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Data Management Techniques for NEOCO, the Network for Environmental Observations of the Coastal Ocean

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Data Management Techniques for NEOCO

The Network for Environmental Observations of the Coastal Oceans

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Over the last two years, a new coastal monitoring system has been developed in California. The Network for Environmental Observation of the Coastal Ocean (NEOCO) addresses the need for long-term high-resolution coastal data. Seven initial observation sites have been established at marine stations affiliated with the University of California.

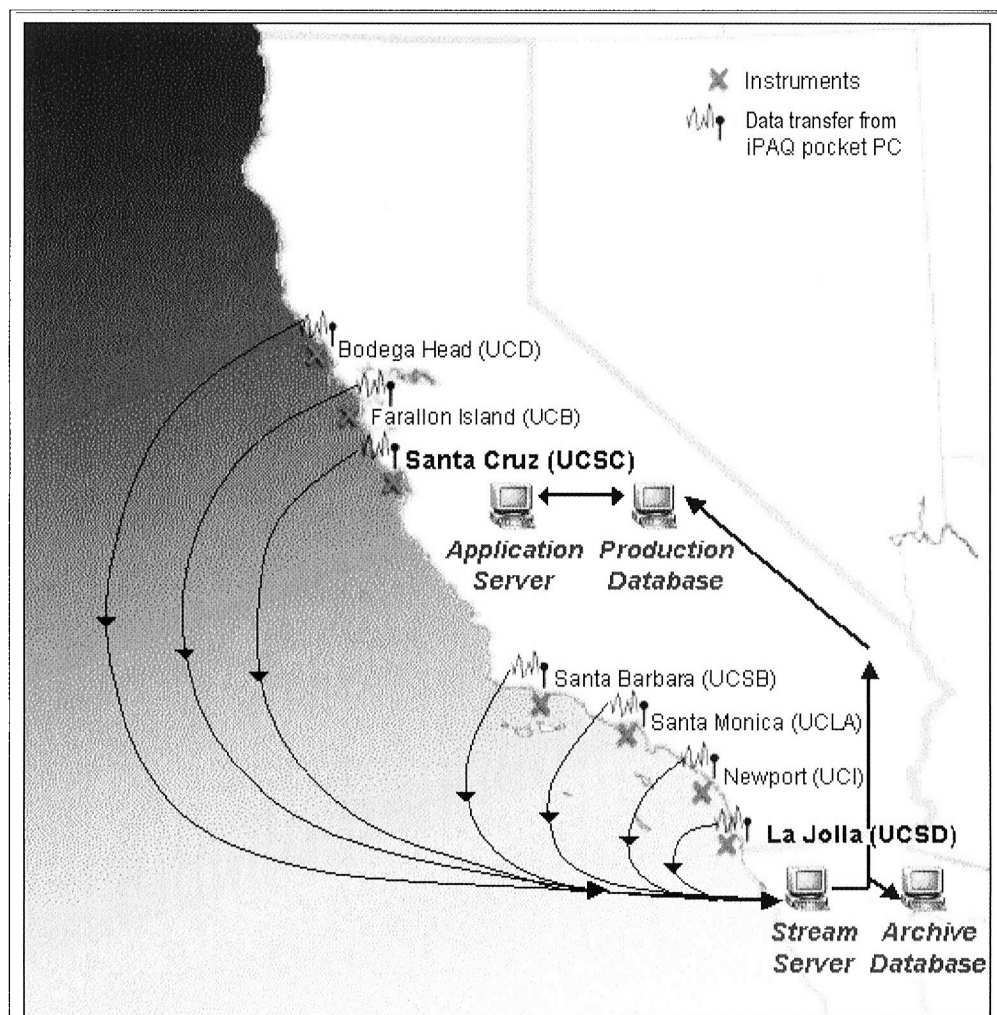
Data streams are obtained continuously using standard instrumentation at each observation site. This spatially distributed network transfers data to a relational database management system with web accessibility and reliable archiving. This article describes the NEOCO infrastructure for managing a continuous influx of oceanographic data and making this data accessible over the Internet.

