



GIS Europe

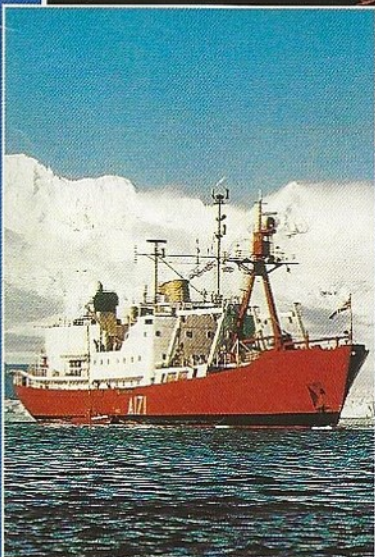
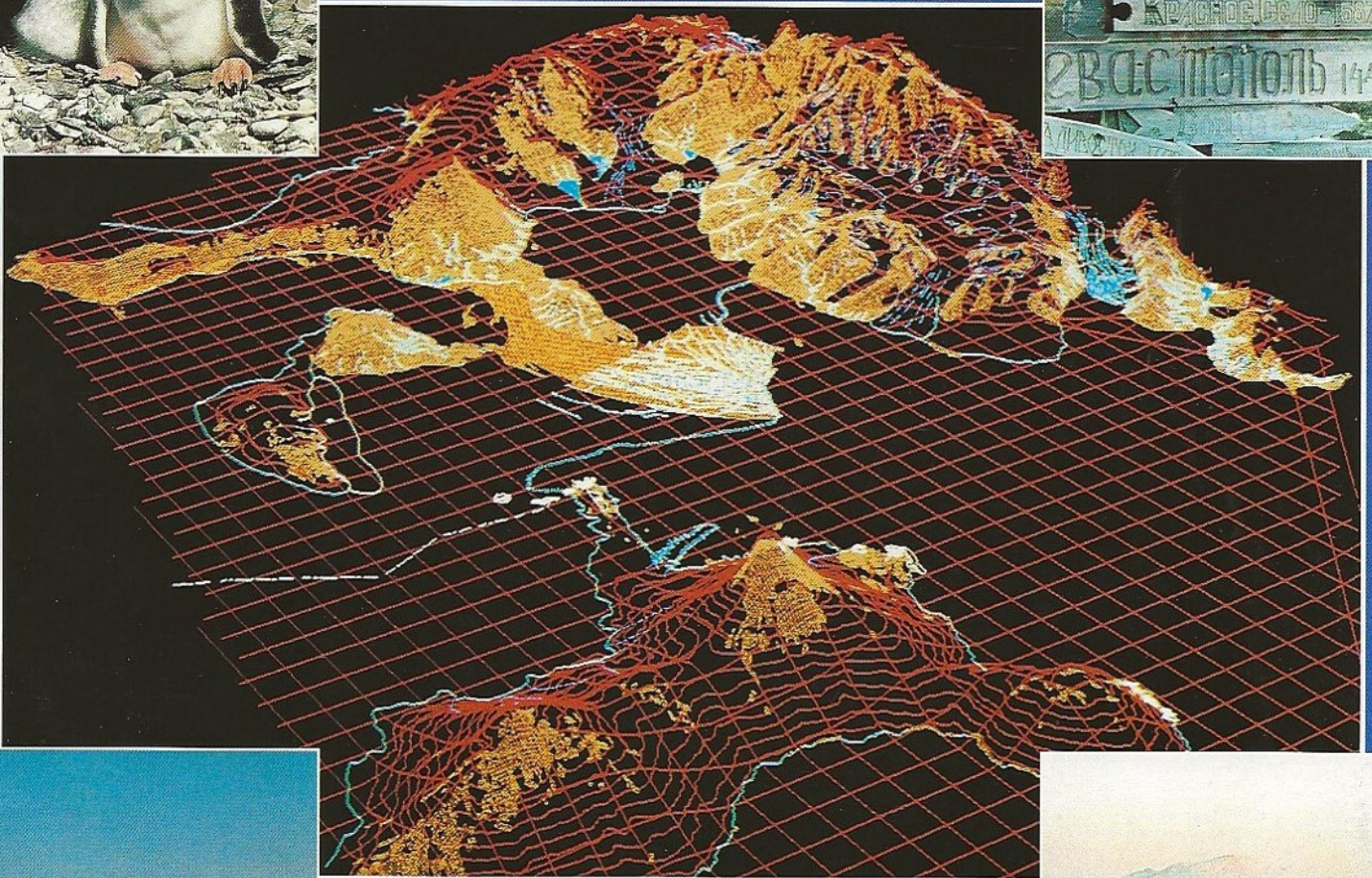
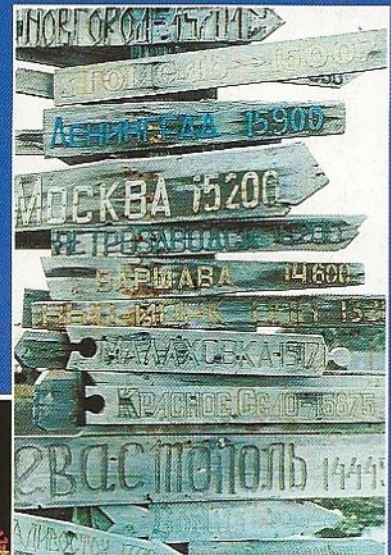
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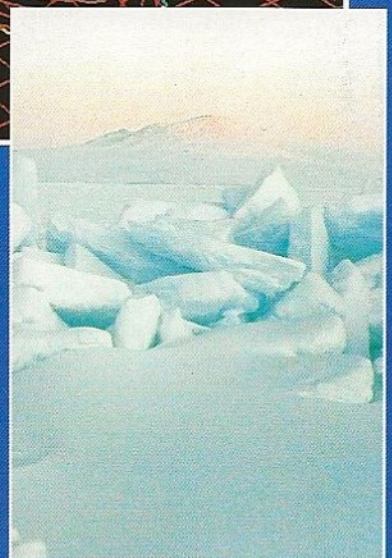
Europe's Geographical Information Systems magazine



