Pokemon Leaf Green Plus

# Aim

Create a Pokemon ROM hack that is more similar in style and feel to what Game Freak create with the official games, as opposed to most ROM hacks which strive to innovate with lots of new features, increasing difficulty, and giving the player many options at their disposal. While these hacks are impressive and fun in their own right, they definitely have their own feel that doesn’t really match the experience one would normally have when playing a Pokemon game. Fights can be much tougher than normal games, requiring significant amounts of strategy and planning even when not nuzlocking. At the same time, the player is given much more to work with in these difficult scenarios, which can actually make the game more boring in a way as overpowered strategies will rise to the top, whereas others will be completely unviable, promoting only one style of play if one wants to be optimal. An example of this would be the move substitute in Renegade Platinum, which is given to the player early, which is very powerful, and the AI is particularly bad at dealing with. This leads to substitute, an already slow move to play with, being the dominant strategy and slowing the game down to a crawl should you choose to use it. This can be particularly problematic in a nuzlocke where it can often be required to deal with the challenges thrown at the player, and since the TM is reusable there is no reason not to use it.

The purpose of creating another game closer to the originals is that there are only so many of them, meaning if you want to play games that feel that way your options become limited quickly as you are forced to replay them. While there are an abundance of other ROM hacks out there, there are only 8 generations of Game Freak games. My hack is particularly aimed at people who enjoy nuzlocking mainline games and would like more opportunities to experience that.

Finally, the aim of the hack is to improve what is in my opinion one of the weakest Pokemon games, Fire red and Leaf Green. These games feel very much held down by their gen 1 roots, taking place in a boring region with an awkward level curve (due to non-linearity) and disappointing encounter variety. I feel like these games have a great framework for something much better however, which is likely why very ambitious hacks like Radical Red use it as a base.

# Difficulty

## The Problem

Leaf Green’s original difficulty is quite awkward. The first 3 gyms can be quite difficult, especially if you don’t have the right team, due to the very limited options the game gives you at the start. However, starting from the fourth gym, the difficulty mostly plateaus as the game becomes non linear. While boss fights do increase in level noticeably, everything in between consists of many very weak regular trainer battles with little type variety, which also provide little experience due to their low levels. This creates an overall boring an unrewarding experience. If it weren’t for how easy these mid-late game boss fights are, the lack of experience could have been quite a problem.

In terms of the difficulty I am aiming for, it should be close to the experience Black and White 2 offer, which are in my opinion the second hardest mainline games in the series. These have their fair share of difficult boss fights with powerful pokemon and moves, and even regular trainers can put up a real fight due to their expansive movepools.

When addressing the difficulty issues in these games, there are 2 key problems to tackle: the non-linearity, and the mediocre Pokemon that the player faces.

The non-linearity means that the whole game needs to be designed under the assumption that the player will only take 1 path to reach new areas, and will also complete multiple tasks in their own order. There are two examples of the former in this game, the two paths to Fuchsia city and the two paths to Cinnabar Island – once the player chooses one path if they go back to take the other to explore some more all the trainers will be weak and uninteresting to fight. Meanwhile the fact that gyms 5,6, and 7 as well as the Silph Co. fight can be done in almost any order means that all their levels are roughly the same. Thus, while the first few you complete may be challenging, those you leave for last will be disappointingly easy.

Weak Pokemon is a common theme amongst the early games. While a select few like psychic types are blessed with amazing movepools, the majority are forced to deal with god awful moves which the AI trainers have to work with and attempt to put up a fight. Even if a Pokemon learns good TM moves, random trainers will basically never make use of these, and even boss trainers can have very crappy movesets like Giovanni. As such, as long as the player has any kind of reasonable team they should be plenty prepared for any fight.

## The Solution

Giving boss trainers better movepools is definitely the easiest change to make – you would only need to look to later gens for examples of much more versatile teams, and more Pokemon can be added to them on top of that for more formidable fights.

There will also be a much greater variety in trainer types in areas rather than onslaughts of normal- flying- and grass types like in the base game. This will require the players team to be more balanced, and along with the trainers improved moves the player will need to proceed with a lot more thought when traversing routes.

With the level curve, I aim to increase the levels of each the branches in the game noticeably, creating a clear order that tasks should be completed. I will leave the player the option to complete some out of order to preserve the feel of the original, but will also restrict some other freedoms in order to make sure the player does not accidentally enter an area they are far too weak to challenge. Figuring out the right balance will be difficult here, especially with the Sevii Islands taken into account.

