

MISSION-RIVERCARE

A semi--dramatised, educational CD-Rom for Australian Primary Schools about the water and river environmental problems facing Australia

**Written
by
Steve Connard**

The quality and availability of fresh, clean drinking water is being a matter of major concern for both city and country Australians.

Through the escapades of two school children, this CD-Rom investigates the conditional status an un-named river which serves as metaphor for every major river in Australia.

"MISSION- RIVERCARE" CONCEPT

"Mission-RIVERCARE" is an entertaining, **interactive story** on **CD-ROM** aimed at educating school children aged between 8 and 16 about the environmental problems facing Australia and what they can do to help.

Using the power of Interactive Multimedia, the school students will participate in the adventure by becoming a third person who accompanies two young city kids, **Jack and Sarah**, who are on annual holiday with their parents at a campsite next to a River. Every year they meet up with their friend Bill, the knowledgeable Park Ranger. With **Jack and Sarah**, the students-

- discover the beauty of the natural world ,**
- learn about the environmental problems** confronting the river,
- find the solutions** to help restore this important natural resource.

The school students themselves become involved in the story as it unfolds:- they share our two heroes natural curiosity as they travel up and down the River. Together, they

- discover environmental interesting places and facts,**
- make decisions and master the obstacles** that confront them,
- learn what is being done by people to help save the environment.**

As the word "multimedia" suggests, this interactive program uses a number of mediums;

- still photographs,**
- animation and graphics,**
- moving video clips,**
- music, narration, the voices of actors and sound effects.**

The interactive story will be produced on a CD-ROM that can be played on both IBM compatible and Apple computers that are equipped with CD-ROM players.

Entertainment drives the story and makes it highly engaging for the school students. The educational side is presented either as part of the story or as additional information accessed through a stimulating variety of interactive menus or options.

Using the **mouse** on the computer, the Students **navigate themselves through the program-** finding new places, accessing information and videos, overcoming obstacles and answering questions. At the end of the program they can receive a **score** for their performance. This entertainment approach to education, called "**edutainment**", is the **fastest growing genre in the CD ROM market.**

CAST

There are three central characters in the production:

- Jack**, a 12 year old boy from the city
- Sarah**, his 9 year old sister
- Bill**, a wise and knowledgeable Park Ranger.

There is also:

- David**, Jack and Sarah's father
- Joan**, Jack and Sarah's mother.

These characters will be cast in a similar manner to a film, for both their acting and speaking ability and their empathy with the environment.

VISUAL STYLE

Jack and Sarah's adventure journeying up and down the River is told with a **series of still photographs** that are shot by a professional photographer.

These still photographs show:-

- Objective shots of the children, the boat and the river**
- Subjective point of view shots of the children.**
With these subjective shots, the audience will effectively become a third person travelling with children and thus become very involved in the story.
- Close-ups of the natural environment** that illustrate the intrinsic beauty of the area.

With these shots we will capture the magic of the natural world with an innovative approach to photography. Extreme close-ups, filters, time exposures and other photographic techniques will be used.

The two children can also **converse** with each other. When they do so, we see them appear "**live**" in a **video window** on the screen and we hear their conversation. If we want to access their thought track, we may also see them in the video window.

Their friend Bill, the wise and knowledgeable Ranger, is always with them in spirit. Occasionally he appears in a video window, reminding them to perhaps pick up some garbage that they might have missed or test the water for salinity or pollution.

STORYLINE

Introduction

Every year **Jack and Sarah** go with their parents, **David and Joan**, to the same camping ground which is beside a river near the mountains.

Over the years the family have got to know **Bill**, a wise and very knowledgeable Ranger who looks after the camping spot and the nearby National Park. Bill understands everything about the environment and he knows the River backwards. Every vacation the children go out on the River with Bill and his boat. Jack and Sara have become quite proficient in handling his old vessel - a timber "putt-putt" boat.

This year, when the family arrive at the **Camp Ground**, they find that the River is so polluted that they cannot swim. The children cannot understand how this has happened. They want to know why the River has become polluted and what they can do about it.

