

Forensic Investigation: Shellbags

October 26, 2020 By Raj Chandel

In this article, we will be focusing on shellbags and its forensic analysis using shellbag explorer. Shellbags are created to enhance the users' experience by remembering user preferences while exploring folders, the information stored in shellbags is useful for forensic investigation.

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Introduction

Windows Shell Bags were introduced into Microsoft's Windows 7 operating system and are yet present on all later Windows platform. Shellbags are registry keys that are used to improve user experience and recall user's preferences whenever needed. The creation of shellbags relies upon the exercises performed by the user.

As a digital forensic investigator, with the help of shellbags, you can prove whether a specific folder was accessed by a particular user or not. You can even check whether the specific folder was created or was available or not. You can also find out whether external directories have been accessed on external devices or not.

For the most part, Shell Bags are intended to hold data about the user's activities while exploring Windows. This implies that if the user changes icon sizes from large icons to the grid, the settings get updated in Shell Bag instantly. At the point when you open, close, or change the review choice of any folder on your system, either from Windows Explorer or from the Desktop, even by right-clicking or renaming the organizer, a Shellbag record is made or refreshed.

Location of shellbags

Windows XP

The shellbags for Windows XP are stored in NTUSER.DAT

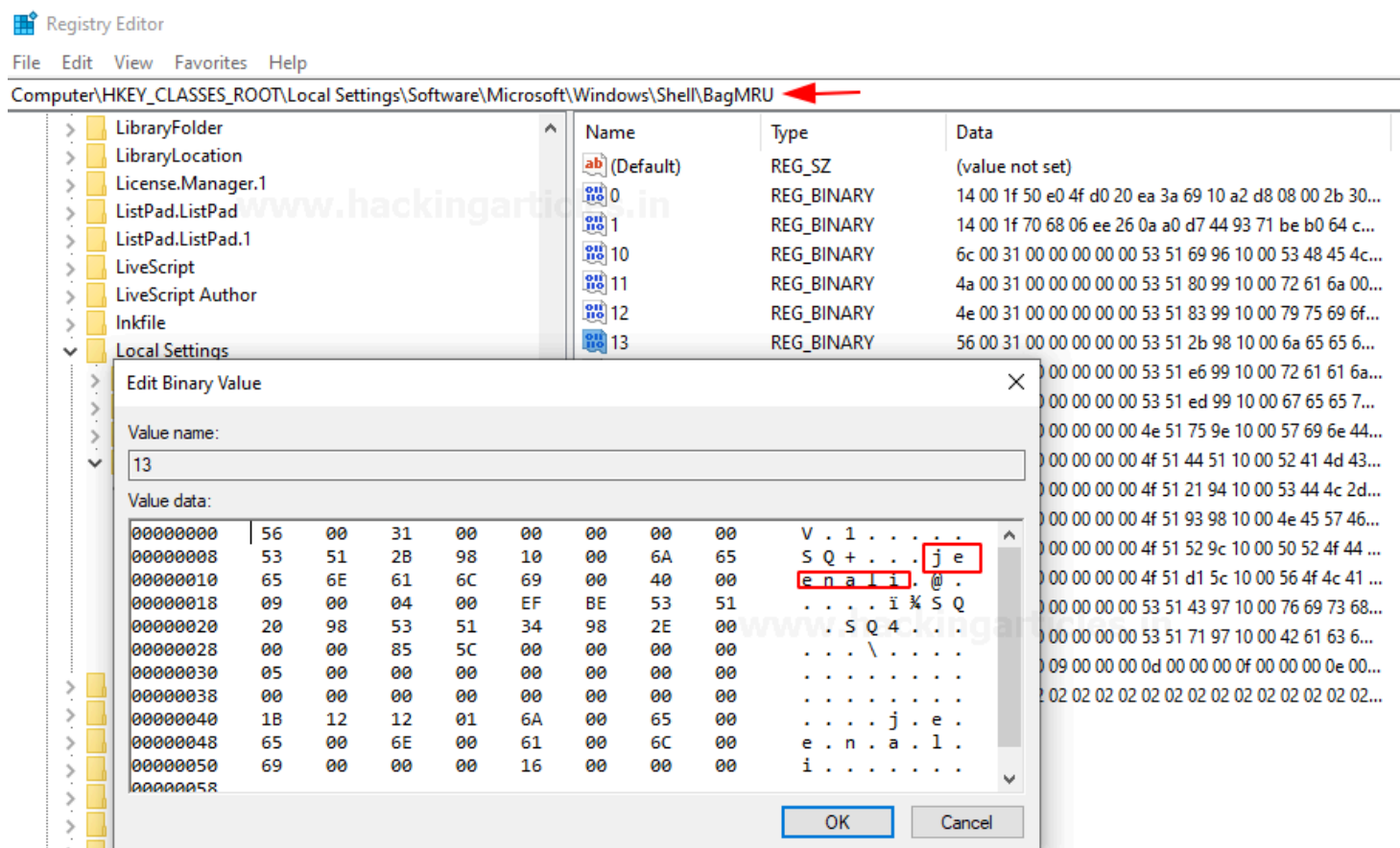
- Network folders references: \Software\Microsoft\Windows\Shell
- Local folder references: \Software\Microsoft\Windows\ShellNoRoam
- Removable device folders: \Software\Microsoft\Windows\StreamMRU

Windows 7 to Windows 10

Shellbags are a set of subkeys in the `UsrClass.dat` registry hive of Windows 10 systems. The shell bags are stored in both `NTUSER.DAT` and `USRCLASS.DAT`.

- `NTUSER.DAT`: `HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Windows\Shell`
- `USRCLASS.DAT`: `HKCU\Software\Classes\Local Settings\Software\Microsoft\Windows\Shell`

The majority of the data is found in the `USRCLASS.DAT` hive-like local, removable, and network folders' data. You can manually check shellbags entry in the registry editor like so. In the following screenshot, a shellbag entry for a folder named `jeenali` is shown.



