As I and a few others use IRLP on a regular basis I thought I would inform others as to how the system works. Several members have made comments that they are not sure how to use it and are interested to become competent with the procedures.

IRLP usually operates on 2m or 70cm. It is method of communicating long distance via a Computer, a Radio and using the local repeater. By long distance I mean anywhere in the World where there is an IRLP Node. A special Microphone is required that can generate the DTMF tones. Each IRLP Node or location has a 4-digit number. This list of Node numbers can be found at the IRLP web site. The address for this web site is www.irlp.net. The site carries lots of other information about IRLP that is far greater in depth than this little article.

To operate IRLP you listen to check that the local repeater frequency is not in use. If it is clear, you then announce your call sign and that you wish to use the IRLP. After releasing the PTT you then press the PTT again and key in the number of the IRLP Node you wish to contact. After keying in the number release the PTT and listen. If you have been connected successfully to the Node you dialed, the Node will respond with a connection message.

After connection it is normal to wait about 10 seconds prior to putting out a call. Effectively you are connected to a repeater that you normally can't hear so you need to make sure you have not interrupted local traffic. It IS acceptable to call CQ, in fact, if you really want to make a contact, it is preferable to say, "This is VK3AXI calling CQ, is anyone available for a contact?" as opposed to "VK3AXI listening" ...silence for 2 minutes, followed by a disconnect. However, 3 x 3 x 47 CQs are unnecessary and should be left for CW/SSB frequencies where tuning around is the observed practice.

Once your connection is made and you have a contact you carry out a normal conversation. I find it is better if you leave a pause between overs for the system to catch up or in case someone else wishes to join your conversation.

At the conclusion of your conversation you need to disconnect from the Node you are connected to. Simply announce that you are going clear of the Node and key 73 into your Microphone keypad. This will disconnect you. The Node that you had been connected to will now announce that you have been disconnected.

In next month's Newsletter I will give more information on using IRLP. This is only the start and will get you up and running initially.