When they ask Bill what has happened, he tells them that it is a combination of many things. He would love to show them but he is busy in the Park office. He tells them that they can take his boat and look for themselves if they like. If they look hard enough, they will see what is wrong with the River. They might even discover what has also happened to the country around it. If they are really clever, they will also find what is being done to save the environment and who is doing it.

Bill gives them his mobile phone and tells them that they can use to if they wish to ask him anything about the environment. The parents too have their own mobile phone. Knowing that they can contact their children at any time, they are quite happy for the children to go off alone.

The Learning Adventure

When Jack and Sarah decide to take Bill's boat and investigate what is wrong with the river, they immediately have a choice which direction they can go. **Upstream or downstream**. In fact there are lots of choices.

When they go upstream the River becomes shallow. They must then find a mooring spot and walk along side what is now a creek. Eventually they reach the upper reaches of the River, high in the Mountains. If they choose to take the journey downstream, the River becomes wider and eventually flows out into the ocean.

Which ever direction they travel, the River has a number of key locations which are **Learning Stations** for the children (and the School Students). There they can access information about the environment.

Upstream, the learning stations are:-

- Mountain Stream,**
- Upstream Creek,**

Travelling Downstream , the Learning Stations are:-

- River through Farmland,**
- River through City and**
- Marine Wetland.**

In the course of their journey they must camp overnight at another Learning Station which is a: -

- Forest Camp Ground.**

The Students can also take options to leave the River and investigate other environments that "branch off" from the River. They can then walk to a:-

- Town,**
- Farm,**
- Beach.**

LEARNING INTERFACE

At each of the Learning Stations, the screen will contain "**hot spots**"- areas on the screen which contain "**hidden**" information about that particular part of the environment.

This information is available in three ways:-

1 Hidden environmental relevant detail.

As the cursor moves over the hot spots, the hidden subject becomes apparent and a statement appears on the screen. For example, as the cursor is moved over some trees, a koala might appear with a statement about why this animal is under threat. All of these close-up shots can be increased to full screen size for a more detailed inspection.

2 Activity Menu

The menu allows the students to interact with the environment by choosing a number of options. From this menu the student can access:-

ii **Bill's Notebook**

This note book contains a library of text information about the environment as well as tips on navigating through the River. (So while Bill remains behind, his presence remains with them.) The Notebook also contains a **map** of the River to help them navigate and travel to other locations.

iii **Pick up & Put down**

It also contains an action that allows the Children to pick up and put down items. With this they can collect garbage or carry Bill's **Notebook** in a **backpack** if they travel to another location away from the River.

iv **Toolbox**

With the Toolbox, the students can perform activities with objects. For example they can test the water for pollutants and salinity with a salinity meter from the **Toolbox**.

v **Quiz**

Within this Menu there is also a quiz about the environment. The students are asked questions and to respond, another sub-menu appears with multiple choice answers. The answers that the students give are logged to provide a **score** at the end of the session. The teacher can then monitor how well individual students learn about the environment.

iv **The Mobile Phone**

After all the activities at each Learning Station are completed the phone will ring. The call will be from either the children's parents or Bill. If the call is from their parents, Jack and Sarah summarise what they have learnt, if it is Bill they answer a quick quiz. This acts as a revision of the learning station and can be printed out in text form for a later reference.

With these regular calls, **the parents gradually become more involved** in the children's quest. As Jack and Sara discover more and more problems with the River, they tell their parents that they too should be thinking of ways to help save the environment.

For example, when Jack and Sara visit the **Town**, they find a **Junior Landcare Group** who is cleaning up one of the Town's parks as a **Park Care** project. They ask a parent, (who is a supervisor of the Group) how they can get involved with Landcare. He gives them the **Countrylink/Landcare 008** phone number to call for more information.

When the Children dial up the **Landcare 008** number they ask the operator for information on how they start a Junior Landcare Group. The Children get the number of the Landcare Coordinator in their area. They find out that their parents can join the local group and they can start a Junior Landcare Group in their school. The Landcare Coordinator also suggests that they look at the **video "Who is Landcare"**.

If the students haven't already discovered the video menu this will guarantee they use it.

3 Video Menus

From this **video menu**, they can access several short **environmental videos** about what is being done to solve the problems at each location.