The Shellbag data contains two main registry keys, `BagMRU` and `Bags`

- **BagMRU**: This stores folder names and folder path similar to the tree structure. The root directory is represented by the first bagMRU key i.e. 0. BagMRU contains numbered values that compare to say sub key's nested subkeys. All of these subkeys contain numbered values aside from the last child in each branch.
- **Bag**: These stores view preference such as the size of the window, location, and view mode.

We will be analyzing the shellbags using the shellbag explorer.

1. ShellBags explorer(SBECmd)
2. Shellbags explorer (GUI version)

Shellbags explorer is a tool by Eric Zimmerman to analyze shellbags. The shellbags explorer is available in both versions cmd and GUI. You can download the tool from [here](#).

Forensic Analysis of Shellbag

Analysis using SBECmd

Here we are using the SBECmd.exe (Cmd version of the shellbag explorer tool) by Eric Zimmerman. This cmd tool is great for command prompt lovers who prefer using commands over GUI.

To get a clear idea about how shell bags work and store data and how you can analyze it I have created a new folder named “raaj” which consists of a text document. Further, we will be renaming it to geet and then to jeenali. Let’s analyze the shellbags entries for this.

```

C:\Users\raj\Desktop>mkdir raaj
C:\Users\raj\Desktop>cd raaj
C:\Users\raj\Desktop\raaj>echo "Join Ignite Technologies " > file.txt
C:\Users\raj\Desktop\raaj>cd ..
C:\Users\raj\Desktop>dir
Volume in drive C has no label.
Volume Serial Number is C23C-F876

Directory of C:\Users\raj\Desktop

10/19/2020  12:00 PM    <DIR>          .
10/19/2020  12:00 PM    <DIR>          ..
10/19/2020  11:59 AM    <DIR>          Backup
10/19/2020  12:01 PM    <DIR>          raaj
               0 File(s)                0 bytes
               4 Dir(s)  23,802,351,616 bytes free

C:\Users\raj\Desktop>ren raaj geet
C:\Users\raj\Desktop>dir
Volume in drive C has no label.
Volume Serial Number is C23C-F876

Directory of C:\Users\raj\Desktop

10/19/2020  12:01 PM    <DIR>          .
10/19/2020  12:01 PM    <DIR>          ..
10/19/2020  11:59 AM    <DIR>          Backup
10/19/2020  12:01 PM    <DIR>          geet
               0 File(s)                0 bytes
               4 Dir(s)  23,802,191,872 bytes free

C:\Users\raj\Desktop>ren geet jeenali
C:\Users\raj\Desktop>dir
Volume in drive C has no label.
Volume Serial Number is C23C-F876

Directory of C:\Users\raj\Desktop


10/19/2020  12:01 PM    <DIR>          .
10/19/2020  12:01 PM    <DIR>          ..
10/19/2020  11:59 AM    <DIR>          Backup
10/19/2020  12:01 PM    <DIR>          jeenali
               0 File(s)                0 bytes
               4 Dir(s)  23,802,191,872 bytes free

C:\Users\raj\Desktop>_

```

Run the executable file and browse to the directory where the executable is present. To extract the shellbags data into a .csv file use the following command:

```
SBECmd.exe -l --csv ./
```

```
C:\Users\raj\Desktop\ShellBagsExplorer>SBECmd.exe -l --csv ./ 
SBECmd version 1.4.0.0

Author: Eric Zimmerman (saericzimmerman@gmail.com)
https://github.com/EricZimmerman

Command line: -l --csv ./

Processing live registry. Disabling dedupe
All messages will be saved to './!SBECmd_Messages.txt'
Time zone: UTC

Processing live registry
'C:\Users\raj\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\UsrClass.dat' is in use. Rerouting...

Two transaction logs found. Determining primary log...
Primary log: C:\Users\raj\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\UsrClass.dat.LOG2, secondary
Replaying log file: C:\Users\raj\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\UsrClass.dat.LOG2
Replaying log file: C:\Users\raj\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\UsrClass.dat.LOG1
At least one transaction log was applied. Sequence numbers have been updated to 0x011

Parse time: 0.92 seconds

    Total ShellBags found: 54

    Totals by bag type

    Directory: 41
    Root folder: GUID: 6
    Drive letter: 1
    Variable: Users property view: 1
    GUID: Control panel: 3
    Control Panel Category: 2

Finished processing live registry

Exported to: './20201019_120428_DESKTOP-ATNONJ9_LIVE_REGISTRY.csv'

Processing complete!
Processed live registry in 0.92 seconds!
Total ShellBags found: 54

C:\Users\raj\Desktop\ShellBagsExplorer>_
```

As a result of the above command, a .csv file will be created in the directory.

```

C:\Users\raj\Desktop\ShellBagsExplorer>dir
Volume in drive C has no label.
Volume Serial Number is C23C-F876

Directory of C:\Users\raj\Desktop\ShellBagsExplorer

10/19/2020  12:04 PM    <DIR>          .
10/19/2020  12:04 PM    <DIR>          ..
10/19/2020  12:04 PM                4,487  SBECmd_Messages.txt
10/19/2020  12:04 PM            11,162  20201019_120428_DESKTOP-ATNONJ9_LIVE_REGISTRY.csv
10/18/2020  03:26 PM                22  cmd.txt
10/18/2020  02:16 PM        4,671,544  SBECmd.exe
10/19/2020  11:51 AM    <DIR>          Settings
10/18/2020  02:16 PM       74,054,712  ShellBagsExplorer.exe
10/18/2020  02:16 PM       2,236,056  ShellBagsExplorerManual.pdf
               6 File(s)      80,977,983 bytes
               3 Dir(s)    23,801,282,560 bytes free

C:\Users\raj\Desktop\ShellBagsExplorer>_

```

Lets' open the .csv file and analyze it.

