

## Results 2000

**Note: many of the links are no longer current.**

Five entries were received for the 2000 Web Indexing Prize. I examined these with the assistance of Madeleine Davis, NSW Branch President, and found that of these five, two were not indexes and one contravened the guidelines, leaving two entrants and one clear winner. It is clear that Web indexers have yet to learn all the lessons painfully acquired over the years by book indexers.

### **Prize winner**

**Site Index: a Subject Guide to the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency**

<http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/environment/>

Submitted by: Patricia Kennedy, Librarian (Electronic Publishing), Public Affairs Division  
The QEPA index is a good, workmanlike approach to providing access to many topics scattered across hundreds of pages. Each letter is given its own Web page and there are subheadings and a few double entries (but not cross-references). It accomplishes the requirements of what, in my view, a good Web index should do: it could appear at the back of a book without causing the publisher any embarrassment; it puts technology to work in a way that enhances the usefulness of the index; and, finally, it enables the user to retrace their steps in a more detailed and informative way rather than simply through the use of the Back button.

There is still lots of room for minor improvements. The site uses frames and the top part of the frame is large and fairly intrusive. I didn't see any way to turn it off or get to a frame-free version. There are no 'go to top' buttons or links back to the index home page. Link colours are a bit dramatic and could be toned down. Initial capitals are used throughout. Occasional lapses of organisation are evident - under Mammals, for instance, where the sole subheadings are 'nocturnal' and 'search'. (What is a search mammal? Is it a bloodhound?) Scientific names are given after the common name, but don't appear in the index in their own right. Links from 'Save the Bilby' and 'Bilby' take the user to different pages, although the two pages do then interlink. There could be many more double entries: 'Environment Education Centres' could be indexed under 'Education'. Individual National Parks are not listed by name. The link 'See also publications' would be more useful if it took you to publications starting with the same letter as the index page you are on. And access to the index from the QEPA Home Page could be a bit more obvious rather than going through 'Search'. However, taken all in all, and considering the usefulness of this index as a search tool for the site's target audience, this was the clear winner of the AusSI Web Indexing Prize 2000. A book voucher for \$100 from the Co-op Bookshop will be sent to Patricia Kennedy.

### **Other entries**

#### **Quaker Index**

<http://www.geocities.com/michaeladamr/quakerindex5.htm>

Submitted by: Michael Adam Reale

This is an index of the World Wide Web on the topic of Quakers, Quakerism or The Religious Society of Friends.

I know nothing about Quakerism, on or off the Web, so I am in no position to judge whether or not Michael's links are comprehensive. There are about 300 of them here, connected to Quaker-related sites around the world, from 'Aotearoa Yearly Meeting' through 'Friendly Woman' (a magazine?), 'Politicians and where they rest' (not 'where they lie', for obvious reasons), to 'Young Friends'! The text is a little small and the layout could be tidier, but there are big letter headings to help locate where you are. Italics are used for the titles of publications, but I couldn't fathom the reasons behind the occasional use of bold - and there was no introduction to tell me. Colours are appropriately plain, but the page would benefit from a change in the link colour to something that contrasts a little less dramatically with the background.

Although this is set out like a 'traditional' back-of-book index, there are many problems and inconsistencies, for example:

- 'Another Journal of John Woodman' appears under 'Another' and 'Journal' but not 'Woodman'
- 'Articles on Prayer Teams by Stan Perisho' is indexed under 'Articles' but not 'Prayers' or 'Perisho'
- 'Biography of William Penn' appears under 'Biography' but not 'Penn'
- 'William Penn' appears as an uninverted heading but the Biography is not listed here either.
- 'Fox, George' appears inverted but with a cross-reference to 'Journal of George Fox' that leads nowhere.
- The subheadings listed under 'articles' and 'books' omit articles and books mentioned elsewhere in the index.

In fact there are no cross-references and no double posting that I could find.

### **Australian Pictorial Thesaurus**

<http://www.pictureaustralia.org>

Submitted by: State Library of New South Wales

This is part of a large integrated system, obviously representing many person-years of work, whereby images (mainly photos) from Australian sources can be made available over the Web through a keyword search system. The photos are assigned keywords, which are in turn taken from a thesaurus, the creation of which itself is a considerable achievement.

I had serious reservations when I took over the Web Indexing Prize about our competence to judge information retrieval sites, and these have surfaced here with a vengeance. To begin with, I'm not sure what has actually been submitted: is it the picture retrieval system itself, the keywords associated with the pictures, or the thesaurus behind the keywords? If it's the picture retrieval system, then it's obviously orders of magnitude larger than any other entrant and far more sophisticated in its design and operation. It gets users to images quickly; and in general to the right images, although the ambiguities of image indexing preclude complete accuracy all the time. But is it an index? Isn't it rather a search engine?