# More Pokemon

The original game contains 149 pokemon which are obtainable during the main game, which while workable is definitely a step below later games, being tied with DP and BW in terms of number. However, while these games make the most of what they have, FRLG are very reluctant to use the Pokemon it has, preferring to just spam the same pokemon everywhere. Electabuzz, Magmar, Scyther, Pinsir, Tauros, Kangaskhan, Chansey and the fossils are used to my knowledge, no trainers anywhere in the main game, and if they are, its only 1 at most. Even the player is unlikely to use them due to their rarity and being in the same location (Safari Zone) in a Nuzlocke Challenge. Since so many Pokemon are hard to find, this means that in a Nuzlocke many Pokemon are just guaranteed because Kanto has an insane amount of routes and they all have similar Pokemon on them. The rarer Pokemon will definitely get their time to shine in this hack.

Furthermore, I will be adding in Pokemon from Gen 2 to supplement the Pokedex. This should provide some much needed variety and also fix the type balancing these games have. There are literally no dark types in this game despite there being dark moves so nothing gets STAB, and the only Steel family is Magnemite (who of course has no steel moves). This leads to Team building becoming a lot more stale, as not only is the player not allowed to use these types, but they do not need to play around the AI having them as well. The in-lore explanation for these Pokemon being here will be that they simply migrated from the Sevii Islands, which is where you catch these Pokemon in the originals. This will also allow Pokemon to evolve into their gen 2 evolutions, which for some dumb reason they cannot do originally. There is no proper explanation for why in the games and it was fixed in HGSS because Game Freak realised it was a terrible idea.

# Better Pokemon

In earlier gens, most Pokemon are close to useless in-game due to their horrendous movepools, something that has been fixed more and more with every gen. Some ROM hacks buff stats and change types as well to make pokemon more viable, but I have never been a fan of this idea. Their aim is usually to make all Pokemon close to on par with each other, which strays far from how the original games work.

While I don’t want everything on par, I want everything to at least have a use for something, so that if someone catches it in a Nuzlocke, they will be pleasantly surprised when using it, even if they expected it to be useless. I will obviously be doing this by giving enhanced movepools like in later gens, pulling moves from those gens as well, and rather than buffing stats I have another idea to make weak Pokemon better. Giving these weak Pokemon access to stronger moves at earlier levels could be a great way of making them more viable, especially around the mid-game, if their type is especially needed for something. This should hopefully make up for all those pokemon that got evos in gen 4 and are stuck in gen 3 with their crappy stats.

# Sevii Islands

A completely optional addition in the originals, I will definitely be making these Islands mandatory to at least visit to encourage the player to complete the questline. They will be visited after the 7th gym and will serve to break up the pace from what in the original game can be potentially a 4 gym gauntlet. My current plan is to make them skippable once you have travelled there, but increasing the 8th gyms levels in a way that means the player will be taking a big risk carrying on with the story instead of levelling up. Maintaing some level of non-linearity is in my opinion, key to keeping the feel of the original games and also making the game better for speedrunning if someone chooses to do so (the Kanto games are very popular for this).

# Encounters

Route 1 – Rattata, Pidgey, Sentret, Ledyba

Viridian City – Old Rod – Poliwag, Goldeen

Route 2 – Caterpie, Weedle, Rattata, Hoothoot, Pidgey, Hoppip

Route 22 – Spearow, Mankey, Nidoran-M, Nidoran-F, Marill, Azurill

Old Rod – Magikarp, Goldeen

Viridian Forest – Hoothoot, Spinarak, Pikachu, Pichu, Caterpie, Weedle, Metapod, Kakuna

Route 3 – Jigglypuff, Igglybuff Nidorans, Mankey Spearow, Sunkern

Mt.Moon – Zubat, Geodude, Paras, Cleffa, Clefairy, Slugma, Sandshrew, Dunsparce

Route 4 – Ekans, Sandshrew, Phanpy, Mareep, Spearow

Route 24 – Abra, Wooper, Oddish, Bellsprout, Pidgey

Old rod – Magikarp, Horsea

Route 25 – Abra, Venonat, Oddish, Bellsprout, Hoppip

Old rod – Magikarp, Krabby

Route 5 – Meowth, Snubbull, Houndour, Mareep, Jigglypuff