January is a month of new beginnings—a time to reflect on the past and to consider resolutions to implement in the coming year. Using software as a metaphor, it is a time for a new release that implements known bug fixes and possibly introduces new features! The FreeBSD Project often publishes a new release in January, so let’s take a look back in time to see which releases the Project was working on then. Where did your FreeBSD experience begin and which at-the-time “cutting edge” features do you now take for granted?

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As the USL vs. BSDI lawsuit marched toward the settlement that was finally announced, minus most of the terms of the FreeBSD 1.1-RELEASE, which was announced on May 6, 1993, its future was in a state of flux. For quite some time, the USL/UCB lawsuit, and subsequent clarification and agreements from USL on our distribution terms, we can bring you this distribution without legal ambiguity, and with clear plans for a fully unencumbered future.

FreeBSD 5.2-RELEASE was announced on January 12, 2004. While many of us remember waiting with baited breath for a very long time for the much anticipated 5.0 (SMP release) in 2003, the other releases in this branch averaged every six months as the fledgling SMP support matured. While 5.2-RELEASE contained a number of significant stability and performance improvements over FreeBSD 5.1, it was still advertised as "a New Technology release that might not be suitable for all users." That is a testament to both the cautious, let’s-not-break-production-usage philosophy of the Project and the amount of work and testing needed to move a code base from its uniprocessor assumptions to the new SMP world.

FreeBSD 7.1-RELEASE was announced on January 5, 2009. Being the second release in the 7.x series, it didn’t introduce too many new features. However, some of the changes it did introduce remind us how far computing has moved along since the turn of the century: the ability to boot from USB devices, the ability to boot from GPT, the ability to use the VESA BIOS for DPMS during suspend and resume, and the ability for traceroute(8) to display an AS number.