Tasty morsels

Tim Nott reveals his sources and serves up some choice cuts of information about .CAB files, MS Knowledge Base and the Recycle Bin.

Roger Castle-Smith, of Milton Keynes wrote me a very long letter showing that there is, after all, something to do there in the evenings, if only write to *PCW!*

One point he raised is that he "rather suspects that I might have access to useful sources of information which are not available to us lesser morsels!" Unless this is a clever pun about bytes that has gone over my head, I presume he means "mortals", but I rather like "morsels" so I'll pinch it.

Journalists have a traditional obligation to protect their sources but I'm happy to come clean on mine. First, there's the stuff that all we morsels have, if we possess the Windows 95 CD-ROM. The resource kit help file (Win95rk.hlp) is mainly geared towards system administrators, with whole sections on topics such as Deployment Planning Basics, but there's a great deal of information on Windows architecture and the finer technical points.

At the risk of stating the obvious, you should also find 17 text files installed in your Windows folder. These cover everything from mice to memory managers, and there's an especially fine file called Tips.txt — so now you know where I get them from. If, by chance, these files aren't installed on your PC, you can find them on disk three of the floppy set or win95_03.cab on the CD.

Call me a cab

This gives me a good excuse to go off on a tangent. What is a CAB file and how do you get things out of it? Cabinet (.CAB) files are simply a bunch of other files compressed into a single entity, rather like a ZIP. They are stored on the CD-ROM or floppy disks. If you got Windows pre-installed on a PC

with no disks, the dealer should have copied the CABs to the hard disk. Just to complicate matters, the floppies are in Distribution Media Format (DMF), which means they can hold more than the standard 1.44 Mb, and they can't be copied by normal means. Each floppy may contain one or more .CAB files and others. And .CAB files can be split across floppies.

The easiest way to see the contents of a Cabinet and to extract files from them, is to use the Cabview utility that comes with Powertoys. With this installed you can right-click on a .CAB file, view and extract the contents as if it were a normal folder. For those who don't have Powertoys, or prefer the standing-up-in-a-hammock way of life, there should be a tool named EXTRACT.EXE in the Windows\ -Command folder. If not, it's on disk one, or in the CD-ROM Win95 folder and can be copied normally. It's a DOS application and if you run it without any parameters you'll get instructions. I will draw your attention to a couple of rather cool features.

If you know the name of the file you want but not which .CAB it's in, the /A switch will search the .CABs starting with that specified. This works on floppies, too, and you are prompted to insert disks until the file is found. The

/D switch, with a .CAB but no file specified, will list the contents of the Cabinet.

You can also use the /D switch with the /A switch to find but not extract a file. There's a catch here, as even after it's found the file it searches the rest of the CABs so the "hit" can scroll out of the DOS box as can the listing produced by /D alone. There's no switch to page the results and the old tricks of redirecting the results to MORE.COM, or sending them to a file don't seem to work. (*See the first tip in the panel on page 262 for a partial work-around*).

Anyway, let's get back to sources of information. There are many online sources of information and discussion. I have little to do with most of them as there aren't enough hours in the day. The one notable exception is the Windows_95 conference on CIX which, besides being a great place for gossip and argument, has some of the country's finest 32-bit minds poised to solve each other's problems. The sheer number of members means that even the most obscure problems are likely to find resonance. Someone there will have BTDTGTTS (been there, done that and got the T-shirt). For simpler problem solving, don't overlook the obvious. The first resort is on the Start Menu. Select Help and check out the Troubleshooting sections.

Sound advice

The one big "morsel" that I do get is Microsoft Technet. This is a subscription-only monthly issue of three (or four) CDs containing everything you could conceivably want to know about Microsoft and its

products, including Bill Gates' syndicated press homilies to the world at large.

The gold standard, however, is the Microsoft Knowledge Base, which is full of problem reports, tips and general answers to one's prayers. And it's all searchable. For example (to go off on yet another tangent), I received an email message a few minutes ago from Nicholas Hill.

He wrote: *"I have no soundcard in my PC (and I don't really want one) but the inbuilt speaker doesn't feature either. The sound options in Control Panel are greyed out and there doesn't seem to be any speaker driver on the CD. Am I missing out on something?"*

Bunging this month's Technet CD in the drive, I ran a search for "speaker" and "Windows 95". Soon, I was able to reply that a speaker driver isn't included with Windows 95 but that the file SPEAK.EXE is available from Microsoft's web site.
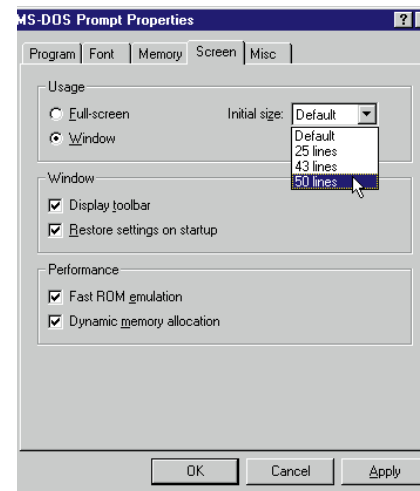
Before you all rush off looking for it, it's the same as the Windows 3.1 speaker driver and has been around since 1992. It's on our cover-mounted CD this month (see *Hands On Windows 3.1* for details). Returning from the tangent, the Technet subscription price is £249 per year but lesser morsels can search the MS Knowledgebase online. Go to www.microsoft.com and click on "Support".

