



Presentation to
**The East Bay Ruby
Meetup Group**



Learning Ruby on Rails

**The 1st step is easy but watch out for the 2nd step...
It's a doozy!**

April 17, 2007



My background



- **Started programming in 1967 – UF Computer Center:**
 - **My own water-cooled (personal) IBM 360 computer!**
- **Many different languages/systems:**
Assembler language, APL, C, CICS, Cobol, Control RDBMS, DBASE, Fortran, MS Access, Paradox, Perl, PL/1, REXX, Theos, Unix, Visual Basic...
- **Mostly management consulting for the past 15+ years**





What I wanted to do



- **Build database-backed web applications**
- **On my list since before Web 2.0**
- **Tried GoLive/Dreamweaver <ugh!>**
- **Looked at some commercial systems <\$!>**
- **Tried Perl frameworks <ugh!>**
- **Tried Rails <mmm! (sorta)>**





My approach



- Read a bunch for starters
 - *Build Your Own Ruby on Rails Web Applications* <good starting point>
 - *Agile Web Development with Rails* <heavy going in places>
 - *Ruby for Rails* <good 2nd book>
 - *Ajax on Rails* <too specialized for beginners>
 - *Programming Ruby*
- Follow along with book's code
 - Only good up to a certain point
 - Lots of code that doesn't work
- Build a usable application and make it public!
 - 4mypasswords.com





My webapp criteria



- **Must be**
 - **Something I would use**
 - **Offered to the public**
 - **Free of ongoing administration**
 - **Memorable domain name (short...)**
 - **Relative quick/easy to implement in a basic form**
 - **Have an option for a revenue model if successful**

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4MyPasswords.com



- **Place to store sensitive information on the web**
 - (e.g., passwords, credit card info, registration or serial number information, ...)
- **SECURE**
- **Easy to use**
- **For me: replace Coda Hale's *Genius* utility that I've been using for years**
 - Too many different machines I use
 - At different client locations

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1st Step...



- **Pretty straight-forward:**
 - **Get the tools (InstantRails, RadRails, Firebug)**
 - (too bad: I like Vim)
 - **Create an application structure**
 - **Create a simple database**
 - **Create a simple interface (scaffolding!)**
 - **Actually use it for stuff!**
 - Internal “Ideas” application
 - Internal “Booklist” application





1st Results...

- Create a simple app in about 1 hour
- Cool!

Create a general app and populate it with controllers/models/views...

From the Instant Rails Console Log:

Create the framework for this app

```
rails booklist
```

Create the database for this app

```
mysqladmin -u root create booklist_development
```

Set up database migrations

```
rake db:migrate
```

Create the books model

```
ruby script\generate model book
```

Edit the 001_create_book.rb migration file to add the columns

```
create_table :books do |t|
  t.column :title, :string
  t.column :review, :string
  t.column :amazon_link, :string
  t.column :reviewed_by, :string
  t.column :reviewer_link, :string
end
```

Update the database with the new book model columns

```
rake db:migrate
```

Create the controller stuff for administrative (maintenance) activities

```
ruby script\generate controller admin
```

Edit admin_controller.rb with scaffold to set up basic editing:

```
scaffold :book
```

You're now able to edit the data in your browser! scaffold builds maint pages on the fly

Change review field from string (too small) to text/limit=1000

```
ruby script\generate migration update_review_field
```

Edit the 002_update_review_field.rb file to modify the column

```
change_column :books, :review, :text, { :limit => 1000 }
```

Do it... and the field is updated

```
rake db:migrate
```




Easy to scratch the surface...

STEEP learning curve after that!

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2nd Step...



- **Going beyond the 1st simple steps was much harder/more time consuming...**
 - Spent TONS of time Googling for info...
 - Collected many cheat sheets from the web...
 - Started creating my own cheat sheets for specific tasks...
 - Got deluged with porn spam on the rails wiki (wiki.rubyonrails.org)
 - Forums: Some great help; some non-responsive; some assumptions about how much people know





Taking that 2nd step...



- **Get as much 'off the shelf' as possible:**
 - **Improved scaffolding:**
 - Ajaxscaffold.com
 - **Encryption/decryption:**
 - EzCrypto.rubyforge.org
 - **Rails webhosting:**
 - RailsPlayground.com
 - **CSS template:**
 - minimalistic-designs.com
- **SSL – Thawte certificate**





It works – and folks can use it!



www.4mypasswords.com

nubyrubyrailstales.blogspot.com/

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What I ~~like~~ love about Rails...



- Framework & scripts
- Migrations
- WEBrick / Mongrel
- Conventions...?
- ~~Pluralization...?~~
- { Wiki / Api }.rubyonrails.org
- Documentation
- ActionMailer
 - But it's a little weird





What I ~~like~~ love about Rails...



- Deprecation warnings...
- Pretty good tools (e.g., RadRails, ...)
 - But I wish there were a Vim option
 - VI Improved (www.vim.org) has a *great* Rails plugin, but no visual directory tree presentation

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...and what I wonder about



- What happened to script/help?
- ~~Pluralization...?~~
 - Conventions not followed:

Now, generate a controller:

```
ruby script/generate controller users
```

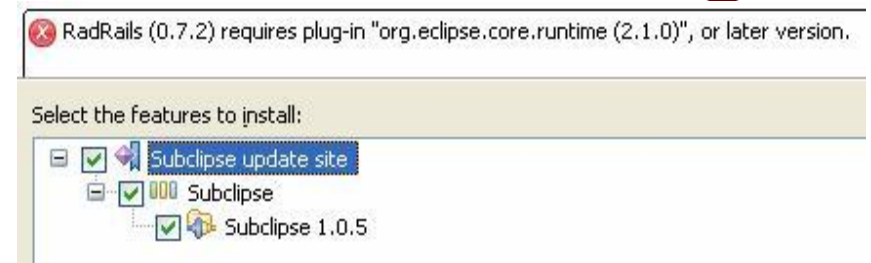
Open the controller file, users_controller.rb and add the plugin include:

- ...and CamelCase versus camel_case
 - script/generate ProductBacklog #> product_backlog
- ...and just who is it “intuitive” to... Non-English speakers?
 - belongs_to :user
 - has_many :users
 - has_and_belongs_to_many :users
- ...and then there are collections
 - :client versus :clients ?



... and what I wonder about (2)

- **Things are broken:**
 - RadRails update fails
 - Ruby update fails
- **Installing a plugin is counter-intuitive:**
 - Sites say “do this” (script/plugin install...)
 - RadRails says “do this” (plugin create...)
 - ***Finally:*** just copy the stuff into the right directory!
- **Fast changing**
 - Deprecations – I’m just learning; why do I have all these recommended solutions with warnings...?





... and what I wonder about (3)

- Gaining familiarity with all the “auto-magical” stuff
- Soooo many special helpers, RJS, methods, ...
- Database collation defaults (not Rails?)

```
Collation latin1_swedish_ci
```

- **Documentation**
 - Scattered (rubyonrails.org, rubyforge.org, individual websites, ...)
 - Inconsistent
 - Missing
- Search engine visibility...?
- MySQL implementation: pure Ruby vs C gem...?

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To be done...



- Subversion
- Testing
- ActiveScaffold...?
- CSS/GUI interface updates
- User interface/functionality
 - E.g., password changes...
- Capistrano...?
- Testing
- Documentation
- XML Export/Import
- ...?

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What's the Verdict?



- Rails is awesome...
- ...and has some maturing to do
- **And I love it!**

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Trade for services?



- I've got a SuSE Linux machine running, and would like to get it set up for development.
- I've got a running Sun Classic X system for trade.



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