The Learning Stations and the videos that can be accessed at them include:-

i MOUNTAIN STREAM

"What is a River?"

" The Concept of Total Catchment"

"Frog Watch"

"Stream"

ii UPSTREAM CREEK

- "Gully Control"
- "Bank Stability"

iii RIVER THROUGH FARMLAND

- "Salinity"
- "Salinity Testing"
- "Fighting Salinity"
- "Frogwatch"

iv FARM

- "What is Landcare"
- "Erosion"
- "Controlling Erosion"
- "Establishing Trees"
- "Strip Farming"
- "Earthworms"

v FOREST CAMPSITE

- "Native Animals under threat"
- "Replanting native flora"
- "Native fish"
- "Seed Collecting"
- "Murray Cod"

vi TOWN

- "Who is Landcare"
- "Park care"
- "Plastic bag recycling"
- "PVC pipe recycling"
- "Compost"
- "Newspaper recycling"
- "School revegetation"

vii BEACH

- "How do I get involved"
- "Dune stabilisation"
- "Bitu Bush"

viii RIVER THROUGH A TOWN

"Blue Green Algae"

"Frog Watch"

ix MARINE WETLAND

"Reclamation"

"Mangroves"

Obstacles

Throughout the Student's journey there are also **obstacles**. For example, they must start the boat, put on safety equipment, then drive and navigate the boat up or down the river. Along the way they will find other obstacles. They might come across a load of domestic rubbish or patch of blue green algae that they have to deal with.

To solve these obstacles and to help them understand the river and access more information, the children have to increase their power of observation and use their common sense. To help them, they find hints in the **Notebook** and use tools from the **Tool Box**.

Like the narrative in the program, these obstacles help make MISSION-RIVERCARE entertaining as well as educational. The Students become involved and engaged in the quest. **They test themselves**. They feel a **sense of achievement** when the obstacles are solved.

Conclusion

As Jack and Sara work through the Learning Stations, accessing **hidden information from the "hot spots"**, information from the **videos** and Bill's **Notebook**, the School Students find out what is really happening to the river and the surrounding countryside.

With Jack & Sarah, they learn about the problems confronting the environment. They realise how humans as well as the native fish, the birds and animals depend on the river for their survival. They also see what concerned people, young and old, are doing to solve these problems.

Parents David and Joan also become more involved. When Jack and Sara complete all the Learning Stations, they return to the Caravan Park. There they find their **parents on the phone arranging to join a Landcare Group**. Their parents are committed to Landcare.

Jack and Sara have completed their mission.

BENEFITS TO TELECOM

TELECOM WILL GAIN PROMINENT EXPOSURE OF THE TELECOM LOGO AND CORPORATE ACCREDITATION AS THE INITIATORS AND SPONSORS OF THIS HIGHLY CONSTRUCTIVE, WORTHWHILE AND IMAGINATIVE INITIATIVE THROUGH:-

1 PACKAGING

- II** The CD-ROM will be packaged with a still photograph of the River and a description of the program and its educational qualities. **"SPONSORED BY TELECOM"** and the **TELECOM LOGO** will be prominently displayed on the front and back packaging.
- III** **"SPONSORED BY TELECOM"** and the **TELECOM LOGO** will also be printed on the **CD-ROM** disc.
- IV** **OPENING AND CLOSING TITLES OF THE PRODUCTION** will also feature the **TELECOM LOGO** and the **SPONSORED BY TELECOM** message..

2 NATIONAL SCHOOL MAIL-OUT

"MISSION- RIVERCARE!" will be made available to every school in the nation. Each will receive a letter, including a message from **Telecom's CEO** explaining why **Telecom** has assisted this exciting and important learning initiative about the Australian environment. Schools and informing them that the CD-ROM is available.

3 NATIONAL LAUNCH AND PRESS RELEASE

An National Launch and Press Release will be used to promote Australian wide awareness of the project. **TELECOM's** involvement and participation will feature prominently in the text of the Press Release.

4 EDITORIAL CONTENT.

Articles on the initiative will be placed in **THE EDUCATOR MAGAZINE**, distributed nationally to school teachers and in **BP LANDCARE CHALLENGE MAGAZINE**, distributed to Australia's 2,000 Landcare Groups.