

Bytes & Pieces

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.

In this issue

[Handy Recovery 2](#)

Data recovery when all else fails 1

[Picasa 2](#)

Google's photo management program reviewed 2

[Installing Xandros](#)

Be careful not to overwrite Windows 3

[Choosing your broadband quota](#)

Allow for usage growth 4

Handy Recovery 2.0

A while back I was given the job of trying to recover data on a hard drive whose structure had disappeared. Windows called it “unallocated space”, but a couple of data recovery programs I tried could “see” data on the drive. How best to recover the data?

More recently I was brought a computer on which the main hard drive had been overwritten when attempting to install Linux. A number of data recovery programs had been tried and then Windows XP and various applications had been installed. Was it possible to recover anything useful?

In both cases the best answer proved to be Handy Recovery 2.0 from SoftLogica.

I am going to outline how to use this application, but let me first stress that, if you are unfamiliar with the procedures described, consult someone with more experience before tackling the job, as transferring drives between computers is not a job for novices.

Take a soft pencil and write something faintly on a piece of paper. Now take a broad black marker pen and write something else across the pencilled message. Makes it hard to read, doesn't it? Applying the obvious logic to the task at hand gives us two rules with which to start.

Rule 1 of data recovery is: “Do not allow the recovery program to write anything on the disk from which you are trying to recover data.” Rule 2 is similar: “Do not install anything on the disk from which you are trying to recover data.” If you ignore either of these rules, or, worse yet, both of them, you will overwrite otherwise recoverable data.

If you are not going to write anything on the drive from which you wish to recover data, you will obviously need another drive. If you do not have one in your computer with plenty of free space on it, buy or borrow one. A new 40 GB drive will cost less than \$100 and an 80 GB one is only about \$20 dearer. Or take the drive to someone else who can attach it to their computer and perform the data recovery for you. When removing a drive from an ATX computer, make sure you disconnect the power cord as the front switch only suspends the computer; it does not switch the power off. On an AT computer you can leave it connected as the front switch does turn it off and the power cord will help to earth the computer. Also be careful not to handle the circuit board on the bottom of the drive as static can damage it.

To do the recovery on your own computer, create a partition on the second drive and install Windows. It doesn't have to be XP, anything from 98 on will do. Download and install Handy Recovery 2.0 in trial mode. This will let you examine the drive to see what is recoverable. Use first the Partition and then the Analyze button to discover what is on your drive. However, you can only use Handy Recovery in trial mode for 30 days and can only recover one file per day. It is enough, however, for you to assess whether the program is worth buying.

Having decided that your valuable data is recoverable, click on the Register button and purchase and register the program online. This can be done from someone else's computer and will result in a serial number. Enter the serial number. If you prefer, you can now complete the registration by email. When you enter the serial number, choose Register by Email, instead of Register, and the program will generate an email to be sent to SoftLogica. The information in the message can be transferred to another computer and sent from there, if necessary, but the .REG file you will be sent in response must be installed on the computer where Handy Recovery has been installed in order to get the program working in registered mode. Once in registered mode, Handy Recovery can quickly copy everything recoverable from the damaged drive to your second drive. It can also be used to make an image of the damaged drive for later recovery.

Unlike other recovery programs I have tried, Handy Recovery can recover the structure of the drive, instead of dumping everything into numbered folders. It is also the cheapest recovery program I know of. To save even more money, check with <http://www.softpile.com>, rather than <http://www.handyrecovery.com>. SoftPile may have it on special. Currently they are selling it for \$USD24.00 instead of \$USD30.00.

While cheap can mean nasty and you often get what you pay for, this application is very much the exception and is highly recommended.

Note: If you only need to recover one, or more, accidentally deleted files, Handy Recovery 1.0 may be sufficient. This is a free program but lacks many of the features of version 2.0.

[top](#)

Picasa 2

I've mentioned this program previously, but it was not until Don Trotman gave me an earbashing about it that I took a closer look. For the digital camera user who is not looking to spend hours retouching photographs, but wants to organise his/her photos, carry out some improvements, email them and run slideshows on the computer, this is probably the ideal application.

Organising your photos

Picasa 2 can download photos from most digital cameras. It places them in sub-folders of My Documents/My Pictures. This means that they are readily found if you want to work on them with another program. You can drag and drop photos from one folder to another. A right-click on a photo brings up a menu. Choose Properties and you can read the EXIF information. With my camera that includes the aperture setting, the shutter speed, whether flash was used, the lens focal length setting, resolution, date and time, camera make and model, and the photographs dimensions. Picasa 2 throws in the filename, where the photo is physically located on the hard drive, and its file size.

Retouching your photos

Picasa offers seven basic fixes, a dozen effects and some tuning tools. Fixes include crop, straighten, redeye, auto contrast, auto colour, fill light and "I'm feeling lucky". They are easy to use and effective. For example, straighten overlays a grid to guide you and the straighten tool consists of a slider. It works on a large display of the picture, not a thumbnail, making it easy to see the result.

The effects are chosen for their usefulness, rather than the wondrous swirls and patterns produced by some other programs. Effects include sepia, black and white, portion of the picture in colour with the rest in black and white, sharpen, soft focus and saturation.

The tuning tools allow you to adjust fill light, shadows, highlights and colour temperature using simple sliders.

