Tree86: Mouse-Minded Hard Disk Organizer
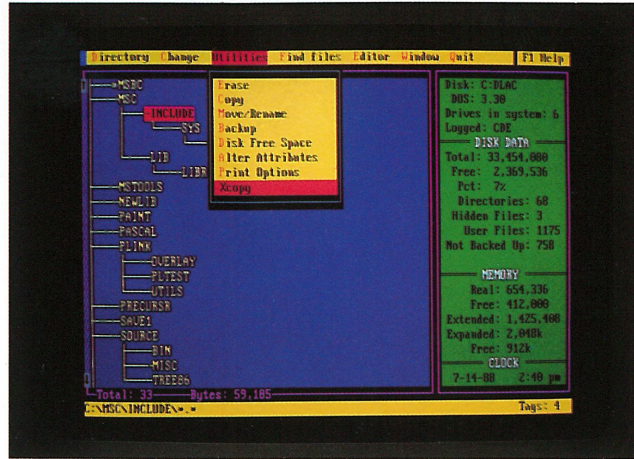
PC **HANDS ON**

BY EDWARD L. PERRATORE

It isn't easy to top *X-Tree Pro* for a good, sleek hard disk manager. But if you want to cut costs, give your mouse some exercise, and pick up a few more features, *Tree86*, Version 2.0, is worth the climb.

At $89, The Aldridge Co.'s *Tree86* first shows a graphic-tree display of subdirectories. Pull-down menus offer DOS commands plus a few additions.

You drag the mouse to undrape various menus and then click options. A mouse isn't mandatory, but mouse support is one of *Tree86*'s best selling points.

Tree86 helps you find files using up to four parameters. You can sort files by several criteria and then reverse the order. While pointing and shooting to copy, tag, and move files, you

Along with routine DOS functions, Tree86's Xcopy copies whole directories.

can also view chained files by using VIEW-86.EXE.

The Xcopy option copies files, directory structure and all, between drives. Hitting " / " toggles you into TreeDOS, a DOS-like environment with command-line editing and retrieval of previous commands.

There's more. The 140K RAM required to boot drops to as low as 80K when you run TreeDOS or a different program from *Tree86*. A configuration program enables you to set which drives to log upon entry into *Tree86*. Tree structures for each drive remain in RAM until you quit the program and can be stored on-disk for quicker log-

ging the next day.

Tree86 rates as a good buy. For $40 less than the market leader, you get all the leader's features and more. **PC**

PC **FACT FILE**

Tree86
Reviewed by Rodney Henderson

A Worthwhile DOS Shell

Tree86, Version 2.0
The Aldridge Company
2500 CityWest Blvd., Suite 575
Houston, TX 77042
(713) 953-1940
Requires: DOS 2.0 or later, 175K RAM, IBM PC or compatible.
Some functions require DOS version 3.0 or later. Also runs under
DOS 4.0. Will automatically use expanded memory (LIM
version 3 and above) if present.
Mouse optional.
List price: $89.95
Not copy protected.

Tree86 is a DOS shell. So is COMMAND.COM. Why would someone pay money for another shell?

Convenience. More features. Help screens. The list of reasons can, and does, go on. The only reason I initially tried Tree86 was to write this review. I have tried numerous shells without satisfaction. With the shells that I have tried, I was always looking at help screens for insight into their particular way of performing a function. In addition to fulfilling the basic functions of a shell, such as file management, directory maintenance, and so on, most of the shells I tried allowed me to run a program from within the shell.

But what about those programs that need switch settings or parameters input on the command line when the program is invoked? Simply high-lighting the program name from within the shell and then pressing [Enter] wasn't any help. The program I wanted to run would either terminate abnormally, or display a help screen giving the possible parameters. I could--and did--create batch files to act as a front end to those programs and pass the parameters to the actual program to be run.

I then ran into the problem of multiple batch files for different invocations of the same program. In one case, I had 27 different batch files that called the same program with different parameter settings depending on what I wanted to accomplish. With an 8-character file name, it's difficult to remember the parameter settings created by 27 batch files. I found myself spending more time editing batch files to figure out what they did than I spent actually using the batch files.

Next, I created a batch file that would ask for input after it started running, That solved the problem of multiple batch files. But in every case it still left me with an interface I didn't care for, and in most cases I thought that I was being asked to input more keystrokes than was necessary to perform file management functions.

