

CERN Courier Archive: 1972

A LOOK BACK TO CERN COURIER VOL. 12, OCTOBER 1972, COMPILED BY PEGGIE RIMMER

COMPUTING

CERN Computing and Data Processing School

After the success of the Varenna School in 1970, a second CERN Computing and Data Processing School was organized from 10–23 September at Pertisau on the shore of the Achensee, an alpine lake in the Austrian Tyrol.

The school brought together a cosmopolitan group of young people working in scientific data processing, to exchange opinions and discuss problems stimulated by experienced lecturers from Western Europe and CERN. The 67 students came from CERN member states, the German Democratic Republic, Israel, Poland, the USSR and Yugoslavia. Lecture topics were divided between pure computer science, applications of small computers in physics, and applied mathematical techniques.

A significant fact to emerge was that the



Participants at the 1972 CERN Computing and Data Processing School.

data-handling and control requirements of high-energy physics are becoming so demanding as to require computer applications of greatly increased complexity. Nowadays, experiments use sophisticated equipment and it is essential to monitor the performance of the apparatus. Small

computers are widely used for this and standardization is playing an essential role to allow physicists to talk to the equipment in a very simple way, mainly using CAMAC and CAMAC-oriented software.

Another important topic is data communication between scientists working in different laboratories using different hardware and software. A European network of fast data links is technically feasible, but difficulties arise in exchanging information among machines that use different operating systems and speak different dialects. The importance of establishing standards for information exchange was emphasized during one of the informal discussions organized by the students themselves.

● Compiled from texts on pp326–327.

CERN

Public Information Office

From its early days, CERN has had a “public information office”, the PIO, the communication channel to the outside world and for many internal-communication tasks. PIO staff are well known to top-class journalists from almost all the member states. Also, many television teams and radio interviewers invade CERN each year, and the PIO either covers their needs or guides them to appropriate CERN contacts. On the film front, the first CERN documentary, *Matter in Question*, appeared in 1961, and is still in limited use although now largely outdated. In recent years, several collaborative films have been made with national television networks, the latest being with the BBC (*CERN Courier* September 2015 p11).

The PIO produces a range of publications, from the pop to the not-so-pop. The mandatory Annual Report, in English and French, is the account of CERN’s activities in the previous year. Regular publications are the *Weekly Bulletin* and the monthly *CERN Courier*. Documentation for visitors ranges from the light-hearted “A look at CERN” through to the more formal “CERN and its Laboratories”.

The photo section takes about 8000 photos per year and also some cine film, for example the assembly of the large European bubble chamber BEBC. Important stages of other large projects have been recorded on 16 mm



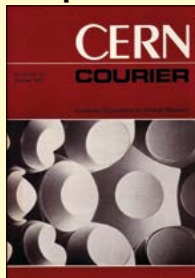
Reception desk at the Public Information Office, the PIO. (Image credit: CERN-GE-7209076.)

film for archival records.

Another major activity is the visits service. Visits are held mostly in French, German or English. About 50 CERN staff, covering many nationalities, act as guides and lecturers. The current annual visitor figure is about 11,000 (excluding Open Days). Two-thirds come on Saturdays, mainly school parties and common-interest groups (farmers, nurses, firms’ outings). Midweek visitors are mostly university groups, industrialists from firms working for CERN, and occasional scientists in transit. VIPs obviously receive special attention.

● Compiled from texts on pp327–329.

Compiler’s Note



Very few visible characteristics are needed to identify individuals, so some readers may recognize themselves, or erstwhile friends and colleagues, at the computing school in Austria, either in Austria or (wo)manning the PIO.

The overarching concern of the 1972 computing schools was the unrelenting proliferation of data. The physics community was pioneering hardware and software standards for data collection, and had a prescient awareness of the burgeoning need for information sharing and its attendant difficulties. Links and networks were rapidly becoming hot topics across a wide range of applications. Various protocols found favour in different areas until TCP/IP, aka the internet, had gained sufficient diffusion that Tim Berners-Lee could define the hypertext transfer

protocol standard to sit on top of it, and the World Wide Web went into orbit around 1990.

And thanks to the Web, nowadays *CERN Courier* is read online by around 30,000 people every month, in addition to a monthly paper print run of about 20,000 copies.

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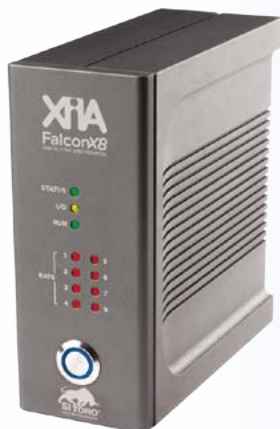
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