

BEGINNER'S INTRODUCTION TO TOPPY EPG TAPS

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Electronic Programme Guide (EPG) can be considered to be an electronic version of the "Radio Times" or similar magazine, with the additional advantage that the data may be searched for particular programmes or programme types. The EPG on the Topsy has not been one of its better features, and therefore has been the subject of a number of TAPs and utilities to run on computers connected to the Topsy.

The object of this note is to provide an overview of the various options available, with particular emphasis on new UK Topsy owners. It should be noted that many of the TAPs and associated PC/Mac programmes discussed are evolving rapidly and so the information here may not be completely up to date, and of necessity is somewhat simplified. The use and loading of TAPs is described in a separate guide.

Before using TAPs, it is strongly recommended that the relevant user documentation and the discussions in the forum are consulted to get information on the latest versions. It is strongly recommended that the TAPs are kept up to date, most particularly after firmware changes or tuning to new channels which may expose problems with earlier versions.

Note that the TAPs mentioned here are those believed to be most actively used on the TF5800 in the UK, but there are many other TAPs which more adventurous users might like to try. However those intended for other models may depend on keys which we do not have on the TF5800, or be optimised for a small number of channels.

2 EPG DATA SOURCES

2.1 General

The choice of EPG source should be the starting point in deciding which TAPs you wish to use. Three fundamentally different sources of EPG data have been identified as follows:

- Data interleaved with the Freeview transmissions.
- Data transmitted on a dedicated Freeview channel for part of the day.
- Data downloaded from the internet via a PC, Mac etc.

as discussed in more detail below.

2.2 Freeview Data

This is the data used by the native Topsy (i.e. when no TAPs are loaded), and has two limitations:

- It only covers a nominal 7 days.
- The Extended Programme Description field is not used on most channels.

but it does have the advantage of being updated in the event of late programme changes. In addition there are problems collecting this data with firmware versions earlier than 5.12.88 ("Bastille"), so anyone proposing to use this data should ensure they have either this firmware or a later version.

2.3 Dedicated Freeview Channel

This is the approach used by many other PVRs. Data is transmitted in the early hours of the morning on channel "4tv".

As the PVR manufacturers have to pay a licence fee for the use of this facility, it is not clear whether its use on a Toppo would be legal, and it has not yet been established whether this data could be successfully decoded by a TAP.

2.4 Web-Sourced Data

At least two sources of programme data are available on the internet, namely:

- "Digiguide", which requires an annual subscription.
- "Radio Times", which is currently free.

These provide 14 day's data, together with much more information on the programmes including genre. The disadvantages of this approach are that a permanent PC to Toppo connection is needed, and the data is only updated daily so is not responsive to late programme changes.

3 THE TOPPY'S FREEVIEW EPG DATA COLLECTION (FIRMWARE VERSIONS 5.12.88-5.13.26)

The native Toppo EPG data collection (in these firmware versions) suffers from two problems:

- Additional information such as the programme genre are discarded.
- Only the first 128 characters of the programme description are made available to TAPs (but up to 256 are shown on the native EPG).

in addition to the Freeview limitations general discussed above.

The "Epg Navigator" and "JAG's EPG" TAPs collect their data and store it on hard disc when the Toppo is not in use – largely a relic from earlier firmware versions that only collected EPG data from the channel currently being viewed. With the latest firmware complete data is normally collected within ten seconds or so on BBC channels, and a little longer on others.

The "Description Extender" TAP addresses the 128 character limit by putting up to 256 characters in the "Long Description Field" which is available to all TAPs (but not all yet use it).

4 SERIES LINKS

None of the currently available data sources support a true "series link", by which a series of programmes are linked in a way that allows timers to be set for the whole series without picking up repeats and/or similar named programmes on other channels. However several TAPs attempt to provide similar functionality by searching for programme names with the ability to restrict the channels searched and days/times of searches which normally achieves the same effect.

The Radio Times data includes a "Repeat" flag, and one can modify rt2mei to add "Rpt" to the programme title as thus exclude repeats from manual or automatic searches. Unfortunately the flag is only set for BBC programmes, and is not set for BBC3/4 programmes repeated on BBC1/2.

5 EPG DATA DISPLAY ETC FEATURES

The choice of display presentation is very much a matter of personal preference, though the “grid” presentation is a popular choice. The native Toppo presentation can show the current programme in a smaller window for one channel at a time, or show a grid view with only 4 channels at a time.

The following TAPs are primarily aimed at displaying EPG data:

- Epg Navigator
- JAG’s EPG
- MyStuff
- iGuide

and there is, of course the native Toppo EPG. Other TAP’s using the EPG include:

- Improbox, for Now & Next data
- MeiSearch for locating programmes by genre and searches through .
- UK/Oz Surfer for Now & Next information.
- UK Scheduler, a facility for setting timers from programme searches

A summary of the features of each are given in the table below:

Facility	TAP								
	Native Toppo	iGuide	EPG Navigator	JAG’s EPG	MyStuff	MeiSearch	ImproBox	UK/Oz Surfer	UK Scheduler
List view				Y					
Grid View	4 Ch	Y	10 Ch		6/8/12 Ch				
Search in prog. Title	Y	Y		Y	Y	By Genre or Keyword			Y
Search in prog description				Y					
Now & next for current channel	Y	Y			Y		Y		
Now & next for PIP channel								Y	
Now & next for all channels				Y					
Set timers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Current channel	Y	Y
Compatible with “Description Extender”	N/A		Y	Version 3.x only	Y	N/A	Y	Y	Y
Radio capability	Y	?	?	Separate TAP	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Free ¹	Y	Y	Y	For limited period	Y	Y	N	Y	Y

Note that some of the TAPs listed above, notably Improbox, have other functions that you may find useful.

