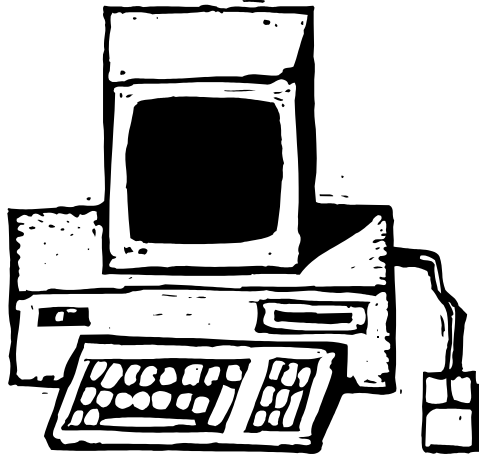

CRUISIN' THE NET



by John Callahan

I was cruisin' the net one quiet Sunday as I listened to the rain falling on the bridge deck. I was trying to find some software to help me solve an annoying problem with Windows 98. I didn't find it, but in the process I found plenty of other useful software.

Shareware

Specifically, I was cruisin' the shareware sites. In the good old days of CP/M, an operating system many of you may be too young to remember, shareware meant a diskette in a plastic bag with a couple of pages of printed instructions that you picked up at a computer-user group meeting. You used the programs at your own risk. Sometimes they worked, and sometimes they didn't. That made life interesting, sometimes treacherous.

Shareware has evolved. It now mostly lives on the Web. There are several websites that have shareware and freeware programs for download.

There are two types of software available on the software-download sites: freeware and shareware. Freeware, as the name implies, is free. Download the software and use it. You have no further obligation. Don't let the price fool you. Many of the freeware programs are high-quality products. Many shareware developers distribute freeware as their way of giving back. It's part of the culture of the Internet.

Shareware is partly free. There is a free trial period, usually 30 days. After that, you are supposed to pay for a license to continue using the programs. Most programs stop working after the trial period if you don't purchase a license. Others just use "nag screens" to remind you that you are a scofflaw.

Shareware has come a long way from its baggie-and-diskette roots. "Shareware developer" used to mean a lone hobbyist sitting in his basement. While the lone shareware developers still exist, others have grown into software companies with

teams of developers and support personnel. While many offer support only by e-mail, others offer telephone support to registered users.

What I like most about shareware is that it gives me a chance to actually use a program so I can evaluate whether or not I want to buy a license. In my experience, no product description or even the most thorough review can tell me whether or not I will find a particular piece of software useful for my requirements.

The other thing that I like about shareware is that it gives me a wider range of choices. I get to evaluate software that I would be unlikely to find on the shelf at my local computer store. For example, this morning I downloaded WinBackup <www.liutilities.com/products/winbackup>, a utility for backing up data files that I want to evaluate. The developer, LIUtilities Inc., is in Ostersund, Sweden. Ulead, a developer of sophisticated graphics processing software that I've used for website graphics, is located in Taiwan. In the best tradition of the Internet, Ulead provides a page of free downloads <www.ulead.com/download/freedownload.htm>, including Ulead Photo Explorer, an extremely useful tool for viewing and organizing digital photos and other digital images.

Here are a few of my favorite sites for freeware and shareware sites:

Simtel <www.simtel.net> has software for MS-DOS, Windows and Macintosh computers and Palm and PocketPC handhelds. A part of Simtel that I like to visit is Dr. File Finder's Picks <www.simtel.net/drff/drffidx.html>. Michael E. Callahan (no relation to this writer) is Dr. File Finder. The good doctor writes short descriptions of shareware programs that he find interesting and useful. It was through Dr. File Finder that I discovered WinBackup.

I used the Simtel Search box using the term "yacht." I found NavTools Lite <www.simtel.net/pub/pd/54826.html>, a tool for planning and executing any ocean crossings using sun, moon, planets and stars to obtain position, course, and speed.

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I also discovered NavTools Meteo <www.simtel.net/pub/pd/54876.html>, an application for retrieving worldwide weather charts, satellite images, radar, and hurricane information from Internet. Andromeda Productions <<http://home.hccnet.nl/g.sassen>>, the developer of NavTools, is located in Ruinerwold, The Netherlands.

Tucows <www.tucows.com> is one of the oldest and most complete shareware sites. Tucows has desktop software for Windows, Macintosh, Linux, BeOS and OS/2 and PDA software for Newton, Palm OS, Pocket PC and RIM.