System Structure

Coastal observation sites have been established at Bodega Head (University of California, Davis), Farallon Island (University of California, Berkeley), Santa Cruz (University of California, Santa Cruz), Santa Barbara (University of California, Santa Barbara), Santa Monica (University of California, Los

Angeles), Newport (University of California, Irvine) and La Jolla (University of California, San Diego). The sites at Bodega Head, Santa Cruz and La Jolla are currently operational.

Data stream from the NEOCO system showing University of California-affiliated observation sites.



This summer, the Santa Barbara, Santa Monica and Newport sites will be functional. The installation at Farallon Island has been delayed due to permitting issues.

Pier-mounted instrument packages are maintained at each observation site to monitor temperature, density, salinity, conductivity and pressure. Each instrument package has a Sea-Bird SBE16 CTD with temperature, conductivity and pressure sensors. There are plans for installing auxiliary sensors at all sites (e.g., fluorometers and

“Pier-mounted instrument packages are maintained at each observation site to monitor temperature, density, salinity, conductivity and pressure.”

transmissometers). We are currently testing the performance of these auxiliary sensors in the nearshore environment at the La Jolla site. The fluorometers that are being tested are the Seapoint fluorometer and the WET Labs ECO-FLS fluorometer with copper shutter. The transmissometers

being tested are the WET Labs C-Star transmissometer 10-centimeter and 25-centimeter path length. These instruments collect data every four minutes, with 30-second averages. Power is supplied from the pier, with a Sea-Bird battery pack providing backup power.

At each observation site, raw data streams from the instruments are logged to the memory buffer in a local Compaq iPAQ pocket PC. Each iPAQ transmits the data via Ethernet, DSL or modem to a stream server at Scripps Institution of Oceanography. This server autonomously executes several programs to handle the incoming data. Specifically, the server performs four key tasks. First, the server loads a full copy of the raw data into an archive database at Scripps. Second, the stream server performs quality assurance protocols to ensure that incoming data values fall within the expected ranges. Third, raw voltage data streams are processed and converted into standard engineering units using relevant instrument calibrations. Finally, the stream server establishes a connection with the database server at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and automatically loads the processed, filtered data into the primary NEOCO database. This database is an Oracle relational database, implemented and administrated at the Santa Cruz site. An application server, also at the Santa Cruz facility, provides web access to the database.

Backup and recovery are primary considerations in the design of this data transfer system. As with any real-time network, uncontrollable system interruptions must be anticipated. For example, a power outage may bring the network down, or instrument failure may corrupt a data stream. To maintain data integrity during such events, network recovery procedures are built into every step of the data transfer pathway. The field instruments are equipped with backup power supply for up to three days, and spare instruments are available for a rapid swap-out in the event of instrument problems. Data backups are preserved in the iPAQ memory buffers and in the archive database. Additionally, an auto-startup script has been



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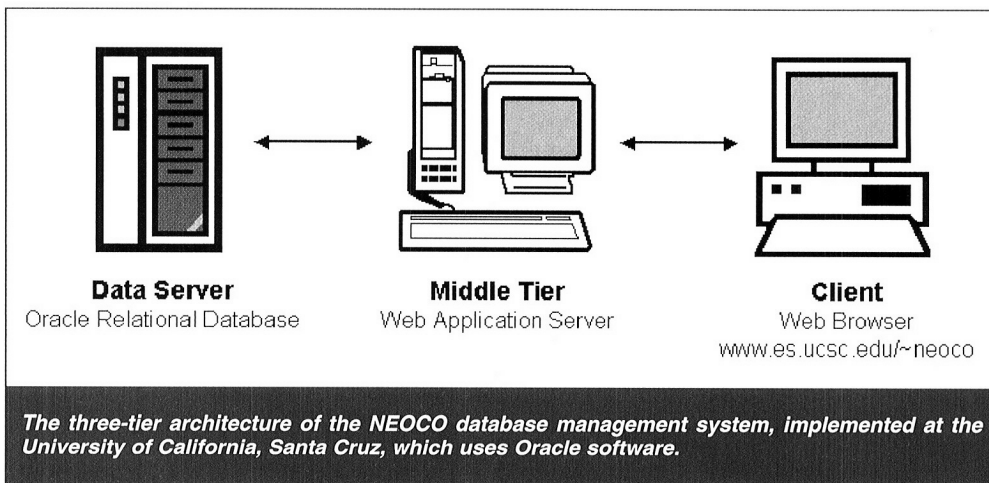
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ity for data storage. Separate tables contain the details about observation sites, instrument calibrations and other auxiliary information. This modular design allows new sites or instruments to be added to the NEOCO system without altering the database structure. For example, when a new observation site is established, the new location is recorded in the site's table while the data from that site is written to the master data table. This way, new information can fit easily into the

