

Surf across the Channel

Taking the Internet route to France allows you to gather resources without ever leaving home. Stephen Glover explains how

Twelve months and four phone bills ago I tremulously inserted a CompuServe CD into my new PC, and even more hesitantly tapped in my credit card details. Minutes later I was crawling on to the electronic surf board that has held me enthralled for hundreds of hours — and pounds.

Don't do as I did — learning by your mistakes takes too long and is expensive. Ask a friend or colleague who has been at it a while to run you through the basics — downloading web pages and pictures, using searches, signing up for the *Times* and *Telegraph*, downloading Acrobat Reader, book-marking sites and sending e-mails with attachments (your own word-processed files). Then buy a good book on the browser used by your service provider and you should be fine.

So, a year on where am I? A quick run through of recent uses of the technology for language teaching might whet your appetite.

◆ I downloaded material on Princess Diana's death from the

French version of the Yahoo search engine, www.yahoo.fr. I finally used a *chronologie de la vie de la Princesse Diana* with Year 11 GCSE classes and Year 12 A-level students after creating a vocabulary list using the indexing facility in Word. Particularly interesting were comments from various Internet users on the *Liberation* newspaper's site, www.liberation.fr. This is probably the best site for regular interesting and accessible articles.

◆ I downloaded poems from the *École de Viville in France* (www.viville.org). A poem on animals was transferred into Word and used with a Year 8 class that had been studying animals.

◆ I wrote the introductory letter and details form for a forthcoming exchange visit and e-mailed a copy as an attachment to the teacher in another school taking part. I also e-mailed a copy of a worksheet to a colleague who is making her first hesitant steps into cyberspace. It was the first time she had received a file (with pictures) over the net. She was amazed and delighted.

◆ After a year trying to persuade twinning-committee people, librarians and teachers in Vitry-sur-Seine, Paris, to get on the net, I found a site at a *centre de loisirs* in the town. I have since been in regular touch and we are linking this to French club activities on Wednesdays, when the French children attend this centre.

◆ After many frustrating months, I have finally got not only streaming sound but streaming video. Radio France, Europe 1 and other radio stations are accessible on the net (www.francelink.com/) and with the Real Audio player from Progressive Networks, you can tune in live. Two weeks ago I upgraded (free) to Real Player, which not only plays the radio channel but can also play streaming television.

The news channel LCI (lci.enfrance.com/) broadcasts continuously on the Internet with the Real Player add-on. While the pictures can be slow during periods of so-called "net congestion", the sound is excellent.

Today I actually paid for some



Walk this way: a little off the beaten track is the site of enigmatic feminist graffiti artist Miss Tic

software over the Internet — the upgrade to Real Player. This allows the user to download and play back the content of LCI. This is one of the biggest advances in A-level teaching possible. Around seven minutes of TV news from LCI will fit on to a floppy, which can then be used by students with headphones in the library. A slider allows instant playback of any section.

◆ After watching my daughters engaging in Chat Room conversations I decided to try the same thing in class with Year 11, but without the computer. Pupils had to write questions or make comments on paper, with an immediate written response coming from their neighbour. I resolved to produce paper-based mock-ups of chat rooms to facilitate this activity. This should be good training for when we

finally get into on-line chat.

◆ Last week I found a further couple of excellent web sites to book-mark for helping A-level students with the topic on Paris they offer for the oral exam. The Mairie de Paris site (www.paris-france.org/) has much practical information about the city. This supplements the excellent *Pages de Paris* on www.paris.org/Links/.

I also found a quirky but interesting site about a mysterious feminist graffiti artist — Miss Tic (mystique). Details for the smitten are available on www.chez.com/miss-tic/docs/miss-tic/html.

◆ I asked Year 8 pupils to produce some material about themselves to put on the web site I am setting up courtesy of Burnley College.

◆ I downloaded some pictures of old trams, trains and buses from the

site of the Paris transport museum to use with Year 8. The "GIF" or "JPEG" images are easily imported into Word or Microsoft publisher.

This is just a taste of the things I have been able to do using the BT Internet service at home and Research Machines' service in school — and that is just for language teaching.

The Internet scene is evolving by the day. Some users claim it is slowing up to the point of being unusable. But weekend mornings (1p a minute all Saturday and Sunday) seem not too bad. Do have a go even if, as *The TES* IT columnist Arnold Evans suggests, you try out all the free services first.

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