

On Location A Review by Dorman L. Bullard

On Location is a file and text locating utility published by ON Technology Inc. This corporation is headed by Mitch Kapor who founded Lotus Inc., one of the largest and most successful companies in the MS-DOS world. Of course Lotus did not fare well in its earlier attempt at entering the Macintosh World with Jazz, an interesting integrated software package that just didn't fly.

On Location is a much less complex product than was Jazz. Let me quote Mitch Kapor on the subject of complexity: "We live in a complex world, but that doesn't mean good products have to be complex too. Our first product, On Location, provides a simple solution to a common problem: how to quickly find and view a particular file when you have hundreds (or even thousands) on your hard disk." So says Mr. Kapor, and I think he's on to something. In any case I believe he has a winner in this product.

On Location comes with a small manual (5 by 8 inches, 24 pages in length). An Index is provided separately on one side of a card with the same dimensions. I haven't yet decided whether the index was provided this way deliberately so it could be propped up on the keyboard for ready reference, or whether it was a last minute add-on. I will be learning this program as I write this review (which may make the publishers nervous). Accordingly I will be using the manual a lot, and will let you know at the end whether this rather small manual is adequate or not. At first blush it seemed rather small for the power of the program. However, I must say that so far it has provided what I needed to know. Maybe Mitch was right when he says On Location is a simple solution.

On Location is a desk accessory that locates files quickly, by filename or the words in the files. Once you've found the files you want, you can view and copy the information from them without opening their applications.

On Location works by building an index of all the files on a disk or in a folder. The index contains the names of all the files and (optionally) all the words in files containing text. Note that the files containing text are not limited to wordprocessing or text files. It could include files such as Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, Wingz Macros, Aldus PageMaker documents etc. The first thing you need to do when running On Location is to create an index. Here's the first set of choices you have when you start to create a custom index:

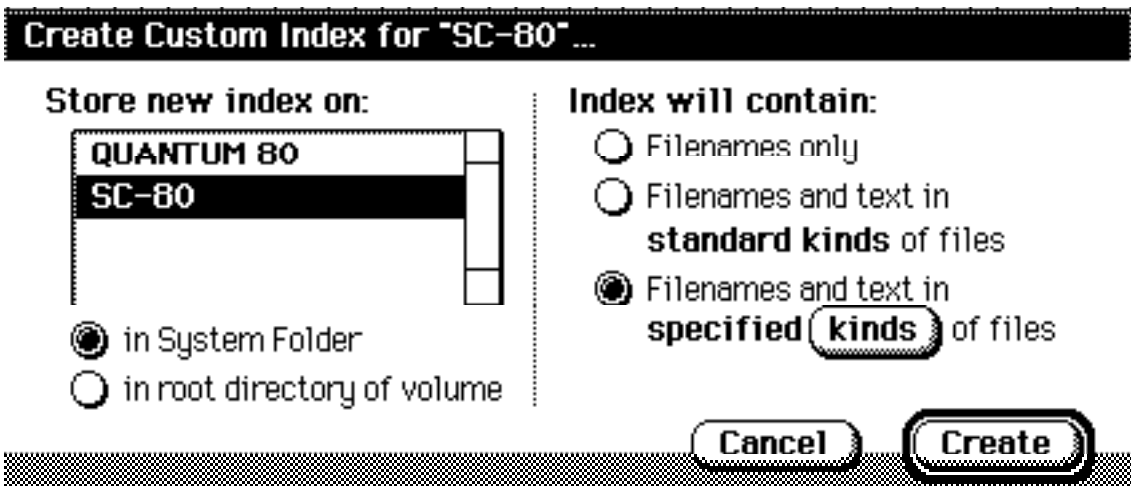


Figure 1.

