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[Microfiche on Steroids: The Rosetta Disk](#)

By [Brian Carnell](#) – [August 10, 2000](#)

I am extremely paranoid about data loss. I have multiple back-up copies of my document files, on different media and in different formats. I also try to maintain back-ups at different physical locations to guard against fire or theft. So when I first heard about [The Long Now Foundation's](#) plans to create a next generation Rosetta Disk, my first question was "When can I get one?"

The Long Now Foundation's main purpose is to find solutions to preserve electronic data. The amount of electronic data being created just on a daily basis is overwhelming, and as many people have noted preservation of electronic data presents several problems that are not present with traditional storage media. I have a stack of 5-1/4" disks at home, for example, none of which I can read because I no longer have access to computer that accepts that disk format. Not a big problem for me because I make sure my data is on the latest media, but I know people who had to spend lots of time and money reconstructing documents because the only copy was stored on 5-1/4" floppy disks.

The other problem facing electronic record preservation is the constantly changing file formats. Converting old files into new formats is not always possible, and even when it is, it often takes a lot of time and the document in the new format can be markedly different from the old document.

So what do you do if you want your data to last a *long* time (like several thousand years)? The Long Now Foundation is working with [Norsam](#) on the [Rosetta Disc](#). About

2.5" in diameter, NORSAM takes TIFF and other files and etches the images on to a nickel disk using an ion beam system. To make a long story short, anyone can then read the files with the naked eye by putting the disk under a microscope.

NORSAM says it can fit anywhere from 1,000 to 100,000 images on a single disk, depending on how high a density the user wants. The higher the density, the more advanced the microscope has to be to read the disks. At a density of 100,000 images per disk, for example, it is going to require a more sophisticated microscope

to read the disk compared to one with a density of only 1,000 images per disk. NORSAM also sells a bright-field optical microscope with a CCD attachment, so if you need to you can quickly access and import the etched images on the disk into a computer.

Since NORSAM's microscope goes for \$10,000, I am betting the cost of etching the files is out of my price range, but give them time and future technological innovations and maybe someday this will be an archival option within reach of paranoid data-freaks like me. I can hardly wait.

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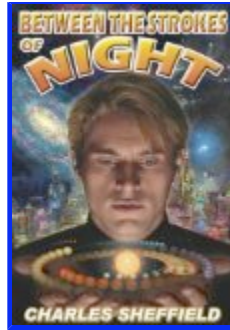
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