

History of Red Hat Linux

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Abstract

There has been over a decade of Linux development at Red Hat. This document describes that history, particularly focusing on the development themes for each release of Linux provided by Red Hat.
Release History

“You know, it’s a funny thing. We go ahead and do things, and afterward, people go and start making history out of it.” — Fred Weick, Aircraft Designer. For the first decade or so, we did not set out to write the history of Red Hat Linux, so some of this data is a bit fuzzy or conflicting. We hope to do more research into our own past to give more useful data. This history is embryonic. It is intended to give some sense of where we have been, to help build a shared understanding of what we did right, as well as what we have done wrong, in order to continue a tradition of excellence.

In the following table, the Version number is prefaced by "RHL" for Red Hat Linux, "RHEL" for Red Hat Enterprise Linux, and "FC" for Fedora Core.

Date	Version	Code Name (or Release Name)	Description
July 29 1994	n/a	Preview (or Beta)	Initial test release, not distributed widely or publicly, built on Red Hat’s original package management system, RPP. This was called "Red Hat Software Linux" and abbreviated "RHS Linux" in the manuals and other accompanying documentation, and was provided on a single CD with an unmarked solid red label. The letter accompanying it thanked the recipient for purchasing the beta version and was signed by Marc Ewing (Red Hat’s founder) and Damien Neil (Red Hat’s first employee, a summer intern). It used a 1.1.18 development series kernel. Reports of a version number for this product appear to be exaggerated.

October 31 1994	RHL 0.9	Halloween	<p>First widely-available beta release of Red Hat Linux. It was still a purchased beta, but at least now it came with documentation. Users had their choice of the 1.0.9 (stable) or 1.1.54 (development) Linux kernel. The manual still referred in at least one place to the 1.1.18 kernel shipped just a few months previously. The manual also suggested that most users would not use the rpp program to install software; instead, they would use the Tcl/Tk LIM (Linux Installation Manager) graphical front end.</p> <p>One of the critical factors that made RHS Linux a success even as a beta was the focus on graphical configuration tools; even this early beta had graphical tools to configure users and groups, /etc/fstab, time and date (this tool even had an easter egg!), and most importantly, networking. Few people today recall the pain of setting up networking on Linux completely from scratch, following steps in a long HOWTO document, and then going through the process again after installing (not upgrading to) every new version of their distribution they installed.</p>
May 1995	RHL 1.0	Mother's Day	<p>First non-beta release of Red Hat Linux, it was not released on the 13th (Mothers' Day that year) but that was the closest holiday, and so it got its name. Built on the 1.2.8 kernel, this release introduced the name "Red Hat Commercial Linux" instead of "Red Hat Software Linux", and replaced the very tall top hat logo with an image of a man walking quickly, carrying a briefcase, and holding on to a red hat. This was the first release done after ACC Bookstores (Bob Young) bought out Red Hat Software, Inc. (Mark Ewing) and adopted the better name. (ACC Bookstores was so named in order to appear first alphabetically.)</p>
Late Summer 1995	RHL 1.1	Mother's Day+0.1	<p>Bug fix release. 1.2.11 or 1.2.13 kernel, depending on exactly which version you got! Known in at least one incarnation as "The Official Red Hat Commercial Linux". The name, for reasons lost in time has always been pronounced "Mother's Day Plus One".</p>
Later Summer 1995	RHL 2.0 beta	?	<p>Beta of first release to use RPM, which meant that upgrades from earlier releases were not supported. This version of RPM was written in Perl for quick development. First release using the ELF format for libraries and executables; previous releases used the "a.out" format.</p>
Early Fall 1995	RHL 2.0	?	<p>First formal release using RPM. Marketing typography called this "Red Hat LiNux".</p>

November 1995	RHL 2.1	Bluesky	Bug fix release. Digital (remember them?) did a promotional CD of "Red Hat 2.1 LiNux" for the x86 platform as a teaser for the forthcoming release of a Red Hat Software product for their Alpha platform; "Red Hat Linux/Alpha 2.1" was released in January 1996. Included the 1.2.13 (stable) and 1.3.32 (development) kernels.
March 15 1996	RHL 3.0.3	Picasso	<p>Engineers intended this release to be called "2.2" but marketing (i.e. Bob Young) decided it would sell better if it were called "3.0.3" ("3.03" in some places). Red Hat is still in business today, so maybe Bob was right. The release was now called "Official" Red Hat LiNux' (yes, the quotes around 'Official' were part of the name, at least on the CD and some of the box copy; in other places, it was in italic typeface instead). This was to separate the version Red Hat sold from the versions sold by third parties such as Infomagic. It was also called "Red Hat™; Software, Inc. LiNux", "RED HAT LINUX", and "Red Hat Linux" on the box.</p> <p>This was the first approximately concurrent multi-architecture release; the (then) Digital Alpha platform was supported. (The binary file format was still a.out for the Alpha platform because the ELF standard for Alpha was not yet ratified; there were no shared libraries on Alpha, either.)</p> <p>This was also the first release to feature the proprietary Metro-X accelerated X server as a feature of the release. It was also the first to include glint, the "Graphical Linux INstallation Tool", as a graphical front end for RPM. It also included graphical printer configuration.</p>
July-August 1996	RHL 3.0.4/3.95	Rembrandt	Beta leading up to the 4.0 release. RPM re-written in C (I think for this beta). First release with Pluggable Authentication Modules (PAM). New configuration tools being written in Python with Tk Inter instead of TCL/TK; first example was a new network configuration tool. Thanks to the new 2.0 kernel, this was the first release to use kernel modules; before this, there were 72 different kernels from which users had to choose to match their hardware. Now, hardware differences could be handled by loading different modules.

