

## Unknown history of cyberspace

*The following stories are but a small few that tell of the origins of community networking in Australasia via Pegasus.*

### **John Seed and origins of Pegasus**

Since 1979, John Seed, often described as a "man of trees", has devoted his life to the preservation of rainforests the world over. He was introduced to electronic messaging sometime in the mid 80s by Jim Barnes. A long-time environmentalist from Washington DC, Jim had been on the board of Greenpeace, had initiated the Antarctica campaign and later was one of the instigators of the campaign to reform the lending policies of the World Bank and other Multilateral Development Banks (MBD).

Initially, they hooked up via a network called EcoNet in the USA, through which they were able to contact other rainforest groups around the world. One problem they had was cost. All messages had to go via the EcoNet computer in San Francisco. Though more expensive than fax, they still found that it was sometimes worthwhile to send messages from say Canberra to Lismore via San Francisco. This ensured that they had their material on disc in Lismore rather than on paper and didn't need to key it in again before being able to work with it.

Nevertheless, they were dealing with costs which were beyond the means of average environmental groups and which severely restricted their activities. So it was a great day for them in September 1989 when Pegasus opened up their doors in Australia and their messages only had to go via Byron Bay (New South Wales). Suddenly email became less expensive than postage stamps for sending messages both locally and internationally. Within Australia, messages were transmitted instantaneously. Overseas, messages were compressed and every few hours sent to San Francisco, London and many other places. Thus began progressive networking in Australia.

### **The Papua New Guinea Campaign of 1990**

Early 1990 saw John Seed and his colleagues focusing a lot of attention on the rainforests of Papua New Guinea (PNG). These are the largest remaining intact in the whole of the SE Asia/Pacific region, as accessible rainforests become scarce in Sarawak, Indonesia and the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan and Korea. Now, Australian loggers are roaming PNG in increasing numbers.

During this period, the Rainforest movement used Pegasus in the PNG rainforest campaign... with great success! Tos Barnett, Chief Justice of the PNG Supreme Court named many companies and individuals in the comprehensive report he released following his inquiry into corruption in the logging industry in PNG. However, some two years after being tabled in parliament, the report was unobtainable in PNG and the then Minister for Forests, Robert Stack retained his portfolio and the same companies continued to ply their vicious trade.

Barnett was knifed to within an inch of his life by unknown assailants outside his Port Moresby home, who then neglected to rob him. In 1990 the Rainforest Information Centre and the Asia Pacific Action Group (APAG) published a summary of Barnett's voluminous findings (with a foreword by Barnett attesting its accuracy) in both English and Tok Pisin (PNG pidgin English) and distributed these widely through PNG.

Using email, George Marshall (working from London), Lafcadio Cortesi (San Francisco) and 6 or 8 others (including several groups in PNG, jointly wrote and raised finance for full -page ads in PNG newspapers. Headlined "WHY MISTER STACK?" and signed by a dozen PNG environment and development groups, the ads resulted in Stack losing his portfolio 3 days after publication and deputy Prime Minister of PNG Ted Diro being suspended a few weeks later.

### **APC Aids Australian Chaelundi Campaign**

Mid-1991, public interest environmental lawyers in Australia won a stunning court battle to protect old growth forests in Australia. At the same time, they proved the value of a new alliance that the world's environmental lawyers had then just created. The following article from John Bonine of the

Environmental Law Association explains how interaction over the APC aided the Chaelundi campaign in Australia.

Australian lawyers, working in conjunction with the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (E-LAW), obtained a ruling that logging on publicly owned lands in the habitat of the "sooty owl" and 22 other species would be a criminal offence. Pivotal evidence was provided by North American experts, whose work on the northern spotted owl has led to similar court victories in the U.S. in recent years. Legal precedents from the U.S. spotted owl litigation were also crucial in the decision of the Australian Land and Environment Court. Government officials Australia were unhappy with the court decision, but called it a "landmark" ruling. One newspaper reported that in the logging industry there was "nothing but woe." Australian environmental groups quickly placed the court's action with the most significant victories ever achieved. They said it was equal to those that previously stopped the Franklin Dam in Tasmanian rainforests and that led to World Heritage Site designation by the United Nations in several Australian forests. They said that their lawsuit actually supported the National Parks and Wildlife Service of New South Wales, which had recommended that "wildlife hotspots" be protected against logging and a national park created.

A key to the legal and environmental victory was a new organisation on the international legal scene, the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (E-LAW). The United States E-LAW opened its doors in March 1991, and the Australian E-LAW did so in June. Other countries that have established E-LAW projects include Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, and Peru. E-LAW U.S. is now providing critical legal help also to lawyers in Japan, Uruguay, Chile, Panama, Nicaragua, and Russia. E-LAW is an outgrowth of informal work between environmental lawyers over nearly four years.

Lawyers and other staff at E-LAW offices use[d] a combination of fax machines, instant electronic mail through satellites, and package delivery services to speed needed legal and scientific research to local public interest lawyers in the eight original countries, plus new ones that are now being assisted. In the Australian sooty owl case, the U.S. office, which serves as the worldwide secretariat for the network of environmental lawyers, had to meet a court deadline of less than 24 hours to come up with new evidence.

Tim Robertson, a barrister in Sydney, had brought suit before the Land and Environment Court of New South Wales. The case charged that logging in the Chaelundi State Forest would jeopardize the biological diversity of the area and the habitat of 23 endangered or protected species, including the sooty owl at the top of the food chain. But Robertson realized there was a missing link: he needed a scientific expert to state that habitat destruction would in fact lead to a decline in the species. On 13 August, Robertson contacted E-LAW's Australian office seeking help. They referred him to E-LAW U.S. and sent an urgent message by fax and electronic mail. The barrister was scheduled to present his argument in just a week, and had to provide his evidence within 24 hours.

