

Retrochallenge 2021 – Paleoferrosaurus

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The landline telephone is widely regarded as a technology whose time has come and gone. For the individual, the wireless telephone is now far more common than the traditional wired sort. For the business, VOIP technology has largely replaced the “plain old telephone service” that many business telephone systems were designed to expect. My employer pays a few hundred dollars per month for a cable modem (soon to be upgraded to fiber optic) and uses the same physical wiring plant for both voice and data communications. The sole remaining copper connection is a “fax line” whose utility decreases each day and will soon become redundant.

Even in my own family, most verbal communication takes place over a variety of cellular devices – my oldest son gifted me an iPhone 8+ back in 2018 that replaced an ancient flip-phone. The wife and younger children use a variety of Apple and Android devices to communicate voice, text, music, video, and raw data. All this communication takes place over a complex wireless network that is entering its fifth iteration of ever-increasing speed and capability. POTS may not be dead, but it’s rapidly becoming irrelevant.

For the retro-computing enthusiast, the downside is that your various ancient computers can’t readily adapt to the modern forms of networking. Yes, there are WiFi adapters and modems out there for such varied systems as the Commodore 64 and Apple II but replacing a phone number with an IP address and using SSH or Telnet to connect with a remote BBS lacks some of the charm of a dialup connection.

I’m probably going to ditch my landline soon, especially since “fiber to the premises” is now available in my area. The cost is comparable to what I’ve been paying for DSL and landline for the last 15 years. The only downside I can see is the inherent difficulties associated with power outages and 911 service. I also have a surplus of ancient equipment that is dependent upon a landline for its basic function. To that end, I need to replicate the functions of a basic landline just to maintain the status quo.

Telephone circuitry is rather basic, but for more than a century it has been the foundation for almost all electronic communication. I don’t want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. If I’m going to move forward with a fiber-optic connection to the outside world, it’s going to be on my own terms and I’m taking my antique technology with me.

— *Paleoferrosaurus*