# BOARDWATCH

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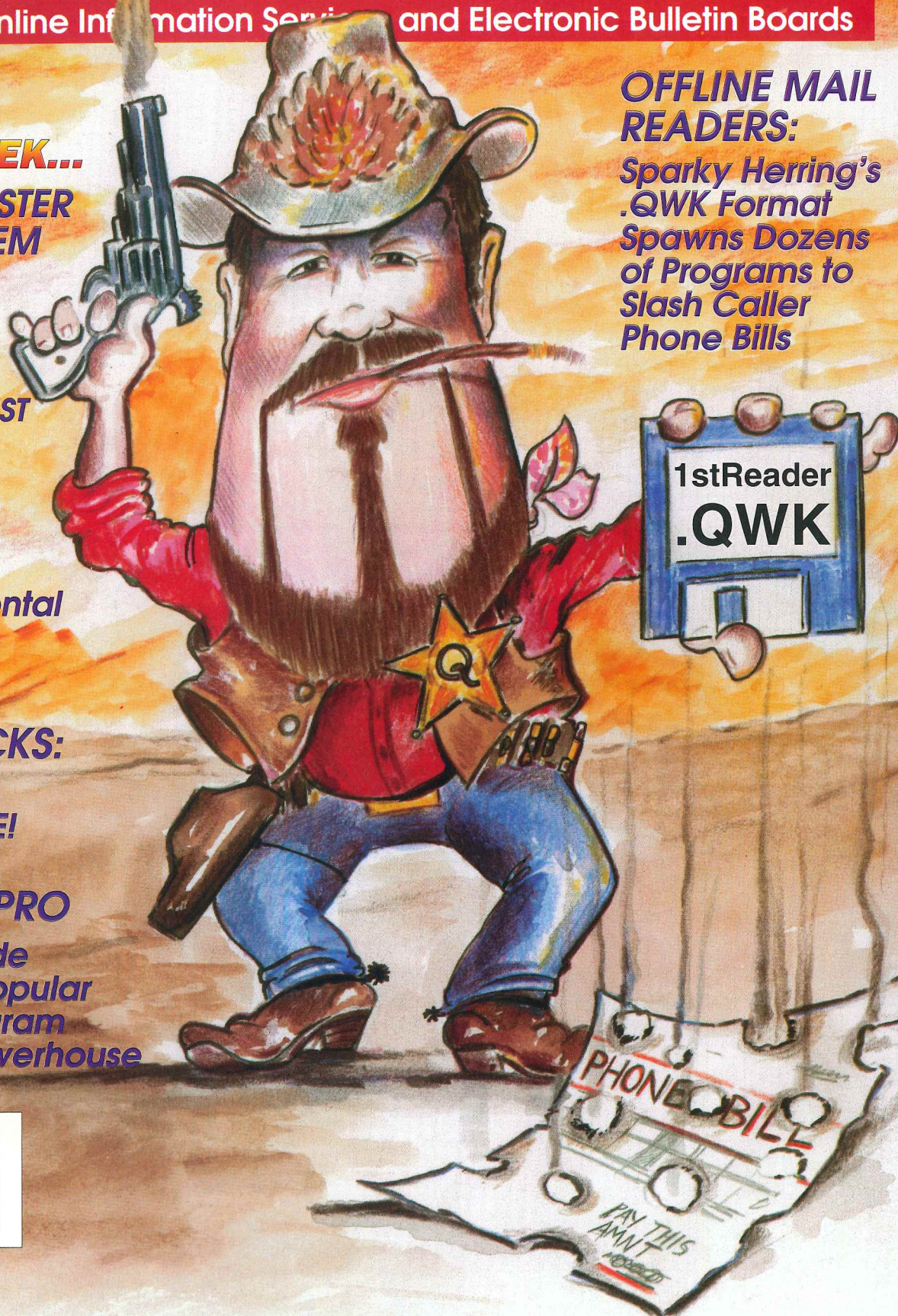
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But in addition to an unusual custom software setup on a NeXT machine and Internet access, MindVox has a very different flavor from those you may often encounter. The system is actually the brainchild of Patrick Kroupa (Lord Digital) and Bruce Fancher (Lord Dead). Kroupa has written a long, rambling essay espousing his early years as a "hacker", a hiatus from CyberSpace, and his recent rediscovery of the online mystique. While the 60KB editorial sports some valiant efforts toward self aggrandizement and some overdone shots at the "suburbia/tract housing" of today's common PCBoard-style electronic bulletin boards, if you discount the "onliner than thou" elements, it's actually a pretty interesting description of the growth and transition of teenage hackers into adult online enthusiasts. Actually, it was a bit enchanting.