Raising the dead

Roger Castle-Smith had a lot of useful advice on the Recycle Bin and deleting files, most of which we covered in last month's column, written before I received his letter. He did reveal some interesting problems about undeleting — a subject about which I was flippant.

As I stated last month, the DOS or File Manager delete commands bypass the bin, as does Shift + Delete. To recover a file deleted in this way, you first need to make sure you have the necessary tools, as the MS-DOS "Undelete" command is not installed by default.

If you've got the CD-ROM of Windows 95, then go to the OTHER\OLDMSDOS folder. Although you can copy the files piecemeal, there's a batch file (INTSUPP.BAT) that does it for you. Run this from a DOS prompt, or the Start button "Run…" command. If you don't want the files installed to the default destinations of C:\WINDOWs and C:\WINDOWS\ COMMAND, type the preferred path after INTSUPP.BAT. This will restore all your old

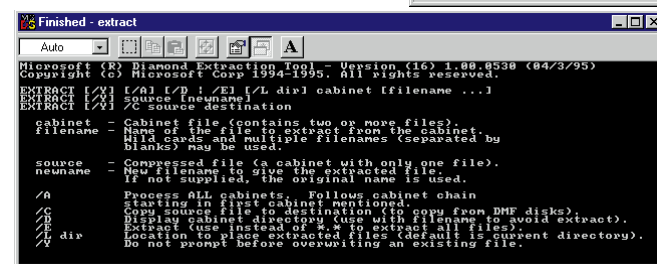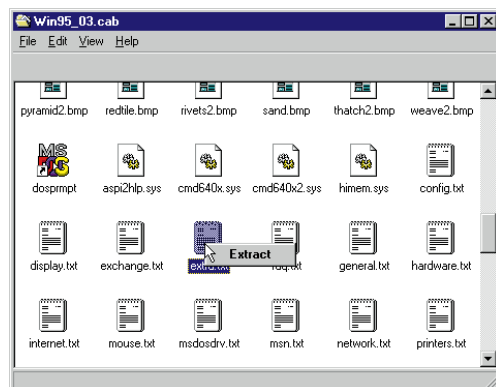**Take 50 lines and get more into a DOS box**

favourites such as MEMMAKER.EXE, QBASIC.EXE and, more germane to the subject in hand, UNDELETE.EXE. Restart your computer as instructed.

Ideally, you should do all this before the need arises, then you won't risk overwriting the files you wanted to undelete. Lesser "morsels" who don't have the CD can get the files from www.microsoft.com/windows /software/cdextras.htm.

To undelete a file, first restart the computer in MS-DOS mode. Change to the directory from whence the files were deleted and type LOCK x: (where x: is the relevant drive). This, logically enough, unlocks the drive so you can then run UNDELETE. You can then tap through the list of deleted files and see if, by some remote chance, the file you want is available for undeletion.

Sod's law prevails here, so you'll probably find that whereas the files you deleted weeks ago are still available, the "starting cluster" of the file you want has already been overwritten when Windows shuts down. When you have finished, type UNLOCK to lock the drive again, and restart the PC.

If the file was deleted from the Recycle Bin, then you have a whole load more problems. For a start, you need to go to the "Recycled" directory on the relevant drive — the Windows Recycle Bin doesn't exist as a DOS entity. As Roger points out, the DOS names for files in the Recycle Bin don't correspond to the originals. If you use the DIR command, or File Manager in the "Recycled" directory, you'll see a list of names in the format DCnn.EXT, where nn is a number and .EXT the original extension. And these DC… filenames are what you'll

(Above) It looks like a normal folder but it's Cabview excavating a .CAB file the easy way…

(Left) …and for those who prefer the hard way: Extract.exe

moves the insertion point, just as left-clicking does. Hence, the selection is lost and there is nothing to copy or cut. Right-click inside the selection (note that the margins alongside more than one line, count as inside) and the "Copy" and "Cut" commands remain available. To complicate matters, if you hold down the right button, you get the drag-and-drop cursor, exactly as you do with the right button, so keep the click short and sweet.

Quote, unquote

Another mystery is when long file names stop working properly. I've noticed this with Word (the suspected culprit was a macro virus detector) but it can happen with other applications as well. What I mean is that if you double-click on a file (or shortcut) called, say, C:\MYFILES\PERSONAL\ LETTER TO MY AUNT.DOC you get an error message that Word cannot open C:\MYFILES\PERSONAL\LETTER.