To the left are listed the two hard drives attached to my Mac. You get some choices as to where to store the index. To the right is where the real operational choices come in. First, you can choose to index file names only. Or you can index filenames and "standard kinds" of files. On Location has decided on a set of applications common enough to be considered "standard." This "standard" includes many the most popular files which contain text, including the most popular wordprocessors. Thus if you don't want to go to the effort of customizing you can just use On Location's "standard" set and press the "Create" button. If you decide to specify the kinds of files to be indexed you get the following screen:

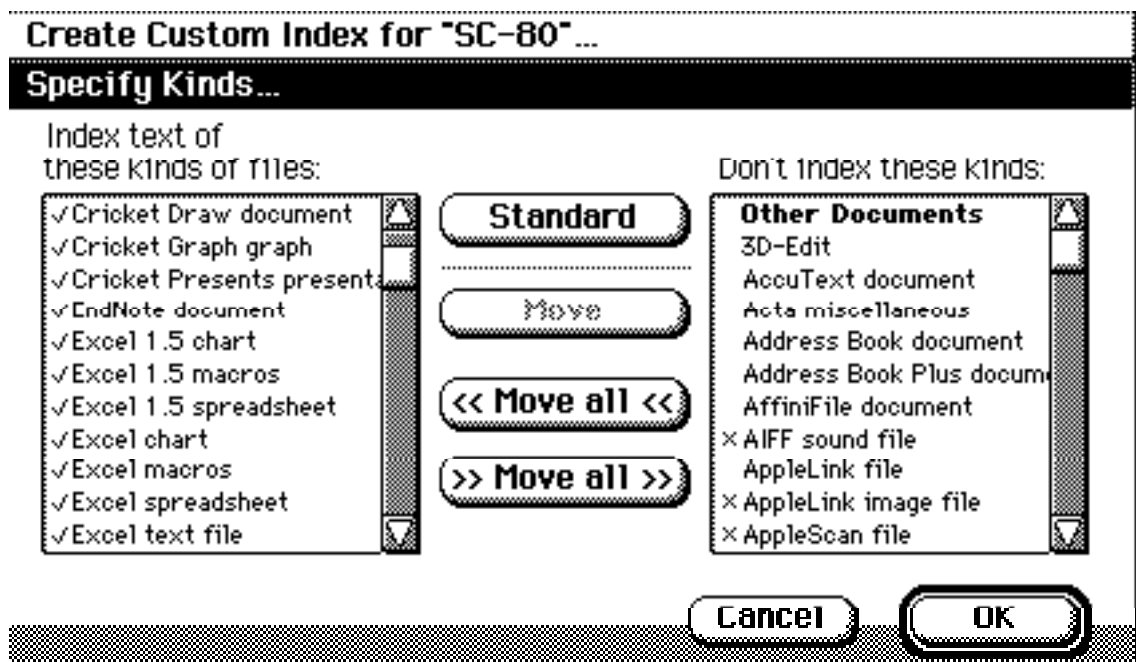


figure 2

This works like the Font/DA Mover. On the left are the kinds of files that will be indexed. The file kinds with checkmarks are those in On Location's "Standard" set. The "x" to the left of a file kind indicates one not containing text (sound files, MacPaint documents, etc.). So, you simply select from the list on the left the kinds you do **not** want indexed and move them to the list on the right and vice versa. Although all of the kinds of files I normally use were in On Location's "standard" set, I customized my index. I did so since the final index would be smaller, making it easier to locate a file from the list. It also seemed the list would load a bit faster, although I suppose the time I save will only be a fraction of a second, since On Location loads its index pretty rapidly.

Once you make your choice you push "OK" then tell On Location to Create your index. If you have a large disk drive, or a slowish Mac and/or hard disk drive, you can then go for a cup of coffee (and maybe a sandwich). I created indexes on both a Mac 512K upgraded to MacPlus capability (one MEG of RAM) and on a Mac IIci. On the plus, with an 80 MEG hard drive that was pretty full, the index contained 1551 files, 269 folders and 632 files containing text. It took almost 43 minutes to create the index. However, on the IIci with a very full 80 MEG internal hard drive and index of 2,113 files, with 468 text files it took less than 12 minutes. The number of text files, and their size, would appear to be major drivers in how fast the index will be created. According to the On Location manual, an index will typically occupy less than 2 percent of the disk space used by the files on the volume. The indexes cited above are 420 and 585 K in size respectively.