developed at the University of California, Santa Cruz, to automatically bring the NEOCO database back online after power failure.

The NEOCO database management system at Santa Cruz is implemented in a three-tier architecture.¹ The bottom tier consists of an Oracle 8.1.7 relational database, which stores the data. The design of this database was carefully planned in light of the size and scalability issues unique to a long-term, real-time monitoring system.² Because the database is publicly accessible, many different types of

queries are expected. All logical data are stored in one master table to enable maximum flexibility in query options. Independent data parameters (i.e., temperature, salinity, etc.) are assigned to attributes in a relational table keyed by timestamp and observation site. This main table receives a continuous influx of roughly 10,000 rows of data per month from each of the observation sites. The table is indexed spatially to prevent its large size from slowing query performance. An internal 80-gigabyte hard drive supplies the required disk space capac-

existing database structure, without requiring a new table each time project expansion occurs.

An Oracle 9i 1.0.2.0.1 Application Server functions as a middle-tier interpreter between the NEOCO database and a web client.¹ The application server executes a program developed at the University of California, Santa Cruz, that parses query requests from a web user. This program embeds HTML and dynamic SQL in the Oracle database language PL/SQL.³ When a client's request has been parsed, the application server connects

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CIRCLE NO. 45 ON INQUIRY CARD

a. Specify your query:

Run Query [Reset]

Query Options
Choose data fields to query:

- Conductivity
- Salinity
- Temperature
- Pressure
- Sigma_t
- Fluorescence
- Chlorophyll Absorption
- Transmittance
- Beam Attenuation Coefficient

Start Time
("MON-DD-YYYY HH24-MI-SS")
(eg. JUN-11-2002 14:00:00): APR-01-2003 08:00:00

End Time
("MON-DD-YYYY HH24-MI-SS"): APR-07-2003 20:00:00

Choose Observation Sites:

- La Jolla, CA
- Newport, CA
- Santa Monica, CA
- Santa Barbara, CA
- Santa Cruz, CA
- Farallon Island, CA
- Bodega Head, CA

b. Results from the NEOCO Database

Observation Site	Date	Salinity (psu)	Temperature (°C)
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:03:24	33.265099	15.8236
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:07:24	33.265598	15.9164
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:11:24	33.264702	15.8988
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:15:24	33.2659	16.051399
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:19:24	33.264702	16.0222
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:23:24	33.266701	16.0865
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:27:24	33.267601	16.1861
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:31:24	33.2677	16.174601
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:35:24	33.266602	16.1166
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:39:24	33.266701	16.065399
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:43:24	33.265999	16.044399
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:47:24	33.265202	16.005199
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:51:24	33.265099	15.9957
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:55:24	33.265999	16.053699
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 08:59:24	33.264999	16.048
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 09:03:24	33.2644	16.0471
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 09:07:24	33.265202	15.9969
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 09:11:24	33.2649	16.0114
La Jolla, CA	APR-01-2003 09:15:24	33.2645	16.084801

c. NEOCO Time Series Last 7 Days

salinity :: temperature :: pressure :: sigma_t :: chlorophyll :: transmittance :: beam_atten

engineering plots

Salinity (psu)

Temperature (°C)

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Web interface for accessing the NEOCO database: (a) data query interface, (b) example download of data in HTML format, (c) example of seven-day plot automatically generated four times daily.

to the database, executes the appropriate query and ultimately gives the results back to the web client. The client, or end web user, represents the top tier in the data management architecture. The structural details of the database and application server are transparent to the end user. Any public user may query the NEOCO database via a web browser.