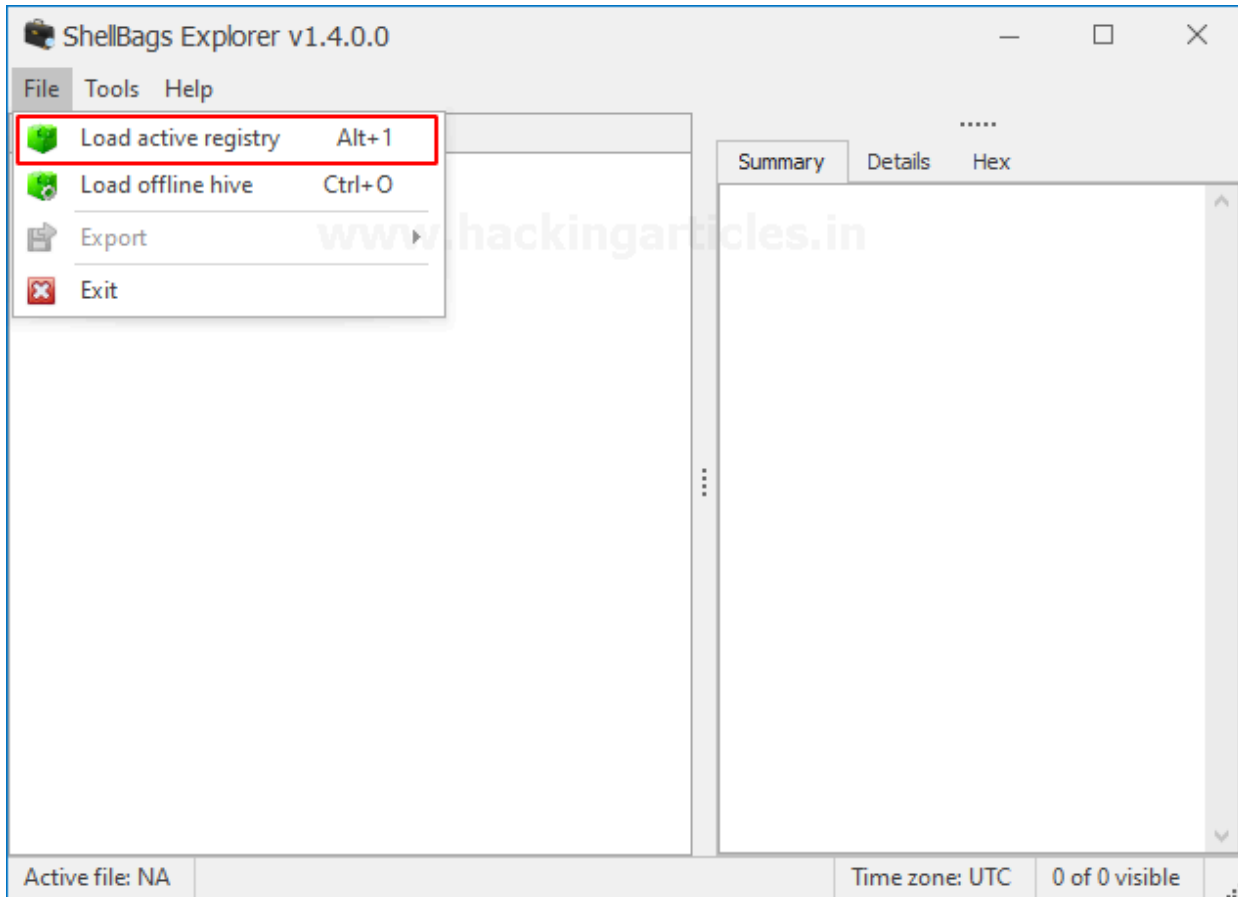
P8												
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	M	N	O	P	Q
10	BagMRU	8	0	9	Desktop\	Directory	vishva	88868	59	1		
11	BagMRU	9	0	1	Desktop\	Directory	Backup	81410	10	1		
12	BagMRU	10	0	0	Desktop\	Directory	ShellBagsExplorer	33480	6	1		
13	BagMRU	13	0	4	Desktop\	Directory	jeenali	23685	5	1		
14	BagMRU	14	0	3	Desktop\	Directory	raaj	23685	6	1		
15	BagMRU	15	0	2	Desktop\	Directory	geet	23685	6	1		
16	BagMRU\	0	5	1	Desktop\	Root folde	Documents			0		
17	BagMRU\	1	6	2	Desktop\	Root folde	Downloads			0		
18	BagMRU\	2	7	0	Desktop\	Root folde	Desktop			1		
19	BagMRU\	3	8	3	Desktop\	Drive lette	C:			0		
20	BagMRU\	4	40	4	Desktop\	Root folde	Pictures			0		
21	BagMRU\	0	16	1	Desktop\	Directory	PassMark	91899	2	1		
22	BagMRU\	1	32	0	Desktop\	Directory	AnalysisSession2	114097	3	1		
23	BagMRU\	0	17	0	Desktop\	Directory	OSForensics	91900	1	1		
24	BagMRU\	0	42	1	Desktop\	Directory	TimelineExplorer	88994	59	1		
25	BagMRU\	1	44	0	Desktop\	Directory	ShellBagsExplorer	30113	3	1		
26	BagMRU\	0	43	0	Desktop\	Directory	TimelineExplorer	88995	58	1		
27	BagMRU\	0	45	0	Desktop\	Directory	ShellBagsExplorer	30116	3	1		
28	BagMRU\	0	9	5	Desktop\	Directory	WinDump	92379	18	1		
29	BagMRU\	1	20	4	Desktop\	Directory	RamCapturer	641	2	1		
30	BagMRU\	2	22	3	Desktop\	Directory	VolatilityWorkbench	83552	5	1		
31	BagMRU\	3	23	1	Desktop\	Directory	sdl-redline	29764	3	1		
32	BagMRU\	4	28	2	Desktop\	Directory	New folder	88310	15	1		
33	BagMRU\	5	30	0	Desktop\	Directory	prodiscoverrelease7003b	111344	8	1		
34	BagMRU\	0	21	0	Desktop\	Directory	x64	642	2	1		
35	BagMRU\	0	29	0	Desktop\	Directory	x64	113948	2	1		
36	BagMRU\	0	11	2	Desktop\	Directory	Program Files (x86)	1374	1	1		
37	BagMRU\	1	12	3	Desktop\	Directory	Program Files	66	1	1		
20201019 121601 DESKTOP-ATNONJ9												

As I mentioned earlier, we have renamed the folder named “raaj” to “geet” and further to “jeenali” as highlighted in the screenshot the MFT entry number is the same for all three folders which depict that the folder was renamed.