All adjustments and corrections to your photos can be undone at any time, even after the program has been closed and reopened. Contrast this with the way many programs lock in alterations forcing you to use a copy to avoid overwriting your original with a retouched photo that went wrong.

Using your photos

Picasa 2 has buttons to email (automatically reduced) photos by your default email program, Gmail or PicasaMail. You can exchange photos through Hello, turn them into web pages, caption them, use them in your weblog (blog), add a star to highlight which are thumbnails of your best shots, print them, order prints from various online services, and make collages. You can burn backups and create slideshows on disc to give to friends.

Operating system

Picasa 2 works with Windows 98, 98SE, ME, 2000 and XP. Unfortunately, it does not work with Crossover/Wine under Linux due to poor rendition of some screen fonts, nor does it work completely under Win4Lin/Windows ME, failing when asked to show a slideshow or burn a CD. Comprehensive yet easy to use, Picasa 2 proves once again that not all free programs are only worth what you pay for them. This one is every bit as good as the ones that cost \$40 up.

[top](#)

Installing Xandros

Xandros' Open Circulation Edition (OCE) version 3 is now available for download from <http://www.xandros.com>. If you use Bittorrent (or a similar Torrent downloader) there is no charge. If you choose the more conventional way of downloading, the cost is \$USD10.00. As it is a large download, you may need to use a download manager, especially if using a dialup connection. As OCE can be freely distributed for personal, non-commercial use, a better alternative for dialup users would be to get a copy from a magazine disc (should be available in the next couple of months), or from someone who has already downloaded it.

If you are going to download it by Bittorrent or otherwise, be aware that there will be heavy demand with, possibly, slow download speeds for a few days as version 3 OCE was only announced on 14 February 2005.

Installation is completely straightforward on a bare drive – just choose the Recommended setting and sit back and watch it happen. In any other situation, I would suggest you use the Expert setting. This allows you to choose the partition where it is to be installed, inspect the chosen partition to ensure that you have chosen the right one, and create a partition out of free space on the drive.

Expert setting will also let you decide whether to install a minimum, typical, or customised version. Choose the customised setting and leave out the servers, Novell network, and the Palm Pilot synchroniser applications. You can also leave out games and other unwanted applications.

Version 3.0 changes include switching from Mozilla Internet Suite to Firefox and Thunderbird, and the use of an updated Linux kernel as well as the latest (improved) version of the KDE desktop. The VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) Internet phone call application has been added to the range of applications available from Xandros Networks to coincide with the release of version 3.0.

Once you have installed your chosen configuration, look for the Xandros Networks icon. Clicking on this will take you a section of the Xandros website where you can register and then download and install the latest updates and additional applications with just a few clicks of the mouse. Registration is free, but you can also purchase a Premium membership which will remove the CD-burning speed limitations from OCE and also allow you to purchase StarOffice and other applications at substantial discounts. It also allows you to participate in forums, gives you advance access to new

applications on Xandros Networks, and gives you the right to vote for applications to be added to Xandros Networks. Premium membership costs \$USD 49.95 per year.

Xandros have also announced a special edition of Xandros 3.0 for surfing the Internet. Called Xandros SurfSide Linux, it includes antivirus, personal firewall, Firefox, Thunderbird, Skype, Plantronics USB headset, encrypted home folders, and secure access to virtual private networks, as well as all the usual Xandros applications. It will retail at \$USD99.95 and should be available in stores next month.

[top](#)

Choosing you broadband quota

Broadband starter packages gives you as little as 200 MB traffic (that is, including both uploads and downloads). Exceeding the quota can lead to punitive excess data charges being imposed, making it very expensive, yet many people – including some of our members – have signed up to such packages and then found they have made the wrong choice.

How do you decide if a starter package is right for you?

First go to your dialup provider's site and log into your account. There you will find details of your usage. Look through recent months and find your heaviest use. This is the amount you will use if you continue to use broadband in the same way that you currently use dialup. Few people do. They find that they can now stream in Internet radio, add a webcam and see the person they are talking to, and use the Internet for telephone calls, and their usage can increase dramatically. So multiply by 5 or even 10. Now you have a more realistic figure.

You can still sign up for a starter package and move up to a larger quota later, but check that your broadband provider allows you to move up a level or two without imposing a charge. Some charge as much as \$50 for such a plan change. Also choose the largest starter package you can find. Preferably with “shaping”. With a shaped plan you do not face excess charges. Instead your provider will throttle back your service to around dialup speed for the balance of the month. You will still be able to make phone calls on the same line whilst on the Internet.

Some providers are reviewing their plans right now with mine – Internode – expected to announce revised plans around the end of this month. Currently the starter plan costs \$29.95 per month and gives you 500 MB download with free uploads, unmetered access to their games and shareware servers, and unmetered access to some radio stations (including whatever is available from the ABC's website). Scanning for viruses and spam is free. They do not charge if you change data quota within a given speed, but there is a \$20 charge is you want to change to speeds. There is a \$129 setup fee and you will need an ADSL modem (from \$70 if you can configure it yourself). They participate in the fast transfer (churn) arrangements and the transfer fee if you are transferring from another churn participant is \$39. You are not bound to a contract, but there is a \$65 “break fee” if you want to discontinue the service within the first six months.

To compare all major provider's plans, read users' comments, and to ascertain if your telephone exchange is ADSL-equipped with free ports, go to <http://www.whirlpool.net.au>. If free ports are in short supply, you should also see information on when more will be installed.

[top](#)

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