new faces

of FreeBSD

BY DRU LAVIGNE

This column aims to shine a spotlight on contributors who recently received their commit bit and to introduce them to the FreeBSD community.

In this installment, the spotlight is on Rainer Hurling, who received his ports bit in August, and Gordon Bergling who received his doc bit in June.

Tell us a bit about yourself, your background, and your interests.

• Rainer: I am Rainer Hurling and I grew up in the north of Germany. Since completing my studies, I have lived in the middle of Germany, near Göttingen. I have been a computer enthusiast since I was a teenager. After my first experiences in 1977 during a school internship with a Siemens TR 440 mainframe, I got an increased understanding for hardware and software by working with a homemade computer based on a SC/MP CPU. In the early 1980s, I got my first real computer system, a Eurocom II board with 6809 CPU from Eltec Elektronik, Mainz, Germany. The included FLEX OS from TSC came with an assembler, a disassembler, Pascal, Forth, and Fortran (and Sargon Chess, of course), all 8-inch floppy disks. In 1983, an Apple IIe was added, on which I programmed mainly with UCSD Pascal.

Because of my second passion, the natural sciences—especially forest ecosystems—I studied forestry and sometime after that I had the opportunity to do a doctorate on a topic in forest protection. For almost 20 years now, I have been working as a head of section and chief scientist in the department of forest protection of a forestry research institute in Göttingen. We intensively work with several packages of the R Project for Statistical Computing, we use PostgreSQL databases with PostGIS, and, in particular, geo-based software like SAGA GIS, QGIS, and OpenJUMP. In our department I am one of the persons who methodically drives data management and data analysis and the one who also tries to contribute to these projects. Among others, I have been the maintainer of the ports math/saga, graphics/qgis, graphics/openjump, and databases/mdbtools for years now. One of my personal goals is to help keep this geo-based and mathematical software running on FreeBSD.

In private life, I am also interested in astrophysics and try to improve existing software there as well as the maintainer of astro/astrometry and astro/py-ephem. Since 1981, I have had an amateur radio license (DH6BAG). It is nice to watch how the bundle of software for ham radio grows and prospers on FreeBSD.

• Gordon: I am currently a freelance software developer based in Leipzig, Germany. I have worked in the IT industry since the late 1990s and have experience in a variety of industry fields ranging from e-commerce, pharmacy, to finance. My work is focused on distributed systems and business applications. I am very interested in IoT and edge computing, but I haven't found the time yet to look at these things in a real-world situation. Besides
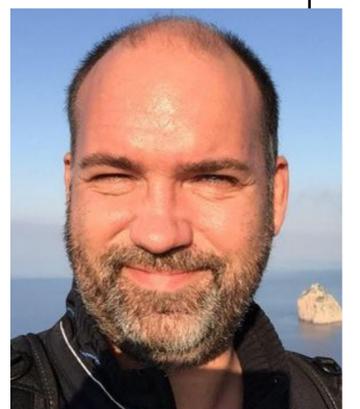
software development, I am also interested in photography and anything related to music. I love traveling and getting to know new cultures and people.

How did you first learn about FreeBSD and what about FreeBSD interested you?

• Rainer: During my time as a doctoral student at the university in the mid-'90s, the Windows operating system was barely usable for fast, extensive scientific tasks on a PC. Instead, I used OS/2 Warp4 for several years, and as an IBM registered developer and tester, I contributed a little bit. Unfortunately, OS/2 was not further developed and an alternative had to be found.

In 1996, I read about this free, driven-by-demons, UNIX-like system and decided to try FreeBSD, at that time, version 2.0.5. It was like a rebirth. The same hardware that was used with Windows and OS/2 before now behaved performant and stable. At that time, there were already countless programs available. From 1997 on, I used the software R on FreeBSD and began to use FreeBSD as a scientific desktop, running all my requirements for a scientific workplace as open source on a Window Maker desktop.

From the beginning, I loved the clarity and structure of FreeBSD and also the very complete documentation. Very early, I decided to use CURRENT and with it the latest available adaptations. FreeBSD mailing lists, forums, and IRC have been invaluable over the years. There was always fast, friendly, and competent help.

• Gordon: I was fortunate that one of my classmates was into FreeBSD and that he gave me a CD of FreeBSD 4.0-RELEASE when it was just released. I started to use FreeBSD at work as a firewall and for some web server and IDS purposes. Later, I started to use FreeBSD as my main operating system for a couple of years. I always liked the completeness of the operating system, ranging from the base system to the kernel and, of course, the ports collection.

How did you end up becoming a committer?

• Rainer: In the early years of using FreeBSD, I posted some suggestions in mailing lists and forums every now and then. The creation of official bug reports resulted from a desire to submit software not yet available as a new port. As one of my first submissions, I submitted a PR in 2009 for a new port: math/saga. After some off-list communication, the port was accepted just three days later. What a feeling! About 220 PR submits followed over the next years. In 2014, I was asked by Wen Heping if I was interested in a commit bit. Although I was very happy with the invitation, my job was so demanding that I declined. In the time that followed, I had to postpone such attractive offers twice more.

This year, in late spring, Tobias C. Berner asked if I was interested in a ports commit bit. After some consideration, I happily accepted. Tobias and Gleb Popov are really nice, patient, and helpful mentors, and it has been great fun to learn from them.

• Gordon: had contributed some patches from time to time around 2004. After 2018, I had some free time and remembered how much fun the Project was in the old days, looked through some release documentation and installed it again. I always liked the comprehensive documentation, especially the man pages and the FreeBSD Handbook, so I started to submit some patches and finally got my commit bit at the beginning of June this year.

How has your experience been since joining the FreeBSD Project? Do you have any advice for readers who may be interested in also becoming a FreeBSD committer?

• Rainer: In my few weeks as a ports committer, I have gained experience with subversion, learned many conventions of the commit process, and extended my general understanding of the ports framework. Compared to many other communities, I find the FreeBSD community to be particularly open, helpful, fast, and concrete. It is a pleasure to work on solutions with others in this community.

Even as a submitter without professional programming or network administration knowledge, there is a lot you can contribute in the areas of ports and docs. But I have very little experience as a committer so far. Nevertheless, I recommend interested people to take responsibility for further developments in the FreeBSD ports. As a submitter, you should begin with a particular area that interests you.

• Gordon: The experience has been just great. Benedict Reuschling is my mentor, and he does a great job of explaining the nuances of quality in documentation and he always offers a helping hand when I run into problems. If someone is contributing patches via bugzilla, they should also provide a differential in FreeBSD Phabricator. That way, it will be more likely to be reviewed and picked up for a commit later. FreeBSD developers will notice your number of submitted patches and that might lead to a commit bit.

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