



Weird and Windowful

Tim Nott turns agony uncle to tackle a strange DOS problem, smartdrive and vanishing Windows worries. There are ten top tricks to teach an old dog, plus two treats on our CD.

Norman Burnell wrote from Cheshire with one of the weirdest problems I've heard for a long time. Something had gone wrong with a DOS game (so, nothing new there) on a friend's PC. Using Dosshell revealed a path which went:

`C:\games\games\games\games\games\games\...`

and so on, until Dosshell ran out of memory some 6,000 directories later. Moving to Windows File Manager, it got stranger still: the contents of C:\games\ were a replica of the contents of C:\ as were the contents of C:\games\games\, C:\games\games\games\ and so on. Another directory (C:\mp2\) behaved in the same bizarre, recursive, fashion.

Norman tried deleting some of the surplus directories. *"Too late I realised that ample disk space indicated the number of files was not a problem and it was the directory structure that was haywire. I had already cautiously (or so I thought) tried deleting one of the sub games directories, only to find that these apparent duplications were the real thing, hence DOS and Windows were among those that were no more."*

The vital clue that he'd missed wasn't what was going *wrong*, but what was going *right*. If Windows was still loading, then the damage couldn't have been too severe. I searched the Microsoft Knowledge base for similar reports but unsuccessfully. I can only guess that there was an error in the disk directory structure which was responsible for the problem. Scandisk (or Chkdsk in earlier versions of MS-DOS) should be able to fix this automatically. It's certainly worth a try before deleting the lot and reinstalling. As to how it happened, I have no idea, but

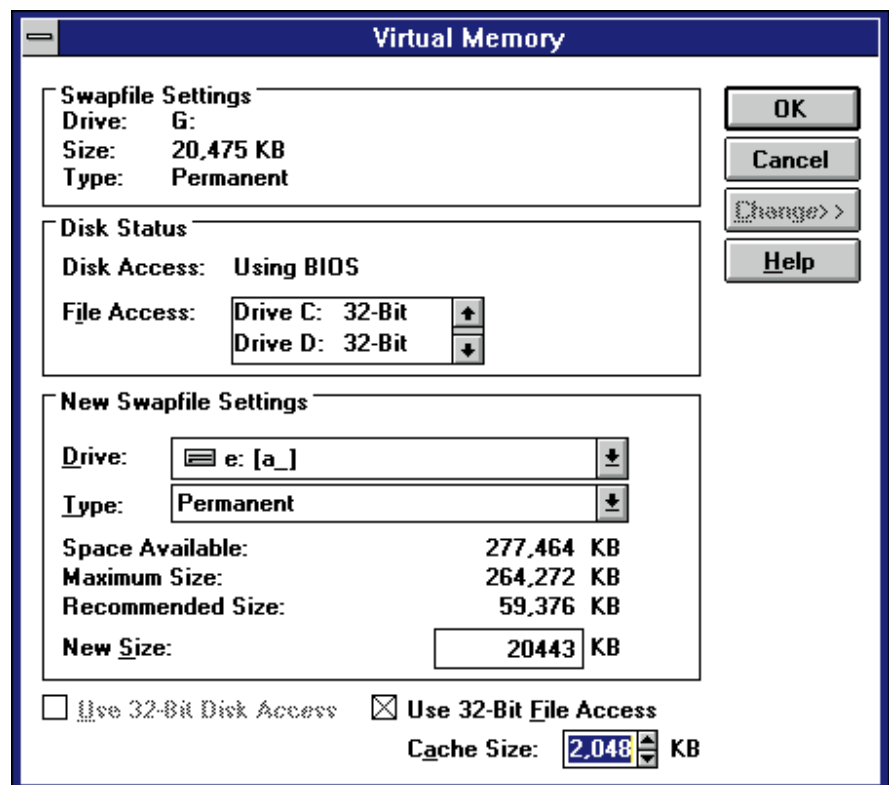


Fig 1 You need to set up Windows 3.11 32-bit file access from Control Panel. It isn't automatic

as ever in the mysterious happenings stakes, checking with an up-to-date virus detector is always a good idea.

Get smart...

Roger Caton, of Bradford, writes: *"I have Windows for Workgroups 3.11 installed, I've enabled 32-bit file access and I'm told that I no longer need Smartdrive. However, the line C:\WINDOWS\SMARTDRV.EXE 2048 128 still appears in my AUTOEXEC.BAT file. Has Windows fouled up?"*

Roger is right, but so is Windows. To explain briefly, Smartdrive is a disk cache.

That is, an area of memory that acts as a holding area for disk data. If it thinks the same data is likely to be read again, it stores it. Memory access is much faster than disk access, so performance is enhanced. Similarly, disk writes are held in the cache until it is "flushed" and all outstanding data written to disk. With Windows 3.11 came 32-bit file access and VCACHE (Fig 1), which replaces (and outperforms) Smartdrive when Windows is running.