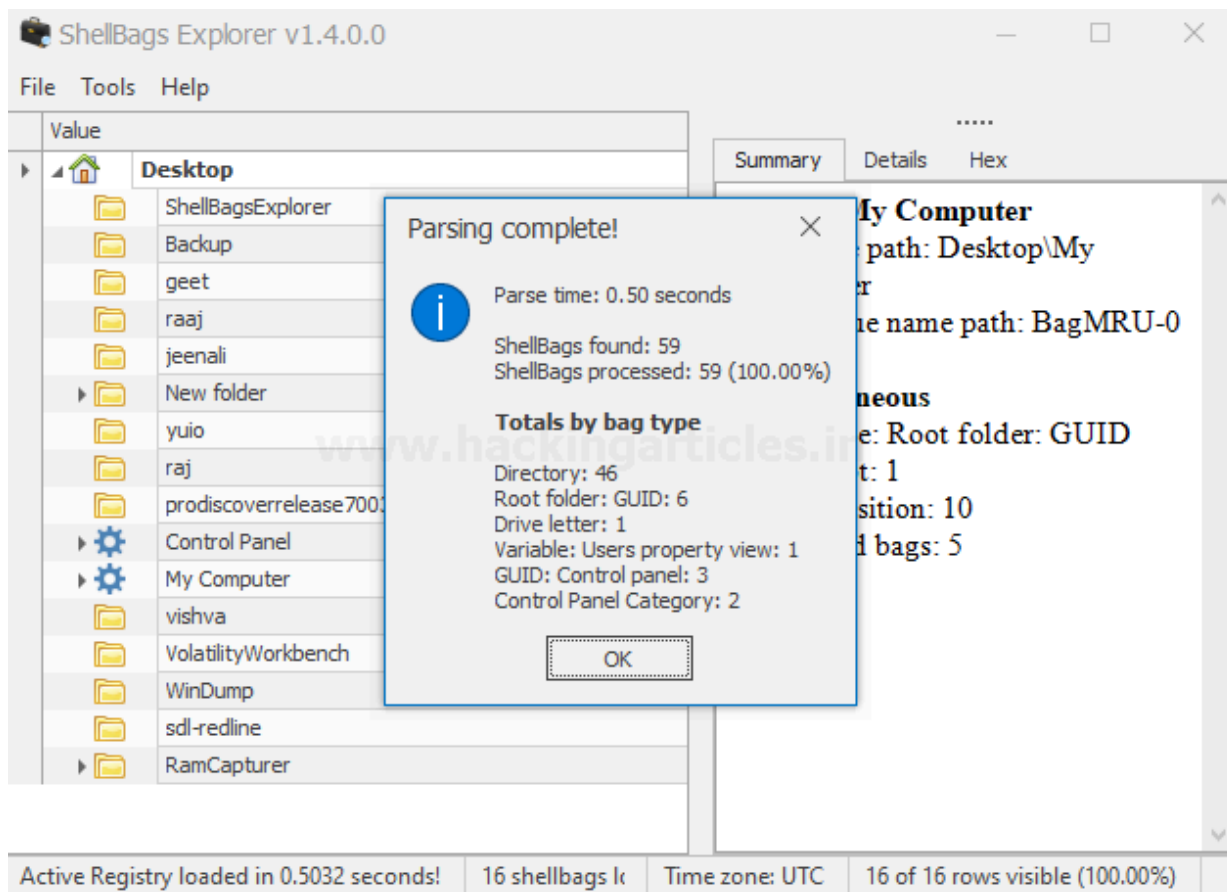
- Shellbags explorer (GUI version)

Active Registry Analysis

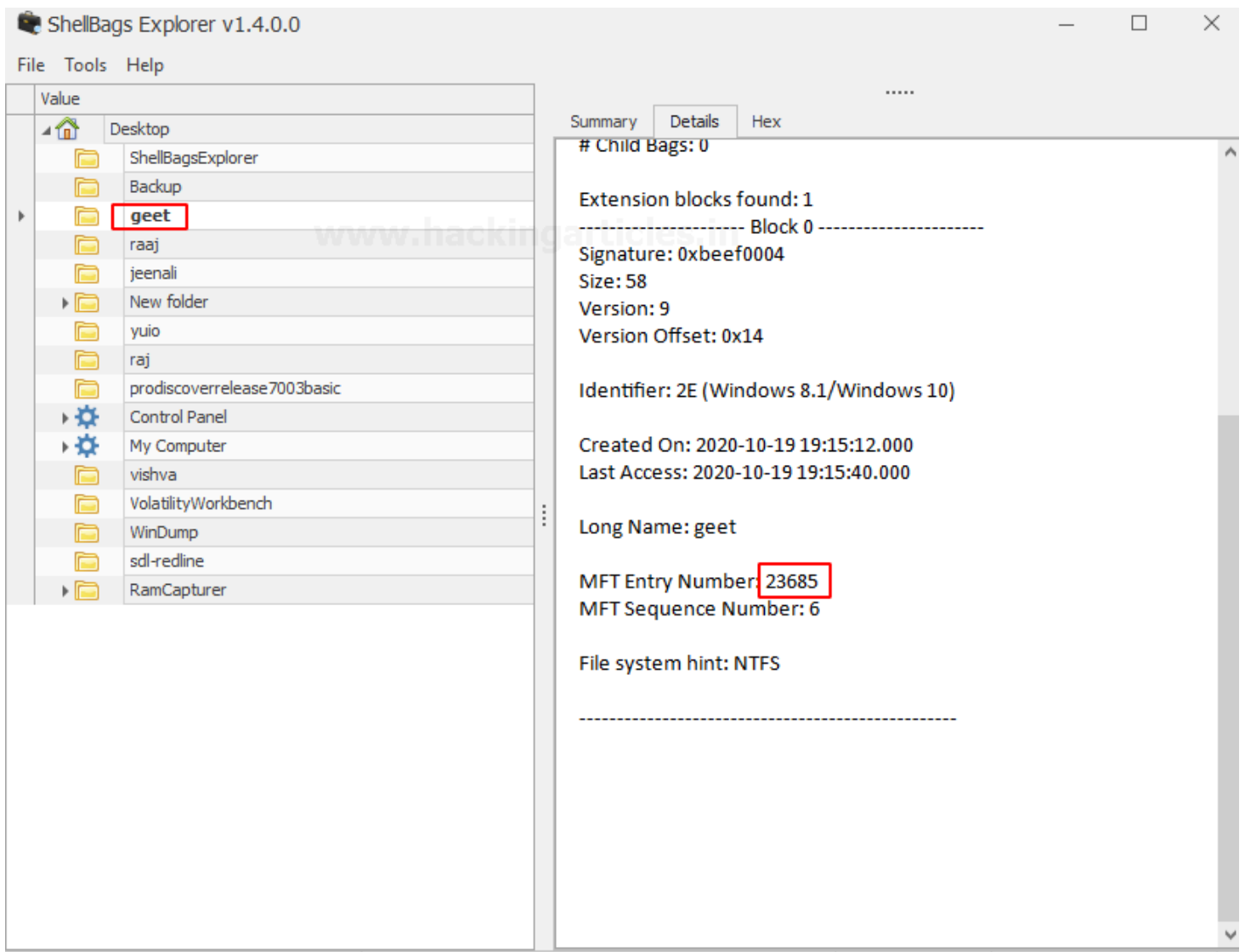
Using the shellbags explorer we can also analyze the active registry. Select load an active registry which will load the registry in use by the active user.



