fosdem: <http://fosdem.3ti.be/>
- [2] Main Fosdem site: <http://www.fosdem.org/>
- [3] Lecture slides portal: <http://www.fosdem.org/2004/index/news/>
- [4] BudgetFosdem: <http://wiki.gllug.org.uk/cgi-bin/moin.cgi/BudgetFosdem>