¹ But several request donations from regular users.

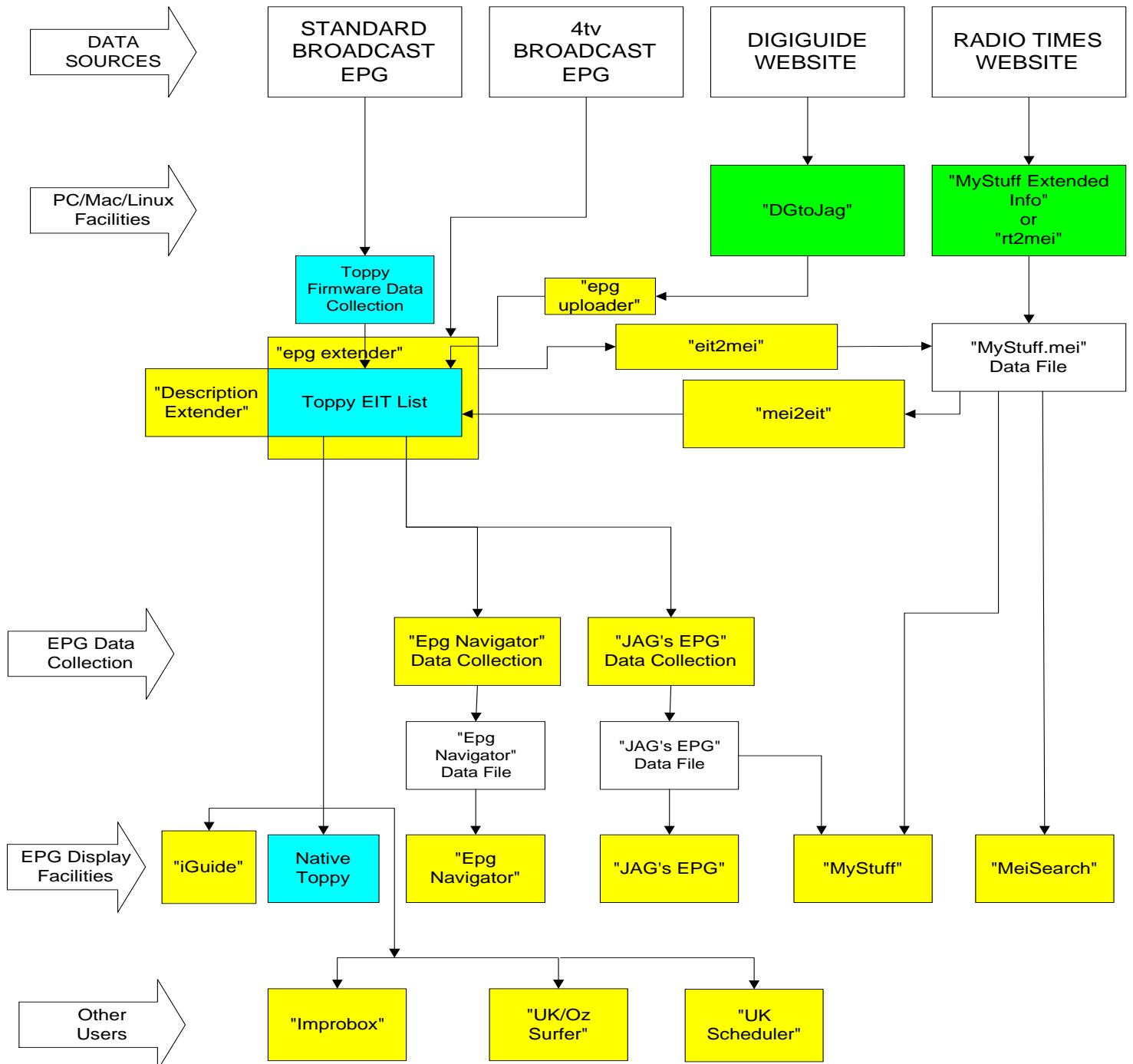
6 EPG DATA FLOW

The (somewhat simplified) diagram below shows the data flow from the data sources discussed in section 2 above and the display etc facilities described in section 5 above. Having chosen the source(s) and destinations you would like to use, one can see which TAPs and computer programmes you will need to use.

The following colour coding is used:

- Green: PC/Mac/Linux programmes
- Blue: Native Topy facilities
- Yellow: TAPs

Where a TAP appears more than once, this is only for clarity of data flow, and does not imply multiple copies are required.



The "Description Extender" TAP effectively modifies the behaviour of the native EPG so that the improved data is available to all users. Thus the improved data can be used in conjunction with EPG Navigator, JAG's EPG, Improbbox etc to allow access to the enhanced data.

In addition to the data flows on the diagram, "mei2archive" allows the information stored with recordings to be updated to reflect the additional information in the MEI database.

7 PC/MAC & MOBILE PHONE FACILITIES

Other features that may be of interest include:

- TopyEPG – allows Radio Times EPG data to be viewed on your computer, timers to be generated and downloaded to the Topy.
- Topy Remote Control – enables UK Scheduler searches to be set up on any web-connected computer and passed via your PC or NSLU to the Topy.

It is understood the MyStuff team are developing equivalent features .

8 TOPPY.ORG.UK TAP ETC LIBRARY

This provides a list of TAPs and related PC/Mac programs that may be of interest to UK Topy owners. It has the following features that are not available in many other such libraries:

- Categorisation into types such as EPG, Audio, files, etc.
- Indications of suitability for use on TF5800
- E-mail notifications of changes to TAPs etc of interest.
- Links for downloads and to discussions in the forum.

To register for e-mail updates, go to Home, TAPs, select "more info" against the entry of interest, and click on the large red tick in the new window.