And the catharsis may be representative of a larger picture. Recall that **Len Rose,** a prominent figure in the **Operation Sun Devil** drama, was arrested for breaking into a Bell South computer and fetching a copy of a 911 service administrative document that the telephone company claimed was valued at some $79,000. Rose plead guilty to the charge. Craig Neidorf, a college student in Missouri who published an electronic newsletter titled Phrack, was also charged with a variety of things based on the theft, transportation across state lines, and publication of the document. A trial ensued in St. Louis and as it turns out, the document was publicly available from the telephone company at about **$13.50.** The charges against Neidorf were dropped. But since Rose had already plead guilty, his sentencing, despite the fact that it occured after the Neidorf trial and after what actually amount to fraud and manipulation of the justice system by the telephone company had been revealed, somehow Rose got 14 months in prison anyway. I've never been very comfortable with this turn of events, and Rose likely less so. Subsequently, we read regular accounts from Rose of life behind bars in Jim Thomas's electronic publication **Computer Underground Digest.** He apparently found the stay in jail a very focusing and clarifying experience.

Rose was released a few months ago, and apparently Kroupa has hired Rose as the system administrator and chief of security on the MindVox system. And Neidorf and Jim Thomas are on the system regularly along with a host of luminaries from the network and the hacker underground. Bruce Sterling, author of **THE HACKER CRACKDOWN** has been on a few times and the system seems to be forming up as a hangout for a whole bevy of maturing hacker underground types. This makes for a rather interesting community of users.

The system exhibits a kind of an adolescent humor that hits sometimes and misses about as often - alternating between grandiose and often lengthy poetic descriptions of a grander cyberspace, and arcane inside jokes. They claim to be newer, flashier, and more satisfying than gummy bears and longer lasting than most hair styling products for example.

In any event, the system is different, clearly experimental, and working in this new Internet host bridge niche that's struggling to find legs. This one's certainly worth a look. Phantom Access Technologies, Inc., 1562 First Avenue, Suite 351, New York, NY 10028; **(212)988-5987** voice; **(212)988-5030** data; Internet: **info@phantom.com.**

## ECONET: THE ECOLOGY NETWORK

by J. Scott Christianson and Dan Wendling

No longer an alternative or radical viewpoint, environmentalism is beginning to change our lives and our world view. The online world is also

changing because of concern for our common habitat. Many BBS now carry environmental conferences and echoes. And some BBS are devoted solely to environmental topics (Boardwatch, November 1991). Online environmental communities are found on services such as CompuServe (Outdoors Forum, Good Earth Forum), America Online (Environment Club, National Geographic Online), and the WELL (Environment). This article explores EcoNet, a service devoted solely to environmental conferences and topics.

EcoNet is a fairly large system. The software and hardware have changed several times since EcoNet was first started in 1984 on four Apple computers. EcoNet now operates on a Sun SPARCstation II with 64 megabytes of memory and 3.5 gigabytes of hard disk storage.

EcoNet is just one of many networks administered by the Institute for Global Communications (IGC), a non-profit corporation that develops low-cost access to computer networking for activists outside the United States, especially in non-industrialized and Southern Hemisphere countries.

## ECONET USERS

Currently EcoNet has over **3,500** subscribers and is growing by about **200** users per month. A recent article in World Watch magazine commented on EcoNet's size: "Given the size of the United States, this may appear to be a fairly small group, but it is one with considerable leverage. More than 60 percent of EcoNet's members are organizations or individuals representing organizations. Indeed, EcoNet's online phone directory, which gives the names and addresses of all of its users, reads like a bibliography of the American environmental movement."

Some, like Lester Brown of the World Watch Institute, are well-known environmental researchers working to create a sustainable society. Others, like members of Earth First!, are known for their preservationist attitudes and for the militant tactics they often employ.

The common denominator of this diverse online community is these environmental activists have realized that if they want to be as successful as the industries and Political Action Committees (PACs) they lobby against, they need to be more sophisticated in networking and organizing people for their cause.

Many organizations have established private conferences on EcoNet. These conferences are available only to the members or officers of that particular group. For example, the EcoNet newsletter reports: "The Green Party of California has been coordinating some of its organizing efforts online. GPOC uses private electronic conferences to iron out some of its internal dis-

agreements rather than devote limited and infrequent face to face meeting time to this necessary but not so pleasant part of developing a party. The low cost of a statewide meeting taking place online doesn't come close to what they'd have to pay for long-distance telephone rates or even a general mailing."

## COST

Besides an initial fee of **$15**, a subscription to EcoNet costs **$10** per month, which includes one hour of off-peak time. Connect charges are **$5** off-peak and **$10** per hour peak (7am-6pm). EcoNet can also be accessed through the Internet (**telnet igc.org** or **192.82.108.1**) at an hourly rate of **$3**. Users can call EcoNet by modem directly in Menlo Park, California at **(415)322-0884** (8N1).

## FEATURES

The EcoNet interface is very basic and offers 3 main functions: Mail, Conference and Database. Although

the capability exists, EcoNet doesn't offer any graphic menus, and all the command prompts are on a single line. The user manual explains: "If IGC adopted a multi-line or graphic menu of commands for all users, the U.S. subscribers would only see a tiny increase in cost. For overseas users, the cost could increase enormously, since they pay according to the number of lines of text sent via a Packet Switching System."

EcoNet is well connected to other networks. In addition to the mail linkages that result from connections to Internet (including connections to Fido, CompuServe, America Online, MCI Mail, the WELL, etc.), EcoNet users can send mail to GlasNet (a computer network in the Commonwealth of Independent States, formerly the Soviet Union), Padisnet (the Pan African Documentation Centre Network) and several other networks.