So... I had forgotten about shells and was happily using the DOS command line when I called the Review Editor and volunteered to help out as a reviewer. Naturally, he sent a DOS shell: Tree86. How was I supposed to prepare a fair and unbiased review of a shell, when I've never found one that I liked?

Good...
*Tree86 is one of the easiest programs I have used. It has context-sensitive help screens that, in my case, mostly went unused. In the vast majority of cases I knew immediately--just by looking at the screen--what I needed to do next. When I did need a help screen, I always found a clear concise statement to help me on my way.

I found myself going into Tree86 every time I turned on my computer. And I could finally do something about those programs that need command line parameters. Pressing the [/] key will take you into TreeDOS, a command line environment for

those times when nothing else will suffice. When you are through, pressing [/] again takes you back to the tree structure of Tree86. So I now have the best of both worlds--command lines when necessary, and a tree structure for the majority of my work.

...and bad
When I was a command line jock, I had emphatically made my preference known. When people noticed that I was using a shell, I paid the price. But it was a small price to pay, and well worth it.

Features
The list of features in Tree86 goes on almost forever. The opening screen shows a representation of the tree structure of the logged disk along with the total disk space available, percent of disk space available, number of directories, number of files, total amount of conventional and expanded memory, and the amount of each available.

As you move through the tree, you see the number of files and bytes per subdirectory. You can log multiple drives, either automatically after running the configuration program, or on the command line when starting Tree86. You can point and shoot to move or copy files, even across drives. You can erase, rename and backup files either individually or by tagging them. Files can be tagged by pressing the space bar while the cursor is beside the file, tagging all files in the subdirectory or by defining a starting point and tagging (or untagging) all files in a range. You can also clear all tags, switch tags, and display only tagged files.

The directory maintenance is superb. You can make new directories; rename, delete, hide and unhide directories, and cut and paste directories. Using the directory cut and paste, I reorganized the directory structure on my hard disk in 20 minutes, instead of hours.

The program also allows you to sort the directory listings in many different ways--by name, extension, size, date, time, path, attributes or as they appear on disk. Sorts can be ascending or descending. I frequently sort the directories in reverse date and time order so that each directory displayed has the file most recently changed displayed first.

Tree86 will allow you to change the attributes of files. In addition, you can change one attribute in a group of files without disturbing any other attributes that may be set by performing a logical "and" or a logical "or" operation between the files and a mask. One good use for this is turning on the archive attribute so that a group of files will be included in a backup without changing the rest of the attributes that are set for the files.

Tree86 allows you to use your favorite editor to update files. You can input the editor program name in the Tree86 configuration program or create a file called EDITOR.BAT that calls the editor. Tree86 also has a full-featured view program. It has a full scroll capability, zoom mode, text search and mark, split screen, hex/ASCII toggle, wrap/unwrap for long lines, filters for high bits and control codes, ruler toggle and simultaneous multiple file viewing.

Tree86 will also print directory structures, file lists and file contents. Tree86 will use the features of PRINT.COM, if it has been loaded first.

As I mentioned earlier pressing [/] while in Tree86 brings up TreeDOS. This looks the same as the DOS command line but has several enhancements. Each command entered is added to the end of a command buffer, which holds 30 commands. The cursor arrow keys scroll forward and backward through this buffer to recall commands. Once a command has been recalled from the buffer or typed on the command line, the insert, delete and backspace keys can be used to edit the command.

While TreeDOS is active, no changes can be made to the environment, so commands such as SET, PROMPT, and PATH won't do anything. The manual has a warning about loading TSRs from TreeDOS. Since Tree86 is not a TSR, it will unload from memory when you end the program. If a TSR has been loaded from TreeDOS, a hole will be left in DOS memory when Tree86 ends which is guaranteed to lock up your computer. This is not a specific problem with Tree86 but a generic "feature" of DOS. If you load TSRs before starting Tree86, you will not have this problem.