Once you have created the indexes, you never have to do it again (barring a hard disk failure). On Location will automatically keep the index up to date. If you choose the "Index in Background" option, On Location will watch for changes to your disk. As files are created, saved, renamed, moved or deleted, the index is automatically updated during lull times in your use of the computer. I've found this to be almost completely unobtrusive. The only time I have noticed a delay for index updating is on quitting, or when I first call up On Location. In each case the delay is only a couple seconds. And, when first calling up On Location you have a choice of aborting the update. You would do this if you were sure the file you wanted to locate had not been created or changed recently. Anyhow, it is a nice touch giving you the choice of aborting the update in this situation.

Now that you have created your indexes, you are ready to start using On Location. When you invoke the On Location desk accessory, a drop-down menu is created in the Menu bar, and the following dialog box appears:

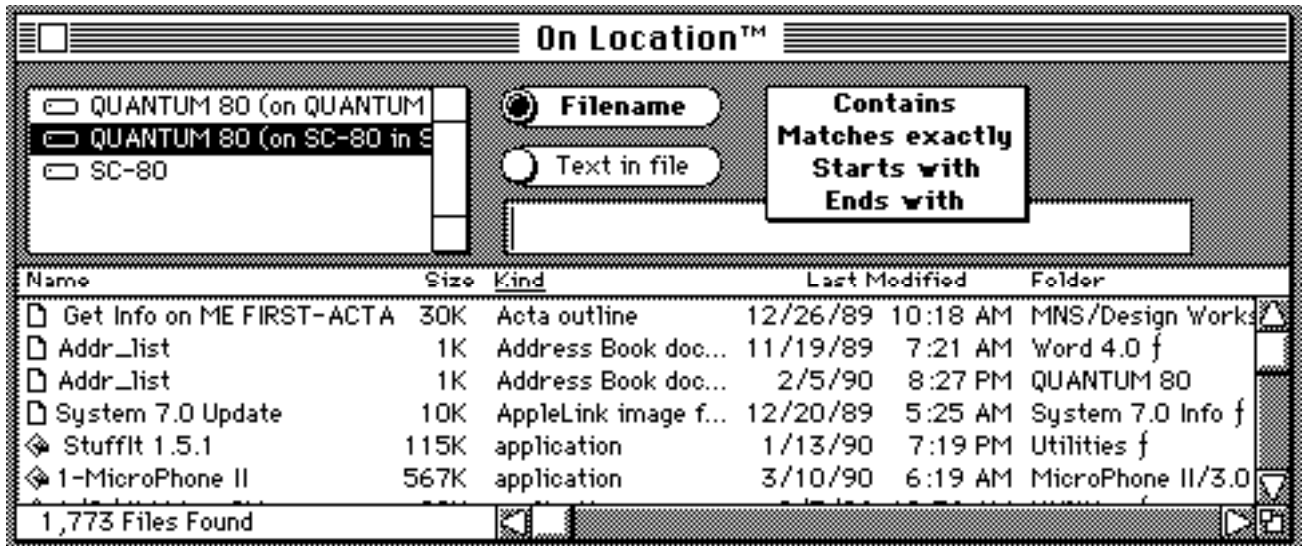


Figure 3

On the left are shown all the indexes available with the active one (whose files are shown just below) highlighted. You can click on the index you wish to make active, or shift-click to select two or more indexes. You can also restrict the search to a single folder by double-clicking on the an index to get a file/folder miniFinder. On the right are the radio buttons giving you a choice of finding filenames or text in files. Below the buttons is the box in which you type the search text. In this example search by Filename is chosen, and I have dropped down the search criteria box to show the choices in finding files. You can find files in volumes that are not mounted. However, to view, open, print a file or use the disk utilities, the volume must be mounted.