The shellbags are successfully parsed from the active registry.



The shellbags parse contains the shellbags entries created based on users' activities. As depicted earlier the folder renamed will have a similar MFT entry number. Here, I have created a folder named "raaj" and we will be further renaming it to "geet".



Whenever a folder is renamed an entry is stored in shellbag, the MFT entry number of both the folder will be the same.

ShellBags Explorer v1.4.0.0

File Tools Help

Value
Desktop
ShellBagsExplorer
Backup
geet
raaj
jeenali
New folder
yuio
raj
prodiscoverrelease7003basic
Control Panel
My Computer
vishva
VolatilityWorkbench
WinDump
sdl-redline
RamCapturer

Summary Details Hex

Bag Path: BagMRU, Slot #: 14, MRU Position: 3, Node Slot: 52
Absolute Path: Desktop\raaj
Has been explored: False

Child Bags: 0

Extension blocks found: 1
----- Block 0 -----
Signature: 0xbeef0004
Size: 58
Version: 9
Version Offset: 0x14

Identifier: 2E (Windows 8.1/Windows 10)

Created On: 2020-10-19 19:15:12.000
Last Access: 2020-10-19 19:15:12.000
Long Name: raaj

MFT Entry Number **23685**
MFT Sequence Number: 6

File system hint: NTFS

Now, once again rename the folder to jeenali. The MFT entry will be similar to the previous one.

ShellBags Explorer v1.4.0.0

File Tools Help

Value

- Desktop
 - ShellBagsExplorer
 - Backup
 - geet
 - raaj
 - jeenali**
 - New folder
 - yuio
 - raj
 - prodiscoverrelease7003basic
 - Control Panel
 - My Computer
 - vishva
 - VolatilityWorkbench
 - WinDump
 - sdl-redline
 - RamCapturer

Summary Details Hex

Short name: jeenali
Modified: 2020-10-19 19:01:22.000

Value: jeenali
Shell Type: Directory

Bag Path: BagMRU, Slot #: 13, MRU Position: 4, Node Slot: 51
Absolute Path: Desktop\jeenali

Has been explored: False

Child Bags: 0

Extension blocks found: 1
----- Block 0 -----
Signature: 0xbeef0004
Size: 64
Version: 9
Version Offset: 0x16

Identifier: 2E (Windows 8.1/Windows 10)

Created On: 2020-10-19 19:01:00.000
Last Access: 2020-10-19 19:01:40.000

Long Name: jeenali

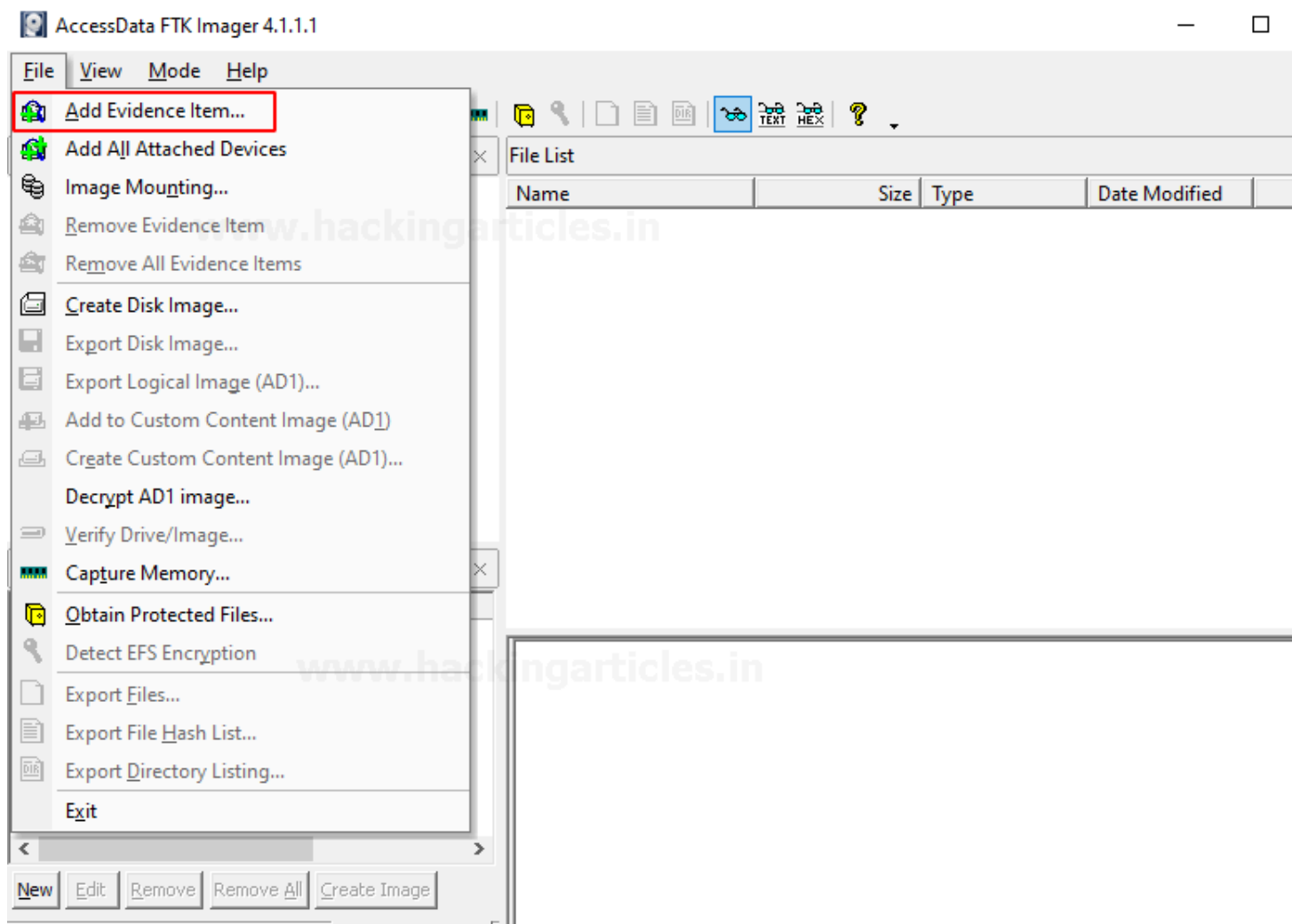
MFT Entry Number: **23685**
MFT Sequence Number: 5