Web Interface

The end result of this coastal monitoring network is an extensive repository of data, accessible over the Internet. The NEOCO homepage (www.es.ucsc.edu/~neoco) provides a link to access the database. This link provides web users with three options for viewing the data. The first, most flexible option is to retrieve data in HTML format. Using a simple check-box query form, researchers may request any combination of data parameters, from any specified time frame and any combination of observation sites. For example, a researcher may

wish to view salinity and temperature values from La Jolla over the period of June 13-16, 2002. This query can easily be executed by selecting the appropriate check boxes and clicking the "Run Query" button. The customized subset of data is then extracted from the NEOCO database and returned to the user in HTML. The second option for database access is to download data in ASCII or Excel formats. With this option, researchers fill out a check-box query form to download all data parameters from any combination of observation sites over any specified time frame. Finally, researchers may quickly assess coastal trends by viewing seven-day time-series plots of NEOCO data. These plots are automatically generated four times daily for each site.

Rationale

Of the standard database systems available, a relational database was determined to be the best choice for NEOCO. Relational database technol-

ogy allows the user to extract subsets of the data.² Customized queries can be made to retrieve just those portions of data in which the user is interested. This subsetting capability is ideal for a long-term research facility like NEOCO, which must accommodate a broad spectrum of user interests.

Oracle software was chosen to support NEOCO for several reasons. The size of an Oracle database is unlimited.⁴ Any amount of data may be stored, provided the hardware contains enough disk space. Such a large-scale database is necessitated by the large-scale data flow expected in a coastal monitoring system. NEOCO must manage roughly 10,000 incoming rows of data per site per month. Future project expansion would increase the required database size capacity even further. The NEOCO database has also been designed to include new data types in the future. Oracle databases provide the built-in flexibility to store any type of data, including ASCII, binary data, satellite imagery and video clips.⁴ Finally, Oracle vends software specialized for building and deploying web applications.¹ This software provides the framework for developing and maintaining an online user interface to the database. An Internet-ready platform is essential to make NEOCO data available for students, researchers, legislators, policy makers, managers and the public.

Web access to oceanographic data greatly facilitates environmental literacy. The NEOCO online database offers a public resource, with relevance to coastal water quality, fisheries management, marine conservation and coastal recreation.

With rapid technological advancements in instrumentation, ever-increasing volumes of scientific data can be collected in oceanographic studies. However, accessibility of this data is limited by the rigor of the database. Data management systems need greater capacity and stability to keep pace with growing volumes of data. The database architecture developed for NEOCO provides an operable solution to the challenge of successfully managing a large, continuously expanding influx of data. The NEOCO tools for data management can be applied to other oceanographic projects with large data sets.

Future Work

Future work is planned to enhance the impact of NEOCO through collab-

orations with other institutions and educational outreach activities. Project expansion is anticipated at San Luis Obispo (California Polytechnic State University) and at the Romberg Tiburon Center (San Francisco State University).

In addition, historical daily temperature data from the multi-decadal Shore Stations⁵ program based at Scripps is available from the website. Other institutions are invited to make use of the NEOCO database infrastructure; additional sites will enhance

the value of the network by providing extended spatial coverage.

Summary

A reliable data management infrastructure has been developed for the NEOCO system. Real-time data streams from Bodega Head, Santa Cruz and La Jolla are now available online. The work in progress aims to connect all seven observation sites to the online network during the summer of 2003, and to incorporate other sites along the coast of California. At this

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time, the public is invited to make use of the NEOCO data system.