If you have expanded memory on your computer, Tree86 can use that memory for buffers. Depending on the memory model you choose and the number of drives you keep logged to Tree86, expanded memory will make a difference in the amount of below 640K memory left for your use after Tree86 loads. The large memory model will log up to 254 subdirectories on the largest drive and up to 10 drives simultaneously and has a 12K internal buffer. The medium memory model will log up to 166 subdirectories on the largest drive and up to 15 drives simultaneously and has an 8K internal buffer. The small memory model will log up to 82 subdirectories on the largest drive and up to 26 simultaneous drives and has a 4K internal buffer. With the large memory model and 10 drives logged, expanded memory will come in very handy.

Ease of use

When I received Tree86, I made a new subdirectory on my hard disk, copied the files from the diskette to the new subdirectory, displayed the subdirectory looking for .COM or .EXE files and brought up Tree86 by keying in TREE86. The initial screen has options labeled Directory, Change, Utilities, Find files, Editor, Window and Quit across the top. Pressing the first letter of any option brings up a pull-down menu to guide you through the rest of the particular operation you want to do.

The tree that is displayed will have the directory you were in prior to invoking Tree86 marked as the current directory. Pressing the [Enter] key will display the files in that directory. This will bring a slight change in the options that are presented across the top of the screen. The options are now List, Tag, Change, Utilities, Sort, View, Editor, Window, Run and Quit. Again, pressing the first letter of any option brings up a pull-down menu for further options.

I went through each option trying out the various commands, and was immediately struck by the intuitive feel of the interface. In nearly every case, I immediately knew what was expected next. If I wasn't sure, pressing [F1] brought up a context sensitive help screen, and I was soon on my way. You'll notice that I have yet to crack the manual. The program is so easy to use that the excellent help screens are mostly wasted. The manual itself is in most cases redundant and unneeded.

However, there is usually a good reason to look at any README file that may be on an install diskette. I didn't in this case until I had used the program for several hours. When I did scan the README file, I found out that Tree86 will execute REXX execs. I have Personal REXX installed on my computer and have many REXX execs that I use in place of batch files. I had been switching to TreeDOS to run my REXX execs and then switching back to the Tree86 screens to continue my work after the exec finished.

To give you an idea of how easy that process is, I wasn't at all inconvenienced by the switching. The two environments can be switched instantaneously, and are very well integrated. But, to learn that I could execute a REXX exec (in addition to COM, EXE and BAT files) from the Tree86 screens with the Run command was icing on the cake.

Tree86 comes with a configuration program to customize the program to your tastes. With the configuration program you can change the default colors, whether or not hidden files will be displayed, the mouse response speed (if a mouse is installed), whether you want file attributes displayed, the sort order for file listings, which drives will be automatically logged, whether EGA/VGA zoom is on or off (zoom **on** gives 43-line display with EGA monitors and a 50 line display with VGA monitors), whether instant log will be on or off, the editor you want to use and the memory model that Tree86 will use.

Performance

I tried Tree86 on an AT compatible. I could find no difference in speed in any of the operations I tried, whether I ran them in native DOS, Tree86 or TreeDOS. The program seems to have almost no overhead. It took Tree86 about 5 seconds to present the initial screen on my AT with 80 directories and 1,066 files totaling about 32 megabytes. Since I tend to go into Tree86 once and stay in it, the time is not even noticeable.

If the instant log feature of Tree86 is used, a log of all the files on your logged disk(s) will be created and updated when you quit Tree86. Then, the next time you start Tree86, it will come up instantly because it can read the log file instead of chasing your disk tree.

Documentation

The program comes with a 66-page manual that gives a clear explanation of each command, and has many helpful tips. The table of contents and index are complete and well-organized. The documentation for VIEW86, the view program, is on a separate .DOC file on the install diskette. The for the view program was integrated with the regular manual.

I previously said that the manual is redundant and unneeded. That statement is true as far as it goes. You can do a lot of good work with Tree86 without even reading the manual. But I found that as soon as I took the time to read the manual, the examples, hints and tips increased the usefulness of the program to me even more. So don't follow my poor example. Do yourself a favor and read the manual as you begin working with the program.

Support

Technical support is very good. The person who answered my questions was knowledgeable and helpful. The company is also very interested in any suggestions a user may have for improvements to the program. The call is local for Houston users.

Conclusion

I have been disappointed with shell programs several times in the past, and had given up on them before I tried Tree86. Now I find myself using Tree86 constantly. I would recommend this program to anyone who is looking for a good DOS shell, and especially to the people who have been disappointed with DOS shells in the past.