A new feature of EcoNet allows users to send faxes and telexes while online. Using this feature, an EcoNet user can read a bulletin about the newest clean water legislation, type a letter to his/her Senator or Representative while online and then immediately fax it to Congress. A typed letter can be in a congressperson's office fifteen minutes after a constituent reads a legislative bulletin!

An EcoNet user from Venezuela explains how he uses EcoNet's telex abilities: "Telex service here requires a three minute minimum for sending to Cuba and Uruguay. To make matters worse, it sometimes takes more than a week to get a telex connection to Cuba from Caracas. Now I send short one minute telexes (through EcoNet's telex service). It is a paradox to go through a US service to get better connections to Cuba!"

EcoNet's growing list of online databases includes: UN NPPA, a United Nations list of National Parks and Protected Areas; Harbinger File, a directory of citizen groups, government agencies and environmental education programs concerned with California environmental issues; DEER, the Directory of Environmental Education Resources; RG-Energy, energy cost analysis system sponsored by Real Goods; Events, a searchable calendar of events posted by IGC users; and EPA, bibliographic citations compiled by the US Environmental Protection Agency library network. All of these databases are accessible without additional charges.

EcoNet's power lies in its conferences. Over **500** EcoNet conferences are available, as well as over **300** related conferences from other networks, including UseNet and other IGC networks (PeaceNet, HomeoNet and ConflictNet).

EcoNet users can create a "visit list" of their favorite conferences. This handy feature allows people to type in a list of the conferences they are interested in only once, instead of each time they logon. After setting up this list, users can select "v" and the computer will transfer them to the first conference in their visit list. When they want to move on, selecting "v" again will move them to the next conference in the list until all the conferences on the list have been visited.

EcoNet's online conferences have become an extremely valuable tool for environmentalists. For instance, EcoNet was used to coordinate and plan the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) that was held last June. Jean-Claude Faby, director of the New York UNCED office, told reporters before the meeting that the best way to stay informed about UNCED was to "Use EcoNet."

Held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, UNCED was the largest United Nations conference in history. EcoNet has over 30 conferences pertaining to UNCED. Most of these were used by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) to prepare for

UNCED. Most of the official UNCED documents are available from EcoNet in several different languages (English, Spanish, French and Portuguese).

One of the most impressive UNCED documents posted on EcoNet is the Rio Declaration. This declaration is a set of goals and objectives for building a sustainable society; a sustainable society is able to support its people without sacrificing the resources that future generations will need to live healthy lives. This idea is expressed in the familiar saying, "We do not inherit the land from our parents, we borrow it from our children." The Rio Declaration recognizes that all humans are "entitled to a healthy and productive life" and that countries have a "right to develop." (Unfortunately, it will of course take much more than a well-worded declaration for our global society to become sustainable.)

EcoNet is the home to many online environmental newsletters including *The Energy and Climate Information Exchange* (ECIX) newsletter; *Develop Net News - Online News and Views on Technology Transfer in International Development*; and *TIEMPO - a Bulletin on Global Warming and the Third World*.

EcoNet has been experimenting with publishing daily newsletters from international conferences. EcoNet volunteers or staff attending a conference write a short newsletter after each day's meetings. This newsletter is immediately transmitted to EcoNet and other networks. People on the network get blow-by-blow reports from meetings that aren't in the news everyday. An important advantage of this type of meeting coverage is that people who read the daily newsletters and decide that their viewpoints are not being represented by their country's emissary can fax or telex a message to him or her, before the next day's

set of meetings. Last year, this technique was implemented during the third meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention of Climate Change in Geneva, Switzerland.

**GLOBAL LINK OFFLINE MAIL**
Global Link is an offline mail reader for EcoNet written by David Mansey-Kano (EcoNet id: **dkano**). Global Link is more than just an offline mail reader - it is also a text editor and a communications program. A nice feature of this program is that conference and mail indices are maintained on your computer, so files can be selected for downloading prior to connecting to EcoNet. And, as with any offline mail-reader, it's not only easier to use, but can also save you money in connect charges. Global Link is available for the shareware fee of **$50** and runs on IBM compatible computers.

**FTP**
EcoNet offers free access to selected

files via ftp (file transfer protocol) to anyone with Internet access (anonymous ftp to **igc.org**). These files include several newsletters and the UNCED documents (in the **pub/ UNCED** directory). For information on EcoNet contact: EcoNet, Institute for Global Communications, 18 De Boom Street, San Francisco CA 94107; **(415)546-1794** fax; **(415)322-0884** data. There is also an excellent book on this topic: *EcoLinking: Everyone's Guide to Online Environmental Information* written by Don Rittner.

[ *J. Scott Christianson is a Research Specialist at the Mason Institute of Ophthalmology in Columbia, Missouri, and writes an environmental column for the local newspaper. Dan Wendling lives in the Washington, DC, area and is the SysOp of the* **Coin of the Realm BBS** *at* **(301)585-6697**. *The two have collaborated on a downloadable document titled* **Guide to Online Resources for the Conservationist**. *— Editor*]