Co-Authors

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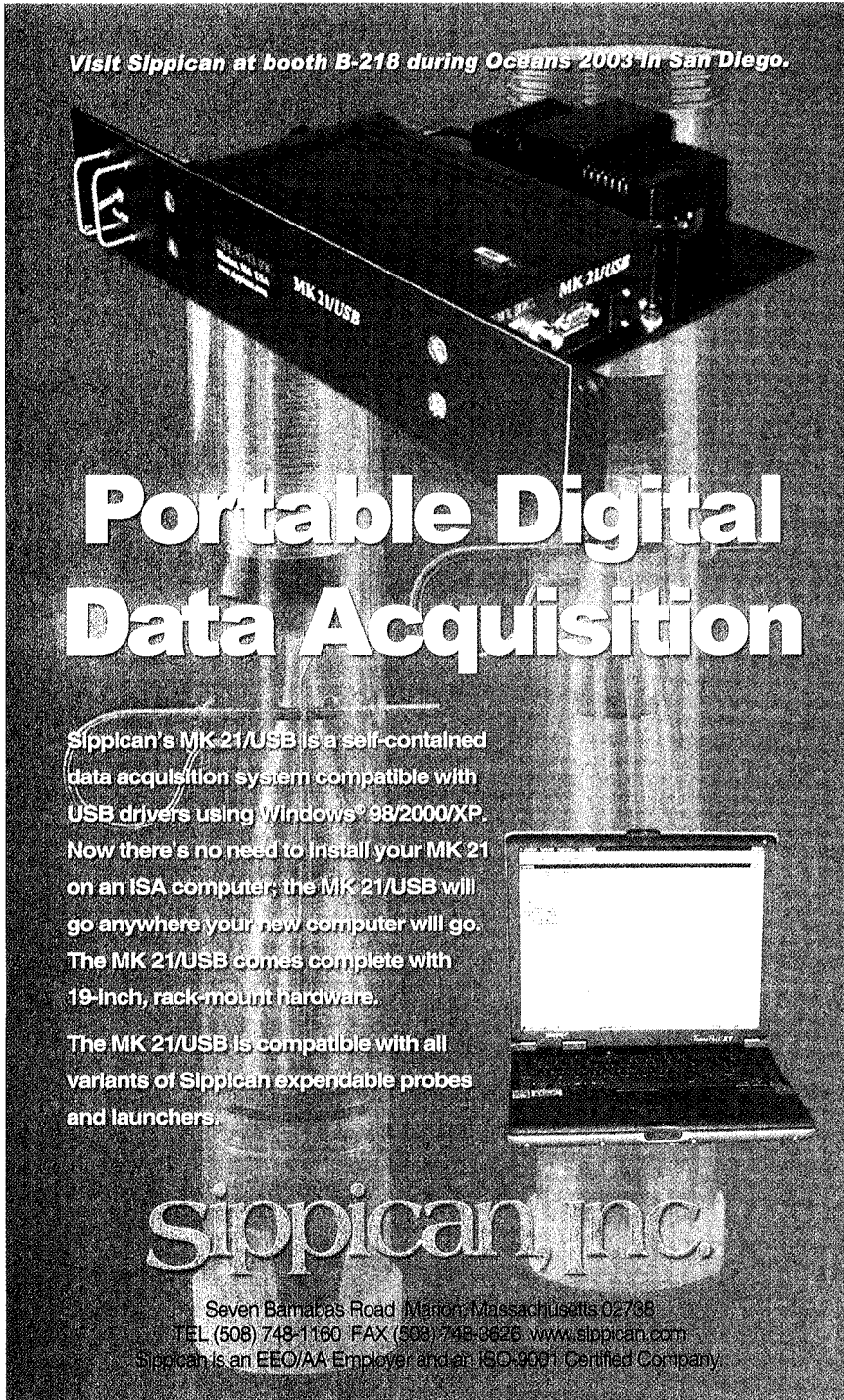
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