October 3 1996	RHL 4.0	Colgate	Three architectures supported: x86, Alpha, and SPARC. Alpha was able to use the ELF file format in this release, since the standard was ratified and tool support implemented. This release also introduced our current Shadowman™ logo. Based on the 2.0.18 kernel. First release to include documentation freely available in electronic form as well as "dead tree" format in the box. First release to ship the spyglass-derived "Red Baron" browser as a proprietary value-add.
February 3 1997	RHL 4.1	Vanderbilt	Bug fix release. Kernel 2.0.27. 1997 Info World, Best of 1996, Operating Systems.
May 19 1997	RHL 4.2	Biltmore	Continued to use a slightly old version of libc (5.3) instead of newer 5.4 version because of instability and gratuitous incompatibility in the new version. One of the first really widely-criticized technical decisions between versions of software in Red Hat Linux, this decision was vindicated, at least for the distribution developers, by the flood of bug reports and demonstrated instability on other distributions that shipped libc 5.4. Last release to ship the Red Baron browser, which proved very buggy.
August 27, September 16 1997	RHL 4.8/4.8.1/4.95	Thunderbird	First release to use glibc 2.0. First formal beta release program.
October 7, 16 1997	RHL 4.9/4.9.1/4.96	Mustang	Another set of beta releases; the massive changes introduced by changing C library versions made it critical that Red Hat ran a two-cycle beta instead of just one or even zero cycles as before. The experience we had of the gain in quality from this very public beta process was a formative experience and cemented a resolve to have strong beta processes for future releases.
December 1 1997	RHL 5.0	Hurricane	Released in time for Christmas sales, Hurricane was named partly in recognition (it is hard to call it honor) of the hurricane that had swept over Red Hat a few months before and done a great deal of damage to the surrounding area, but essentially spared the Red Hat offices. First release to include BRU2000-PE™ backup and Real Audio™ client and server software as proprietary value-add components. 1997 Info World Product of the Year.

June 1 1998	RHL 5.1	Manhattan	<p>Debuted the Linux Applications CD, a disk with primarily proprietary applications from third-party companies that worked on Red Hat Linux. Some pieces of GNOME were included for building a few applications, and a preview release of GNOME was included in a separate directory, though it wasn't part of the installation. First release to ship linuxconf as a centralized configuration tool. First release to include the proprietary Netscape browser. Last release to have a live filesystem tree on the CD; after this the size of the software outgrew the space for it.</p> <p>PC Magazine Technical Innovation Awards: Editorial Fellows' Award Winner, 1998; Australian Personal Computer, Editor's Choice, and Just Plain Cool Award, 1998.</p>
October 12 1998	RHL 5.2	Apollo	<p>Technology preview of GNOME included in a separate directory.</p> <p>LinuxWorld, Show Favorite: Software.</p>
March 17, 1999	RHL 5.9	Starbuck	
April 19 1999	RHL 6.0	Hedwig	<p>glibc 2.1, egcs, 2.2 kernel, GNOME integrated.</p> <p>Desktop Engineering, Readers' Choice Award, 1999; Wired for 3D, 1999 Editor's Choice Award Winner</p>
September 6 1999	RHL 6.0.50	Lorax	<p>First beta release with graphical installer (anaconda); the installer was completely re-written, including implementing graphical mode and reimplementing text mode, in Python.</p>
October 4 1999	RHL 6.1	Cartman	<p>Info World, 1999 Product of the Year, Operating Systems; Information Week, 1999 Product of the year; Internet Week, 1999 Best of Breed and 1999 Approved; Popular Science, 1999 Award for Computer and Software; International Engineering Consortium, Infovision 2000 Award, Private Networks; Network Magazine, 2000 Product of the Year, Server OS.</p>
February 9 2000	RHL 6.1.92	Piglet	<p>The world did not end.</p>
March 27 2000	RHL 6.2	Zoot	<p>First release to ship ISO images for FTP download.</p>
July 31 2000	RHL 6.9.5	Pinstripe	

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