Active Registry loaded in 0.5032 seconds! 0 shellbags loaded in 0.0000 seconds Time zone: UTC 0 of 0 rows visible (NaN)

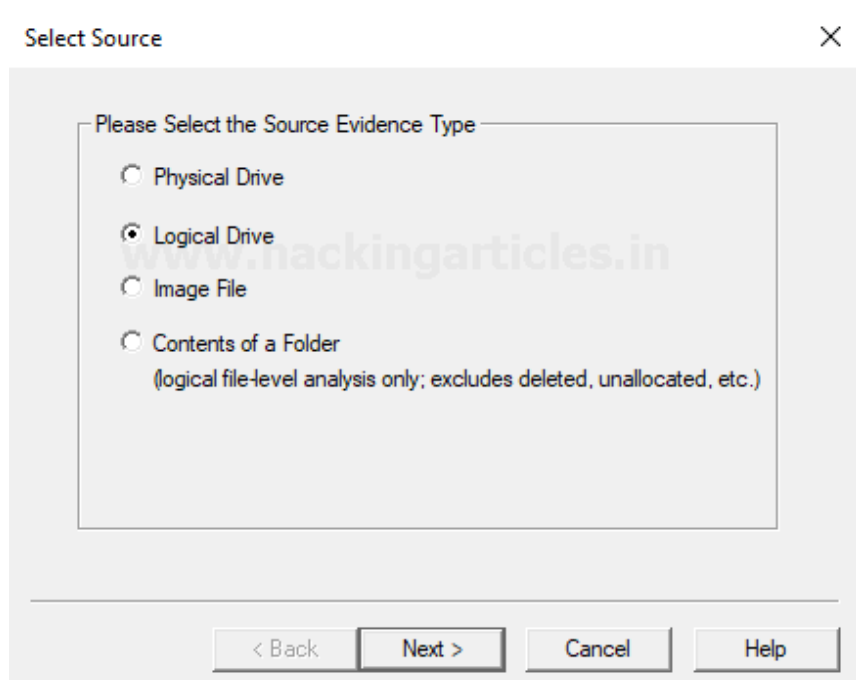
Offline registry analysis

For offline analysis, we first have to extract the shellbags file which is USRCLASS.DAT. Let's extract the shellbag file using FTK imager. Download FTK imager from [here](#).

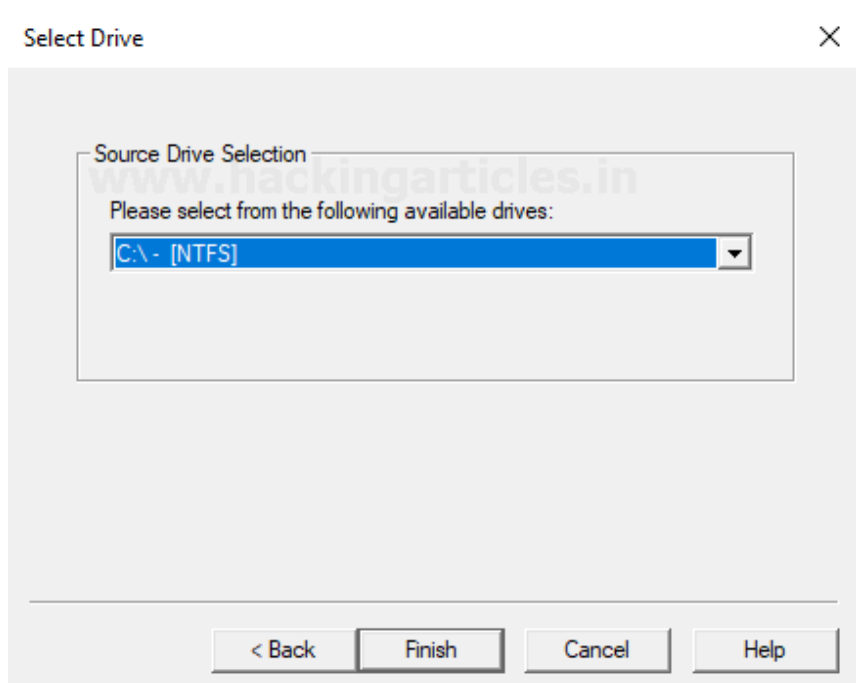
Lets' add in the evidence, go to the add evidence item.