There's a Help button which offers some totally irrelevant advice and an "OK" button. Click the latter and you'll get a similar error message, this time referring to C:\MYFILES\PERSONAL\TO.DOC. OK this and the message repeats for "MY" and "AUNT". Then, just to be really perverse, the file usually opens. If you have long folder names as well, it will extend the barfing process through these.

The explanation for this is the way in which Windows 95 and DOS handle long file names. DOS doesn't like spaces: it treats them as delimiters. The cure is to go to "View/Options/File Types" and scroll to the offending entry. Click "Edit", select "Open" from the list of actions and click "Edit" once more. Under "Application used to perform action", you'll generally see something like C:\WHATEVER\WHATEVER. EXE %1. The %1 is rather like a batch file parameter: it passes the filename to the application. If you enclose this bit in double quotes so the line reads C:\WHATEVER\ -WHATEVER.EXE "%1", the entire filename will be passed along instead of "breaking" at the spaces. Note that in DDE-aware applications (like Word or Excel), the "Use DDE" box will be ticked and the %1 will appear in the "DDE Message" box, but the same double-quote technique applies.

Take five tips

1. DOS boxes
You can get more lines in a DOS box by going to "Properties" in the System (top left icon) menu, or the button that looks like a hand holding a document. Switch to the "Screen" tab and choose the number of lines from the "Initial size" box. Windows will save this setting and use it next time the DOS application is run.

2. Copying files
Oh for the days of File Manager when you could copy and rename at the same time by pressing F8 — highly useful for making a backup, in the same folder, of a file you're about to tamper with. After having fought the system for months I discovered Windows 95 does just this, but even more easily. If you right-drag, right-button copy then paste, or select Control C, Control V, you'll end up with "Original.ext" and "Copy of Original.ext". Additional pastes will give you "Copy (2)…", "Copy (3)…" and so on.
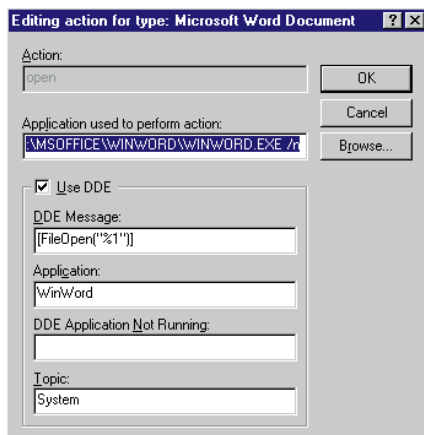
3. More pasting
You can paste complex commands, say from a help file, straight into the Run command. You can also drop files into the Run… box. This can save a lot of typing. For example, if you want to compare two files with the DOS FC command, type FC in the Run… box then drag and drop in each of the two files. The entire path name appears as if by magic, suitably enclosed in quotes if it's a long file name.

4. Policy Editor
If you found (*Hands On Windows 95*, September) that clicking on the book symbols does nothing, make sure that you're using the right template. This should be ADMIN.ADM in Windows/Inf. You'll find the original in the same folder on the CD as POLEDIT.EXE. You can set the template from the Poledit Options Menu.

5. Tip of the day
For an instant "tip of the day" fix, stick a shortcut to Welcome.exe on your desktop.

The quotes stop Windows choking on filenames with spaces

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you're looking for. Even then your troubles aren't over. When the file is restored (*hint: use some letter other than "D" at the "first letter" prompt*), it won't miraculously appear back in the Bin. Oh no, that would be too easy. You'll have to find it from DOS or File Manager, and copy it somewhere else. Really the whole business doesn't bear thinking about, but if you're really desperate, I hope this helps.

Lost copy

Back to Roger, who seems to have taken over this column and earned himself a book token to help while away those long, Milton Keynsian evenings. He also asks why Microsoft Works (and Word, for that matter) have seemingly unusable "Copy" and "Cut" commands on the right-click menu.

With Notepad or WordPad, if you highlight some text and then right-click anywhere in the window, you get the Copy and Cut options. With Word and Works the selection disappears and the options are greyed-out. The answer is that it's not impossible to copy the selection, it's just one of those loveable Microsoft inconsistencies.

In Word (I'll confess I haven't tried this in the Works word-processor but I imagine it's similar) right-clicking outside the selection

see from the Undelete command. You can get some clue from the file size, date and extension but there will usually be many deleted files thrown up by undelete.

However, if you've only just deleted a file from the bin without emptying it completely there may be some further, rather slender, hope. Start File Manager (WINFILE from the Run… command) and make sure that "View hidden/system files" is checked in the "View/By file type" options. Open the "Recycled" directory and you should see a file named "Info". Drag this into Notepad and you'll see the original filenames, listed in order of the numbers. Using inspired guesswork, you should be able to correlate the missing number with the missing filename. Then you can do the whole restart in MS-DOS mode, lock, undelete, unlock rigmarole and have some idea of what

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