If the "Text in File" button is highlighted, On Location will compare each word in your search string to the words in the indexed files. All files containing the search text are displayed. The search criteria include "Matches exactly", and "Matches the root of". As an example of the latter (called "fuzzy" matching), if the search text was "study", a file containing the word "studies" would be found. Differences in capitalization are ignored. You can use two or more words separated by a space as the search text. In that case only files with both words would be located.

The search text box is always "live". That is, you can always just start typing or changing the search text in the file, even in the middle of an on-going search. The search will immediately restart the search based on the new search text. When On Location is first invoked, there is no text in the search text box, so On Location begins to display all files. On Location remembers whether you last were searching for Filenames or Text in Files and that is the default when it On Location is next started.

The file list can be sorted by Name, Size, Kind or Type, or Last Modified date. In the figure 3, the files are sorted by "Kind" (notice that heading is underlined). Clicking on Size (for example) will list the files sorted from largest to smallest.

Most of the above had to do with finding files. Well, now that we've found them, what can we do with them? Well, you can "View" a file by double-clicking it, or by selecting "View File" from the menu, or by pressing Command-1. If the file is one for which On Location has provided a file reader, the file can be viewed with its original fonts and styles. If the fonts used are not installed in your Mac, you may wish to improved readability by turning off the "View Styled Text" command. The file will then be displayed in 9-point Geneva plain text. On Location incorporates MacLink/Bridge by DataViz, and provides a set of 15 Claris Corporation's XTND standard file readers. These include MacWrite, MicroSoft Word (versions 3 and 4), WriteNow, and others. Here's a sample of a MicroSoft Word file viewed by On Location:

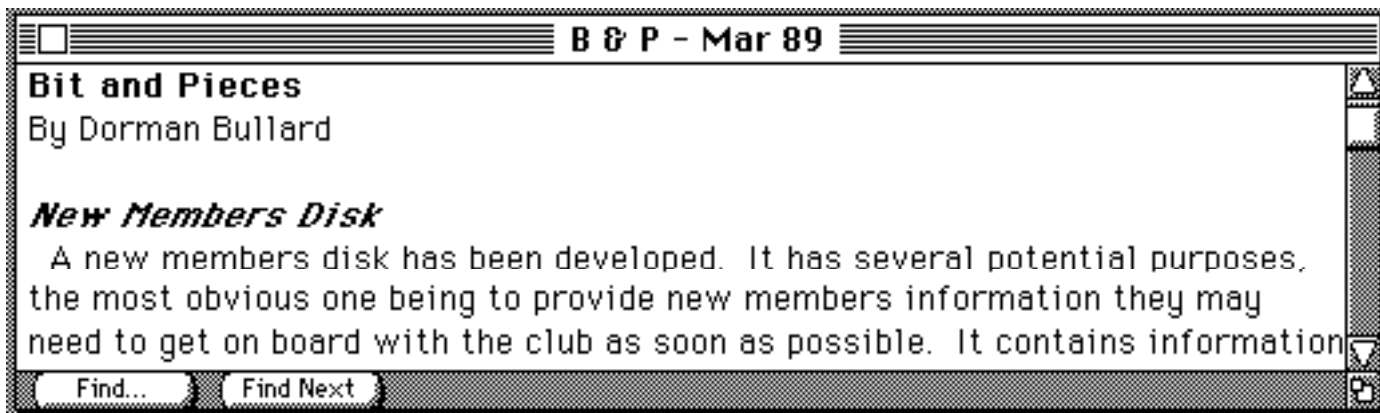


Figure 4

If this file had been opened by a search for a text string, the file would have "opened" to the first occurrence of the text which would be highlighted. You could then use the "Find Next" button at the bottom of the window to look for other occurrences. The "Find" button will give you a dialog box to allow searching for a completely different string of text. I suppose it is obvious, but for completeness let me state that the text can be selected and copied. You cannot edit the text. However, if the file's application is on a mounted volume, you can open the document from the On Location menu (or a Command-O). You can also print the file if its application is available. You can open and print multiple files, assuming all selected files are of the same kind (i.e. have a common application).