Select the source for adding evidence as here I have selected the logical drive as usrclass.dat is present in the C drive.

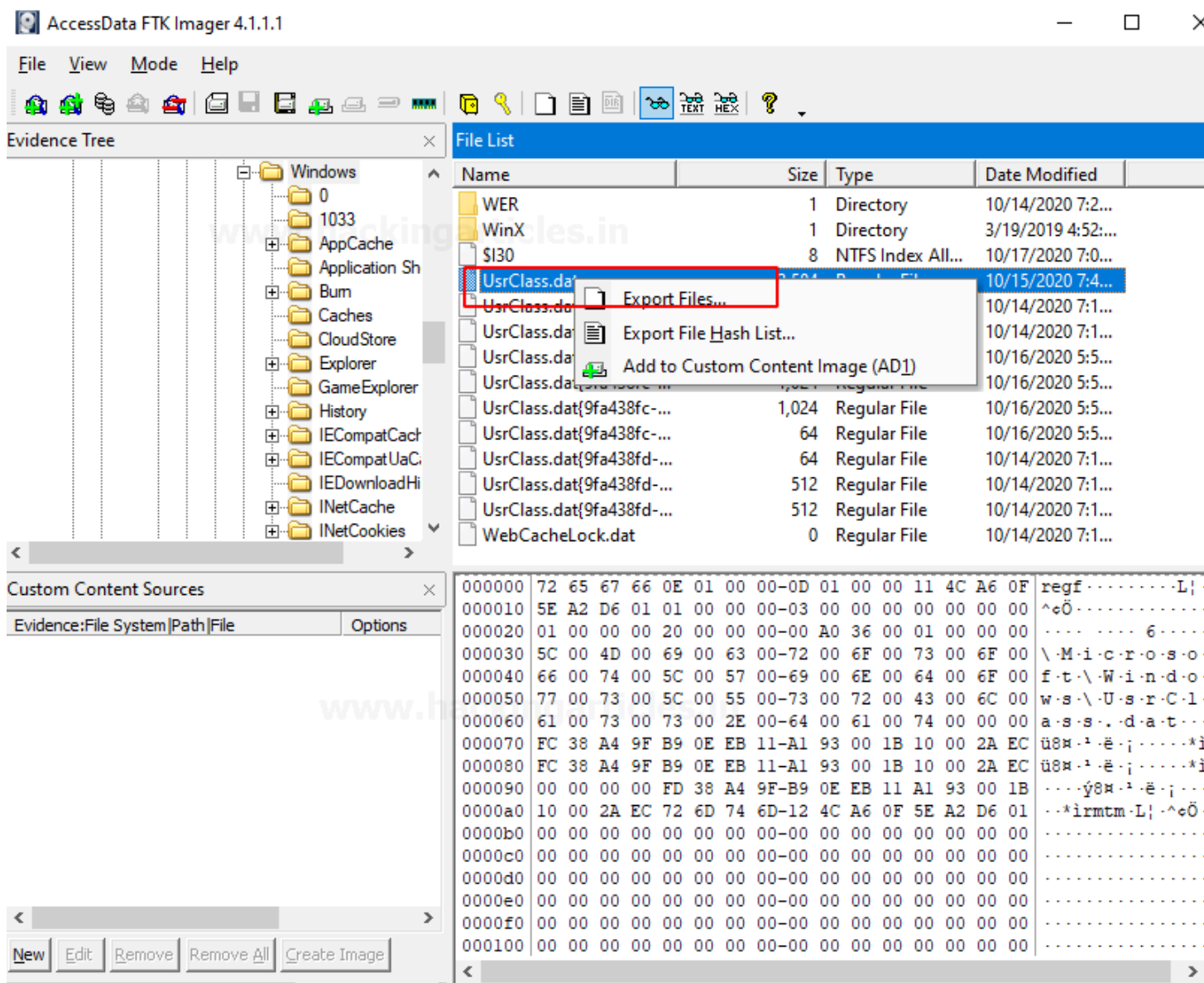


Next, select the desired user drive. Click **Finish**.



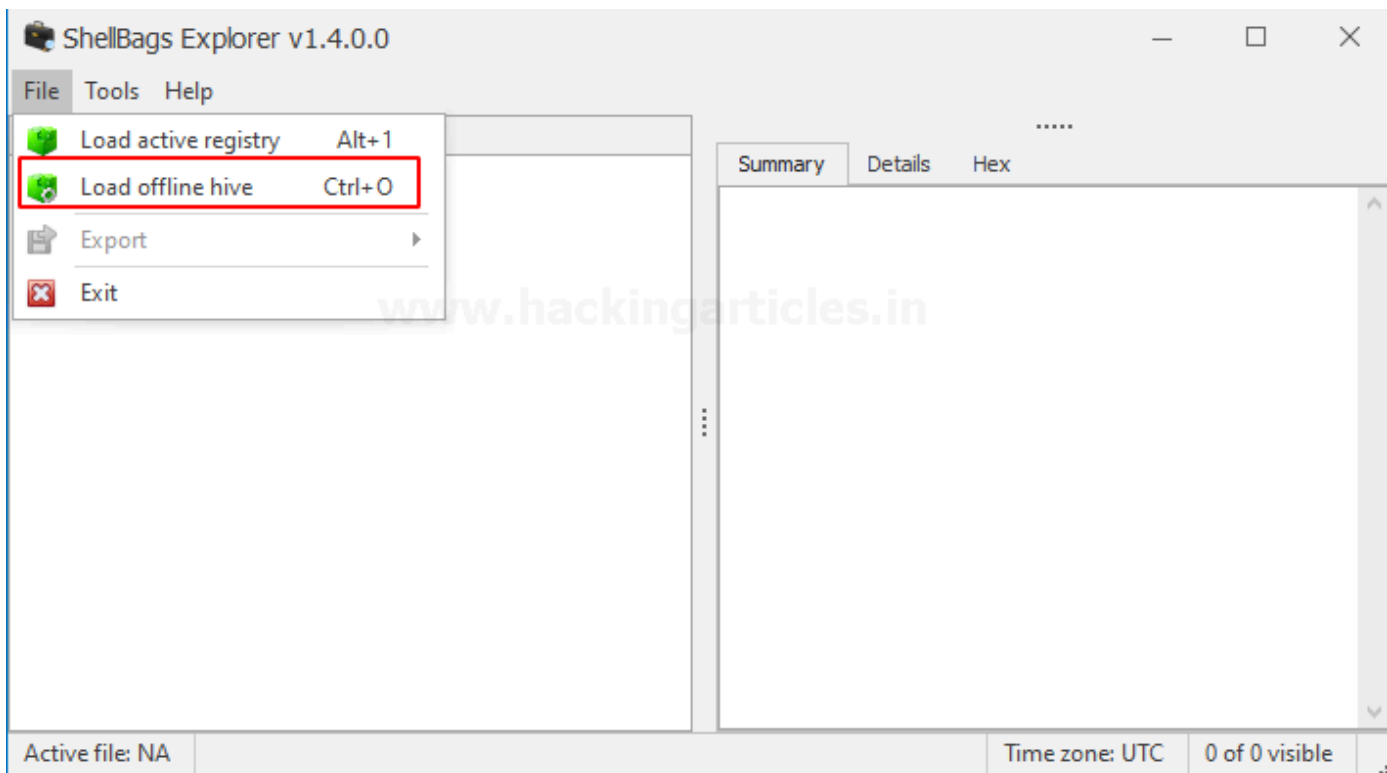
Expand the window to the location of the usrclass.dat. Select the user you want to investigate go to the following path to extract the UsrClass.dat.