Well then, what about the assignment of keywords to pictures? Competent professionals have done this with diligence and skill. The keywords are made visible when the user accesses the picture and in general I had no criticism of the words chosen (or the ones omitted). Indexing has been done, certainly - but where is the index? If I am to judge an index I must have something in front of me to judge, and a vast collection of distributed keywords isn't something I can reasonably compare with the other entrants in the competition.

What about the thesaurus itself? Is a thesaurus an index? Well, yes, in a sense. The entries are words, the locators are terms used in place of those words. There can be subheadings 'see under' and related term 'see also'. A thesaurus is an index to some portion of the English language. But is it an index to material on the Web? We're going to take refuge behind the Guidelines again and say that the thesaurus as such doesn't 'provide users with direct access to online material', and as such is ineligible.

Finally, there is no obvious sequence or subdivision to the results of the search. If I search for, e.g. 'Aborigines', I find a jumble of photos, drawings, cartoons and sketches in no discernible order. Attempts to try and establish whether this was meant to be in geographical, alphabetical, chronological or some other meaningful sequence were fruitless. If, as I suspect, it's in order of storage location on the Web, then the user has a right to know this. So perhaps it's a good thing that this is not an index, as if it was, the sequencing of material would leave something to be desired.

### **History and Cultural Site for Milton Ulladulla**

<http://www.shoalhaven.net.au/~cathyd>

Submitted by: Cathy Dunn

This is a large collection of links to pages relating to Milton Ulladulla, generally from a historical point of view. Most of the pages are on Cathy's own site, and taken together they represent a great deal of time and effort spent on accumulating material and working it up

into Web pages. The home page links to at least 60 other pages, and while the layout is somewhat cluttered, the choice of colours and graphics works reasonably well. However, it is not an index. Indexes don't just have a random jumble of headings, they have a logical sequence accessible to users; and sequence is lacking here. The main headings — 'Local History', 'Genealogy Research', 'Local Cemeteries', 'Convicts', 'Milton Ulladulla & Surrounds', 'Servicemen & Women' and 'Links' — are in no discernible order, and the entries within them are unordered too. Why are 'Budawang Aborigines' at the bottom of the Local History section? Why is 'Ulladulla Lighthouse' at the top and 'Tabourie Museum' in the middle?

There are inconsistencies here too: there are no fewer than five retrieval systems (two drop-down lists, a table of headings, a collection of 'latest additions to site' and a list of links grouped under headings) and the links in one system often don't match the links given in another. Neither do the links always match the title of the pages linked to. Material at the bottom left of the page doesn't seem to fit into any of these systems; it is a mix of awards, message boards and links to other material of local interest.

To quote the Prize Guidelines: "The order of locators in a Web index need not be alphabetical, but it must be a rational and systematic sequence which caters to the users of the site". Given the historical slant here it might have been interesting to try a historical sequence for the home page; but alphabetical would have been fine. Just to step back and consider things from the users' perspective would have made a big difference.

### **Therapeutic Guidelines**

<http://www.tg.com.au/demos/anti/5cec58f.htm>

Submitted by: James Reeve

Part of the spirit of the Web Indexing Prize is that readers of this report should be able to visit sites and make their own decisions about them. For that reason and for ease of judging, I have ruled out sites with restricted access requiring payment, subscriptions or passwords. Therapeutic Guidelines is a site displaying drug treatments for various conditions, but the non-paying public is only allowed access to a demonstration section where a fraction of the 'real' information is available. The real index may be large and impressive, but since I can't get to it I have to judge on the tiny demonstration index that I can get to.

Unfortunately I couldn't at first get to this either. Using the site index on a Windows PC involves downloading plug-in software for the browser — at 500kb this takes about two minutes — and the net result was that the browser displayed the index in a side panel and then crashed, over and over again, any time I made an attempt to use it. (Many plug-ins do this, making it hard for me to look favourably on any site that uses them.)

The second time around it worked, but I found the high-tech plug-in index no improvement over a simple framed alphabetical list of links. To find and get to 'endocarditis' from a linked list requires a) scrolling down; b) clicking on 'endocarditis'. Here it requires a) clicking on the 'index' tab at the bottom left; b) scrolling down; c) double-clicking on 'endocarditis'; d) clicking on 'prevention of endocarditis'. So the result of our 500kb download is that it takes two more clicks to get where I want to go, and another click to get back again. What's the advantage? Finally, a third attempt to access the site resulted in a repeat of the browser crashing problems. This seems like a classic case of technology outstripping usefulness. But I should add that there were no obvious flaws in the index itself — when it worked.