Searching Tucows using the term "boat" I found SailPalm 1.2, navigation software for Palm that is based on Navionics vectorial charts and has the coveted 5-Cow rating. If you go to the site for SailPalm's developer, SW&N <www.sw-n.com>, you can read about the company's complete line of navigation software in either English or Italian. Searching Tucows using the term "yacht," I found YachtMan 1.0 <<http://pdcentral.ozbytes.net.au/palm/preview/169671.html>>, a freeware program for the Palm OS for keeping repair lists, inventory, shopping lists and inspection lists for a your vessel.

If you're in a hurry, **CNET Shareware** <<http://shareware.cnet.com>> has a meta-search option that searches several shareware sites. From CNET Shareware you can search CNET Downloads, ZDNet Downloads, Simtel and Tucows with a single inquiry.

Virtual Cruising

Are you an armchair sailor or an experienced bluewater cruiser? Frankly, it doesn't matter. The Internet and the World Wide Web offer instant access to resources and information for all of us.

If you're an armchair sailor who likes the vicarious enjoyment of sharing others' cruising adventures, there are hundreds of websites where cruisers post their cruising logs along with photographs of their ports of call. The writing in these cruising logs ranges from terse and basic to literary.

If you're an experienced cruiser onshore just long enough to replenish the cruising kitty, there are lots of resources to help you plan your next cruise. Here are a few of my favorites:

Ocean Navigator Online <www.oceannavigator.com>, *Ocean Navigator* magazine's website, describes itself as the "Online Resource for the Offshore Sailor." It is what Web aficionados would call a "content-rich site." Recent articles at Ocean Navigator Online include "Convergence Hits the Nav Station," "Simple Mast Maintenance," "A Different Tack: Home-Schooling on a Boat" and "Installing a Powerful Belowdecks Autopilot." Many of the articles on this website can be read for free by anyone, while others require membership.

Ocean Navigator Online paid membership costs only \$5 per year. Members get online access to all current and back-issue articles from *Ocean Navigator*, *Ocean Voyager*, and *American Yacht Review*. Members also get access to a database of past ar-

ticles from six topical e-mail newsletters on Weather, Communications, Offshore Safety and Medicine, Engines and Systems, Marine Electronics, and Rules of the Road.

Redwings Round the World <www.sailredwings.com> is the story of the voyage of *Redwings*, a Formosa 46, and her crew. *Redwings* left Hong Kong in November 1997. She arrived in Camden, Maine on July 3, 2001. You can access the Ship's Log at <www.sailredwings.com/shipslog.htm>. Entries begin with "Preparing to Leave Hong Kong" and continue with such entries as "Exploring the Maldives," "Arabian Nights — Oman and Yemen," "Cruising the Turquoise Coasts of Turkey" and "Atlantic Crossing."

Before reading the Ship's Log, however, you should look at "The Plan" <www.sailredwings.com/plan.htm>, which has a section called "How It All Started." "Yacht wins out over job after bad day in the office" explains the decision to do it now rather than waiting another year. "The actual refit: welcome to the real world of yacht ownership" will bring tears to your eyes, tears of laughter (since it's not you going through this experience this time) and tears of commiseration (since we're all fundamentally compassionate human beings).

Pangaea's Wandering Website <www.pangaea.to> documents the travels of a 40-foot steel ketch. Liveaboards Erika and Achim follow a "technomadic" lifestyle (their term). Achim, an engineer by training, works on hardware and software projects. Erika is a Web designer who has designed websites for clients in the United States, the Galapagos and Jamaica.

Erika designed and does the writing for the website. Her writing is refreshing, chatty without being cutesy. You feel like you're sitting and talking with her. "Erika's Sailing Philosophy" <www.bluewater.de/philosophy.htm> is a good read.

Pangaea's Atlantic Adventures <www.pangaea.to/adventrs.htm> begins in 1994 with the Atlantic crossing and ends in December 1997 in Boca Raton, Florida. Pangaea's Pacific Passages <www.pangaea.to/pacpass/index.htm> begins in Florida in 1998 and continues through the Panama Canal to Polynesia.

Erika and Achim, who now have two children, are currently in Hawaii. Here's a link to a link to an article Erika wrote from Hawaii for *Newsweek* magazine <www.pangaea.to/tonisept99.htm> on how the Internet makes their "technomadic" lifestyle possible.

Disclaimer: The Internet is a dynamic place. Sites come and go. They can change URLs or disappear completely. These sites are all live when a column is completed, usually 45 to 60 days before publication. Please e-mail me at <john@johncallahan.us> if you have difficulty accessing any of the sites mentioned in this column.

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