Robertson asked the U.S. office about litigation over a species (the spotted owl) in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. The office manager of E-LAW U.S., Lori Maddox, sprang into action. She knew that E-LAW U.S. Board member Michael Axline had handled much of the spotted owl litigation in concert with the Seattle office of the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund. Although E-LAW U.S.'s lawyers and staff scientist were travelling in Russia and Indonesia, she called that office with the urgent request. Could they locate the needed expert? Soon the Australian barrister was in contact with a nationally recognized U.S. expert on endangered species who also has been the leading expert in the U.S. spotted owl cases. The American expert had even travelled to Australia and studied the sooty owl. His testimony was rushed to the environmental lawyers in Sydney who offered it in the court, along with legal precedents under U.S. law that had held wildlife were illegally "taken" or "killed" if their essential forest habitat was destroyed.

On 25 September, the Land and Environment Court declared that the logging of part of Chaelundi State Forest would be in breach of the prohibition in the National Parks and Wildlife Act on taking or killing endangered species. The court said it was irrelevant that the harm was not inflicted directly or that the loggers had no bad intentions toward the wildlife. What was crucial, it ruled, was the risk of harm. Justice Paul Stein noted the "extraordinary wildlife values" of the State Forest, the "high species diversity," and the presence of "numerous significant species." He called the area a "veritable forest-dependent zoo, probably unparalleled in southeastern Australia." Justice Stein said that the evidence

was "overwhelming" that the unique wildlife values would be "destroyed" by fragmentation of the forest due to logging. He said the logging would, even assuming great skill and care, "spell the death knell of the 'truly exceptional' wildlife values" of the forest. As a consequence, he said that the National Parks and Wildlife Act would be violated if logging proceeded. All parties agree that the significance of the court decision extends far beyond just the State Forest in issue.

### **Planning International Actions**

In 1982 the Danish rainforest Action Group, Nepenthes, wrote to John Seed and the Rainforest Information Centre in Australia. They said that they were planning to chain themselves in front of the Indonesian Embassy in Copenhagen to protest that country's destruction of rainforests through their trans-migration program and inviting them to do the same in Canberra. John and his colleagues agreed and then networked the idea around several different countries. As far as John can recall, this was to be the first international action in defence of the rainforests. Airmail letters went back and forth and it took more than seven months to coordinate and organise the actions that took place simultaneously in at least 6 countries. Now, using the APC, such actions are organised in weeks or even days.

### **Email Coming in From the Cold - Casey Station – Antarctica**

In October 1992, Shaun Johnson emailed Pegasus Networks, thanking them for establishing email contact between Casey Station, Antarctica, and the Wilderness Society in Australia. Shaun described the living and working conditions at the Station and how their use of email sustained their spirits during the harshest of winters.

Casey Station is built on a rocky outcrop surrounding Newcomb Bay, on Wilkes Coast (Lat 66.17S Long 110.32E) greater Antarctica. It is one of three permanent Australian Antarctic stations.

Casey's accommodation building, the Red Shed, houses a doctor's surgery, darkroom, kitchen, dining room, movie theatre, library, bar, living room, pool table, video room, over thirty bedrooms and over twenty bathrooms. The walls are 1/2 a metre thick, have triple glazed windows and are climate controlled to a balmy +15 deg C. According to Shaun, working outside in -20 or so degrees Celsius is not at all unpleasant. It is, however, when a wind decides to start blowing. At -24 with a 41-knot (approx 80 km/h) wind the chill factor decreases to -58 deg C.

Antarctica boasts the cleanest air in the world, unfortunately also the coldest! Daily temperatures from Vostok (the coldest place on the planet) reminded the Casey community just how warm it was there!

Nineteen people worked at Casey until early November when the resupply ship, Icebird, brought the summer crew in. The usual crew consisted of two scientists, one who had been gathering and analysing upper atmosphere data as part of an Auroral and Space Physics program and the other collected snow algae, moss and lichen (the only plant life in Antarctica) for analysis both there and in Australia. Their medical doctor was also conducting a research project in conjunction with NASA. The rest of the crew were support staff.

Shaun described the wildlife during summer, the weather during winter, the camaraderie amongst the men and women at Casey and the camaraderie and spirit of International cooperation between other stations, as all second to none. "Around 800 people from a great many countries spend winter on the ice, the spirit and mateship which is shown is a lesson that the 'real world' would do well to adopt."

This spirit was served well by communications. From Casey, Shaun could send email directly to the crew at the South Pole (with whom they played darts over the radio quite often), the crews at McMurdo, Mawson, Macquarie Island, Davis, Farady (UK) and Scott (NZ). He could email members of his family in Fiji, Tasmania and friends in England. He also had email access via Pegasus with his girlfriend in Tasmania. He would also send image files to the South Pole and back to their headquarters in Hobart. Their UV data was transmitted to Melbourne, data from Auroral and Space Physics experiments, seismic information, access to the World Meteorological Organisations weather network and satellite pictures and their newspaper were all processed via computer networks.

The research conducted at Casey gave Shaun and his colleagues an "additional insight into the interconnectedness of the global environment, a view that most of us appreciate as an unique

privilege.” Antarctica is no longer the most isolated continent in the world, “perhaps”, Shaun suggested, “it's even a much warmer place”.