To round out the capabilities On Location let's take a look at its menu:

On Location ⌘	
About On Location...	
Create Index...	
Indexes...	

View File	⌘1
View Previous File	⌘2
View Next File	⌘3

Open Files	⌘0
Print Files	⌘P
Copy Files...	⌘D
Move Files...	⌘M
Delete Files	⌘K
Rename File...	⌘R
New Folder...	⌘N

You can view a file on the "find" list by using the View command. And you can quickly go from file to file with the indicated commands. The files appear extremely rapidly (on a IICI). So much so that it seems like the index must be stored in RAM, and the files created from the index rather than being loaded from the disk. The utilities to handle selected file are obvious from the menu.

Well, a bit about system requirements then lets wrap this up. On Location works on a MacPlus or higher with at least one megabyte of RAM. System 6.0 or higher is required. It can be installed and used on any Mac running TOPS, and indexes on volumes mounted using TOPS can be shared. However only the Mac that owns the volume can reindex or auto update indexes on that volume. You cannot install or run On Location on an AppleShare server. To index an AppleShare volume, you need to mount the volume, then index normally, storing the index locally. For both TOPS and AppleShare, this index must be reindexed locally, then copied back to the remote volume. Obviously searching from a remotely stored index will not result in the same performance as with a locally stored index.

I've tried to give an idea of the speed of operation of On Location. Since searches are from an index, finding files is very fast. Finding text is a bit slower, but still faster than other programs such as Gopher which has to access the disk to find each file, then search the text. And you do not have to wait until one operation is complete to start another. For example,

when you start On Location, it will begin listing all files since there is nothing in the text search box. But even before the On Location window fully appears you can start typing in search text. As found files appear, you can change the search text and the files with the new text start appearing, almost like a wave effect at a football game. OK, OK, I admit this effect is only marginally more useful than a wave at football game, but who said this had to be all work?

Are there faults, and wish list items? Well, maybe. About a month after creating my indexes, I got a message saying one of them was damaged and couldn't be used. I have no idea whether that was a problem caused by On Location, or by me flailing away at something else. I rebuilt the index and it hasn't happened again, but that was only a couple days ago. Anyhow, it does suggest one should backup indexes like any other file (although backing up would save only a little time since you would have to update a restored index).

On the operational side, although you can use a pure number to search for filenames, you cannot search for pure numbers when searching for text. I can't think of any technical reason for this but there may be one. Some would wish for more robust search criteria such as found in Gopher for text and in Disktop (among others) for file searches. However, ya know what? I think Mitch's **Keep It Simple Stupid** approach (the **KISS** principle) is a winner. I'll bet that due to the speed of On Location, by the time it would take to remember (or look up in the manual) the format for date searches (for example), the sought for file could be found by just rapidly inspecting the lists, and/or cycling through with the view command. I know that with me Gopher will never see the light of day again. The last two times I used it, I ended up pulling my hair and swearing. I couldn't remember the secret code words to get it going. The first time I looked in the manual to find out how to work it. The second time I couldn't remember how to use it, I just gave up. Perhaps for huge storage areas with thousands of files more robust search criteria is necessary. But for my paltry little 160 MEGs, I'll stick with the KISS principle and On Location.

I said I would let you know if the rather small manual was adequate. The answer is yes. It is well organized and uses lots of illustrations. I hate it when I have to write a review while I'm still in the enthusiastic stage. Somehow it just feels like I must be overlooking something. However, this time I don't think the enthusiasm will wane. I did feel it only fair to warn you what stage I'm in!