

Web cam sites keep an eye on everything

EarthCam site offers a search engine of cameras

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Web cams — cameras connected to the Internet via computer — used to be a curiosity. Now they seem to be everywhere and their numbers are expanding daily.

The cameras are used to promote tourist sites, keep tabs on traffic and simply provide interesting views of faraway or unusual places. And there are thousands to choose from.

EarthCam at <http://www.earthcam.com> offers a search engine of sorts for hundreds of Web cams worldwide. They're divided into categories, including arts and entertainment, business, traffic, news, weather and many more.

If you simply want to browse what's available in the way of Web cams, this is a good place to start. Some of the cams require registration and there's no promise that all of them are kid-friendly, especially those listed under video chat cams, so parents should beware and monitor kids carefully.

More than 1,500 Web cams worldwide are listed at <http://www.camscape.com> — proving that Web cams are not simply an American phenomenon. You can see live video from such faraway places as Iran, the Netherlands, Brazil, Australia and Romania. Click on one of the sites listed and you can see wild animals at a watering hole in Africa. Click on another and you can watch ships going through the locks of the Panama Canal. There seems to be no end to Web cam sites these days.

Webcam Central at <http://www.camcentral.com> offers an amazing array of Web cams. ZDNet called this site "the virtual voyeur's hub of choice." Among the hundreds of camera sites are some that allow you, the viewer, to actually control the camera. An example is a camera at Sydney Harbor, Australia. You can pan right, left, up or down and even zoom in and out at many of the Web cam sites these days.

The U.S. Department of the Interior maintains Web cams at major national parks and you can see them at <http://www.doi.gov/webcam>. You can see Web cams located at such parks as Big Bend National Park, Glacier National Park, the Grand Canyon and Mammoth Cave. There's even a Web cam at Old Faithful geyser in Yellowstone National Park.

International locations are a primary focus at <http://www.webcamsearch.com>. Featured on this site is a Web cam located in downtown Tehran, Iran, proving that even remote locations in countries not friendly with the U.S. feature Web cams these days.

The fantastic site "How Stuff Works" has lots of information about Web cams at <http://www.computer.howstuffworks.com/webcam.htm>. The site gives you most of the information you need to set up your own Web cam. Why would you want to do that? With a Web cam, you can check on your plants and your house while you're away. You can check on the baby sitter. You can see what your dog is up to in the backyard while you're at work. And you can do it easier and with less expense than you might imagine.

Check out the Patch

No, Software Patch isn't a place where software is grown. It's a place on the Web at <http://www.softwarepatch.com> where you can check for the latest updates and fixes for your favorite software. Some of the patches and updates are critical, such as the ones for Windows software. And others are patches that simply make software run more efficiently. In any event, this is a site you should check occasionally to see if the software you have needs updating or patching.

Well lit site

Today in Literature (<http://www.todayinliterature.com>) offers a calendar of stories about the great books, great writers and events in literary history. You'll find what happened on the day you visit, and also can sign up for a surcharged newsletter that offers more about literary history.

Clearing the air

Air quality can affect your health, especially if you suffer from asthma or other pulmonary conditions. For some folks, ozone and air pollutants can be a real danger.

A government site at <http://airnow.gov> allows you to monitor air quality across the country and gives both current conditions and forecasts. You can even sign up for air quality e-mail alerts.

— Find something online you think others should know about? Or do you have a question? Let Dave Peyton know. His e-mail address is davepeyton@davepeyton.com.