POLE TO POLE: The value of GIS in the Arctic and Antarctic



STEINITZ ON GIS: Part 2: Preserving the landscape SOIL INFORMATION: A remedy for pollution



GIS '93: Birmingham, UK, 18-20 May

BY SEPPE CASSETTARI

The predicted decline of the big GIS conference in favour of 'vertical market shows' for minority interests was soundly refuted at GIS '93. The mood at Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre was upbeat, and most exhibitors reported generally high levels of interest, with signs that the GIS community (in the UK at least) is showing something more than green shoots as the economy moves out of recession.

A stimulating aspect of the show was the wide range of exhibitors from the GIS community. System vendors, data suppliers and publishers, peripheral suppliers, consultants, integrated-solution providers and trainers were all



represented. In fact, the show was remarkable for the high number of small companies who decided that they couldn't afford *not* to be seen at the NEC.

The move from Olympia, London, was greeted with disquiet by some (including myself), but Blenheim's switch to the Midlands proved to be an enormous success. Exhibitors increased from 80 to 125, including all the big names in GIS as well as many of the smaller ones.

The public also turned out in force. Over 4,500 visitors poured through the doors, over two thousand on one day

alone. Not only were the numbers high, but—as one rather pleased marketing manager put it—they were 'quality visitors'.

High-tech setting

The NEC provided a high-tech setting in which visitors could take the first steps in GIS awareness as well as critically appraise the vendors' wares. Blenheim provided not only a setting for all the vendors, including PAFEC's articulated roadshow lorry and the innovative EDS 'trimaran' stand, but also seminars and workshops. Over 400 people attended six sessions of the seminar 'What is GIS?' given by Ed Parsons and myself, demonstrating the ever-growing demand for basic information on GIS. The very successful and professionally delivered hands-on GIS workshops were oversubscribed. Ian Heywood and the UNIGIS staff demonstrated the need people have for practical experience in GIS before they launch into purchasing decisions.

Powerful keynote speech

Let's not forget that GIS '93 was also a conference. This year, 34 papers were published on a wide range of local authority, utility and business applications. There was also a powerful keynote speech delivered by ecologist, writer and broadcaster David Bellamy.

Bellamy urged delegates to support a 'London-Russian Initiative' designed to help the ex-Soviet Union reverse the 'environmental catastrophe' now overtaking it. 'Russia is in a hell of a mess,' he told GIS '93 delegates. Bellamy said he was greatly encouraged by an impressive and largely consistent database, produced by 160 Russian Non-Governmental Organizations and 'came home elated and fired with even more enthusiasm for what GIS can do for the environment.'

There should, he said, be created a GIS database in Russia which would

'not only map the ecological disasters of Russia but tell the world about them.'

Summing up, Bellamy said: 'GIS solutions are in; piecemeal reactions to acute problems are out.'

Supporting the keynote theme of 'Green Information Systems' were papers on environmental issues (David Vaughan of Environmental Resources), the Lancashire Green Audit (Mary Whittaker of Lancashire County Council) and the role of the environmental watchdog (Rob Atkinson of Friends of the Earth). These represented a subject area that demands greater attention from the GIS community as businesses and government become more environmentally aware.

Some papers reiterated old but still valid themes. Implementation strategies, data-capture problems and the 'departmental versus corporate' debate still warrant further discussion. Some of the case studies are now looking a little tired, however. Other papers explored areas not much delved into by the GIS community, such as the use of GIS in radiation monitoring by Phil Jeanes of PA Consulting Group, and the GIS-assisted open-cast coal reserve estimation by Paul Nathanael of Wimpey Environmental.

If GIS '93 provided a barometer of the state of the GIS community in the UK then all seems to be set fair, with few clouds on the horizon and a warm summer in the offing. □



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