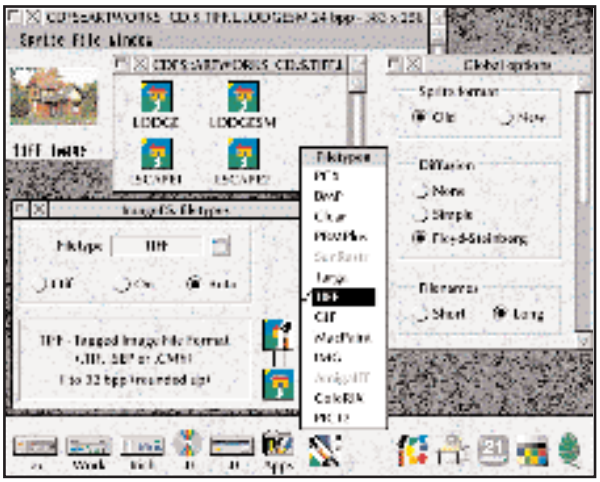
ImageFS

Richard Hallas previews a new approach to foreign image-file translation

If you spend much time importing graphics files created on other machines, you may be tired of using ChangeFSI or Translator to convert them into sprites before you can use them. As well as taking time and being a nuisance, this also requires an intermediate sprite file, which can be an annoying waste of disc space in itself.



ImageFS's options windows

ImageFS promises to solve such problems by allowing you to treat many foreign graphic file formats exactly as though they were plain sprites; so, for example, double-clicking on a TIFF file might load it into Paint, or you could drag a GIF file straight into an Impression frame.

The following file formats were supported in my (pre-release) copy: PCX, BMP, Clear, PBMPlus, Targa, TIFF, GIF, MacPaint, IMG (Atari GEM), ColoRIX and PICT2, with Amiga IFF and Sun rasterfiles on the menu awaiting implementation. ImageFS needs RISC OS 3.10 or above to operate.

USER INTERFACE

As its name implies, ImageFS is a true filing system. Using it is simplicity itself: once installed on the icon bar you can treat all the files listed above exactly as though they were sprites. The original file icon still appears in Filer windows, so you know what kind of image it is; but, by default, double-clicking on the file will load it into Paint as if it were a sprite.

The icon bar application is in fact just a front-end which you can quit, leaving the filing system intact. The front-end allows you to control exactly how ImageFS handles the different filetypes via a control window. Foreign image files are treated in one of three ways: you can ignore them, use them exactly like sprite files, or treat them like directories; and you can set the options for each filetype individually. For maximum simplicity, treating foreign formats like sprite files is most convenient, as you can simply double-click or drag to load them. However, if you try using files in this way with another conversion program such as ChangeFSI, the latter will get confused since the file has already been converted by ImageFS.

In such cases, the directory method is best: double-clicking on a file will open it up like a directory, showing a sprite inside; you can click or drag the sprite files to get at the converted version, but the file itself will be treated as normal by other programs. In fact, certain file formats can contain more than one image per file, and the directory approach will allow you to pick which image you want by selecting the appropriate sprite, although this was not yet implemented in the version of ImageFS which I saw. However, in this directory mode , the name of the sprite can be presented in the form of additional information about the file which you would not normally see (e.g. the name of the author, or the resolution and colours).

Various other options can be configured, the most important being the format of sprite produced by the conversion process. With <I>New format<I>, ImageFS will choose the most appropriate format up to 32bpp. <I>Old

Continued on page 34