Tim Berners-Lee

The WorldWideWeb browser

The first web browser - or browser-editor rather - was called *WorldWideWeb* as, after all, when it was written in 1990 it was the only way to see the web. Much later it was renamed Nexus in order to save confusion between the program and the abstract information space (which is now spelled *World Wide Web* with spaces).

I wrote the program using a NeXT computer. This had the advantage that there were some great tools available -it was a great computing environment in general. In fact, I could do in a couple of months what would take more like a year on other platforms, because on the NeXT, a lot of it was done for me already. There was an application builder to make all the menus as quickly as you could dream them up. there were all the software parts to make a wysiwyg (what you see is what you get - in other words direct manipulation of text on screen as on the printed - or browsed page) word processor. I just had to add hypertext, *(by subclassing the Text object)*

This is a (242kB) **screen shot of the browser**, taken when things had got to the point that *Communications of the ACM* was interested in an article, in 1993. The differences between this and the first edition (whimsically dated 901225 although I was **NOT** working on Christmas Day -- it was prepared some time before closed for Christmas) were:

- The whole thing would have been grey scale as NeXTs were at the time just grey scale;
- The inline images such as the world/book icon and the CERN icon, would have been displayed in separate windows, as it didn't at first do inline images.

See also:

- **another screen shot**, this one by JFG, later but grey scale

A quick tour of this screen to answer the FAQs:

In this shot I am making a link from the word "ATLAS" in the list of experiments to some web page.

The NeXTStep operating system put the menu for each application in the top left of the screen. The application is called WorldWideWeb. because the menus are in this block they windows are very unencumbered. A little like like the windows "start" menu later.

The Navigate menu had things like "back" and "next" and "previous". these last two were useful when you follows a link from a list of links- they meant "go back a step and then take the next link from the same page instead".

The document menu was like the "file" menu for windows I suppose. The "find" menu is fairly self-explanatory, as is "edit".

The "Link" menu you can see. "Mark all" would remember the URI of where you were. "MArk selection" would make an anchor (link target) for the selected text, give it an ID, and remember the URI of that fragment. "Link to Marked" would make a link from the current selection to whatever URI you had last marked. So making a link involved browsing to somewhere interesting, hitting Command/M, going to the document you were writing and selecting some text, and hitting Command/L. "Link to new" would create a new window, prompt for a URI (ugh - it should have made one up!) and make a link from the selection to the new document. You never saw the URIs - you could of course always find documents by following the link to them.

The "style" menu was interesting -- you could load a style sheet to define how you liked your documents rendered. You could also set the paragraph style to an HTML element's style - as lists didn't nest, the user could think of the process as styles (heading1, heading 2, list element, etc) and then this implied an HTML structure when the document was written back.

At the time, the "X" close box was unique to NeXT, before Windows copied it. The broken X in the "Tim's home page" window means that the document has been edited and not yet saved. (A "dirty" flag). As a convenience, pressing Command/Shift/S would save back all modified web pages.

WorldWideWeb was written in Objective-C. It would browse `http:` space and `news:` and `ftp:` spaces and local `file:` space, but edit only in `file:` space as HTTP PUT was not implemented back then.

Back to main Bio