The line in Roger's AUTOEXEC.BAT contains two numbers. The first is the size (in kilobytes) of the cache under DOS. If you

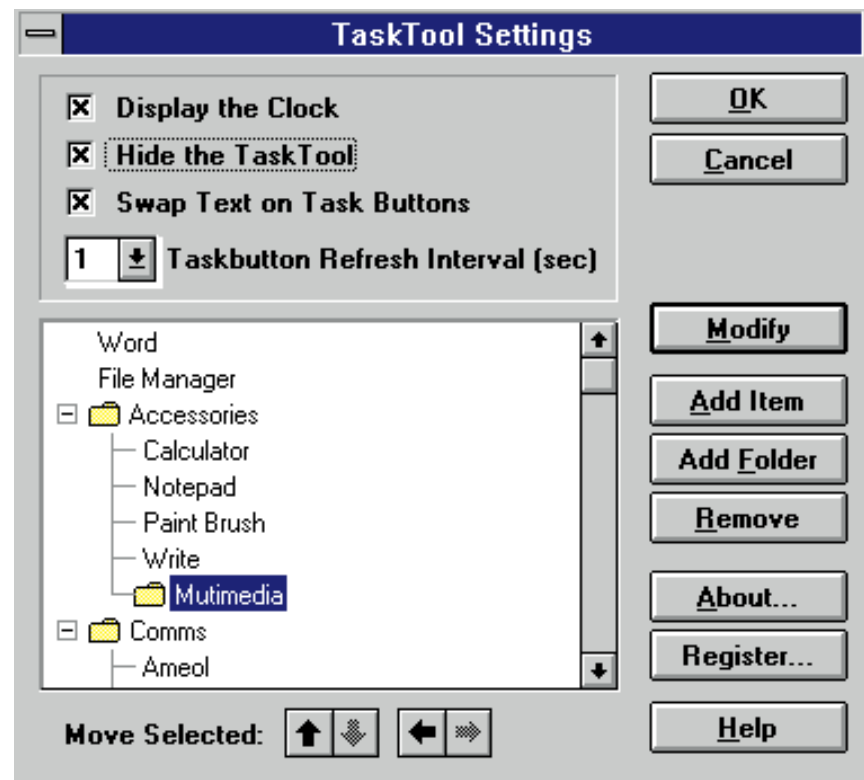


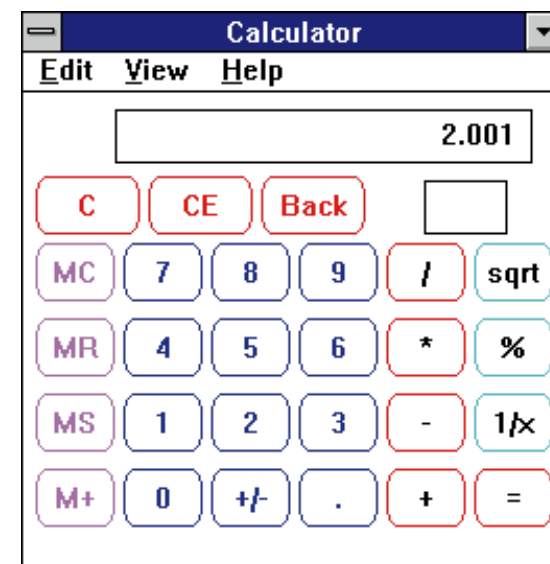
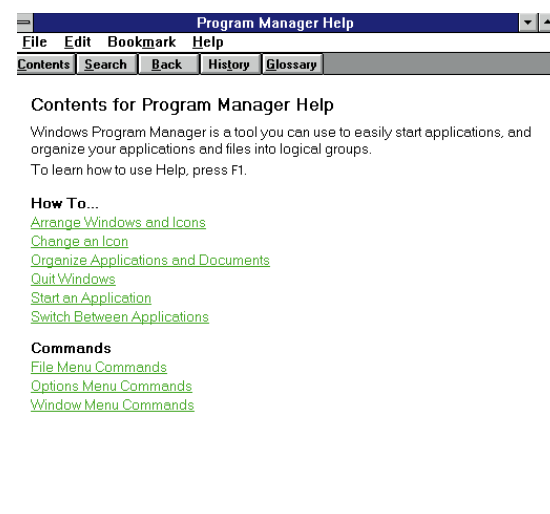
Fig 2 (above) Setting up TaskTool's cascading start menus — just like Windows 95

Fig 3 (right) Default values for positioning the Help screen are defined in the Win.ini file

Fig 4 (below, right) Various bugs on the Windows 3.x calculator have been fixed. Check out our cover CD for the new version

use any DOS applications, especially disk-intensive items such as databases, you still need this. The second figure shows the size of the cache under Windows, in this case a modest 128Kb. So why have it at all? The answer is that VCACHE doesn't work on floppy drives or CD-ROMs, so you'll find that even with this small cache, floppy access is much improved. Note that in order to cache CD-ROMs, the MSCDEX.EXE entry should appear before the SMARTDRV.EXE entry.

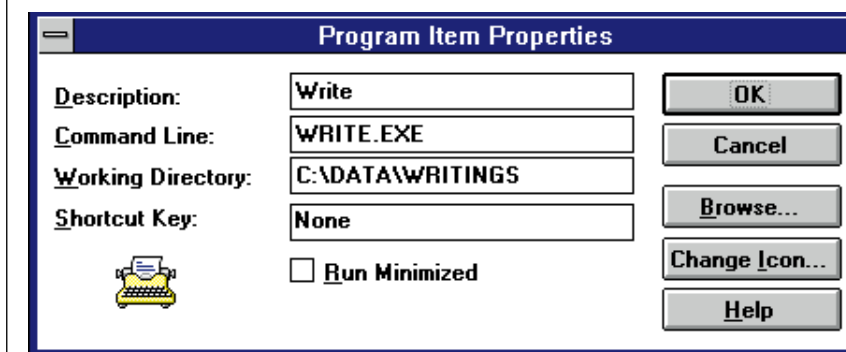
Where are they now? part II
Further to last month's "DIY" session on how to find missing bits of Windows,



Ten Program Manager tips

Despite the alternatives, the old dog can still get up to a few tricks. Here is my top ten, collected from various *Hands On Windows* columns over the last three years.

1. You can change the starting directory of programs. For example if you store Write documents in C:\data\writings, select the Write icon, go to File/Properties... (or press Alt+Enter) and enter this path in the Working Directory box. When you Open or Save As... you'll be in the target directory without having to traipse up and down the tree.
2. Further to the above tip, you can have multiple entries for the same program pointing to different working directories.
3. Icons use Resources — don't try to install more than 40 items per group and keep as few groups open as possible.
4. A related problem is that in 16-bit or 24-bit colour the limit decreases drastically. You'll get "out of memory" errors and solid black squares instead of icons.
5. For keyboard fans, Control + Tab switches between groups, Enter restores a minimised group or launches an item and the arrow keys move between items.
6. You don't have to use the icon that comes with the program. Hit the Change Icon button in File Properties and browse through .EXE and .DLL files. There's a good range of spares in Progman.exe and some tailor-made for DOS programs in Moricons.dll.
7. You can drag files from File Manager and drop them into Program Manager to create icons for programs or associated files.
8. If you've tidied up Program Manager and want to keep it that way, press Alt + Shift + F4 to save the current settings. Turn off "Options/Save settings on exit" to stop this being overwritten when you close down.
9. You can change the horizontal spacing between icons from Control Panel/Desktop, but to change the vertical spacing you need to add IconVerticalSpacing=nn to the [Desktop] section of WIN.INI, where nn is the number of pixels. Setting this to 50 gives room for just one line of text...
10. ...so from File/Properties..., edit the Description of long-winded programs such as *The Universal Widget for Windows version 3.3* to something more succinct.



You can start a program in any directory you choose and change the icon

another component prone to doing a vanishing act is Windows Help (Fig 3) and this is usually because it has been moved off-screen.

The quick and ruthless approach is to open WIN.INI and delete the [Windows Help] section entirely. It will be rebuilt with sensible default values next time you start up Windows. However, if you really want to show off, the entry M_WindowPosition, followed by five figures gives the distance in pixels from screen left to window left, screen top to window top, width, height and a final 0 or 1 to signify windowed or

maximised. The copy, history and annotation windows have similar entries, starting with C, H and A.

A dodgy takeaway

As has been reported to this column, the Windows 3.x calculator is broken for all values of x. One, purely cosmetic, bug is that zeroes to the right of the decimal point don't appear in real time. Try entering 5.0005 and you'll see what I mean. Nothing appears after 5.0 until the final digit has been typed. A rather more serious problem is that it doesn't subtract very well: for

example, try 2.01 minus 2.

The good news is that (after four years) it has been fixed (Fig 4) although I don't believe the fixed version ever made it to the Windows installation disks. Anyway, you can find it on our cover-mounted CD-ROM, this month. Newcalc.exe is a self-extracting file containing the fixed calc.exe a swell as a readme file.

Called to the bar

From something old to something new. Well, new to Windows 3.x users anyway. Another utility on our CD-ROM this month is TaskTool (Fig 2). Copy Ttool21.exe to a temporary directory and run it to install. It consists of a bar that sits at the bottom of the screen, containing buttons for each application running, a button to launch applications from a cascading menu, and a clock. If all that sounds familiar, yes, it's almost exactly like the Win95 Taskbar.

There's some nice attention to detail. Click on the clock button and the date pops up, the bar can be set to hide itself, reappearing when you move the mouse to the bottom of the screen and there's even an option to reverse the text on the buttons, so you see "Mydoc.wri - Write" instead of the other way around. This is especially useful when you have lots of windows open and the full title is too long for the button. You can tell the application from its leading icon, so its name isn't essential. Unlike Windows 95, this works with Microsoft Office. There's a Run command on the launcher menu, which, like its 95 counterpart, remembers a list of the most recently run commands. The launch button itself is titled Task Tool rather than Start, but works in a similar way — you can group programs into folders, rather like Program Manager groups except that they can be nested. About the only Windows 95 lookalike features you don't get is shortcuts to folders and the recent documents list.

The only faults I could find with it were that it caused a phantom bar to appear halfway up the screen (which went away when windows were resized), would only show the date in US mm/dd format and incorrectly reported the title of its own help file on the buttons. The version on the CD is a 30-day trial and registration is \$19.95.

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