root > users > administrator > Appdata > Local > Microsoft > windows

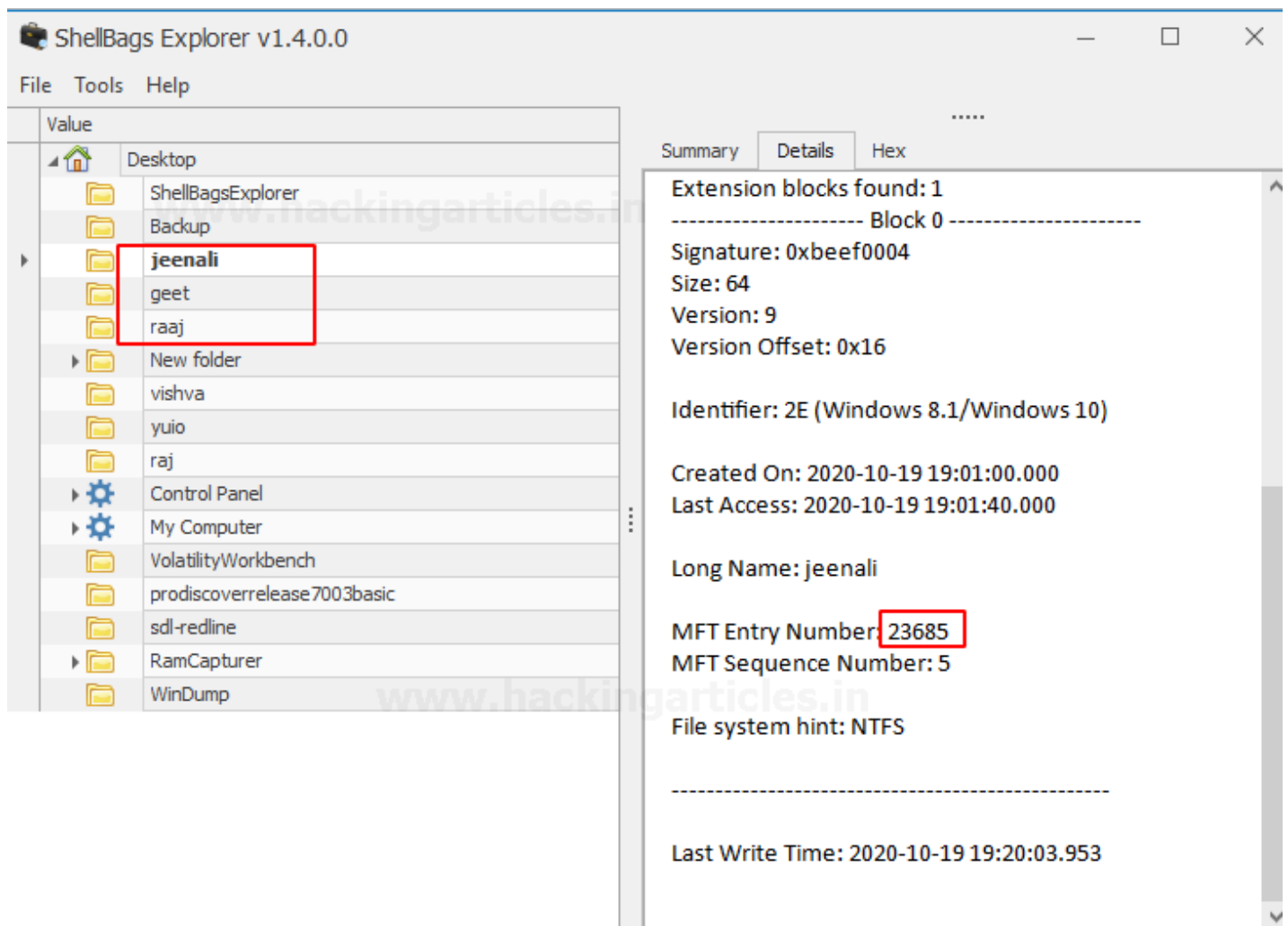


We will be analyzing the usrclass.dat extracted from the above step using shell bag explorer by Eric Zimmerman.

As we have exported the registry hives we will choose “load offline hive”



After successful parsing of the extracted shellbags file, you will be able to see the entries for folders browsed, created, deleted, etc. Here is the entry of the folders renamed earlier, the MFT entry number is the same for the three folders.



Now here, I have deleted the folder named “jeenali”. Now lets’ check the shellbags data whether the deleted folder still exists or not.


```
C:\Users\raj\Desktop>dir
Volume in drive C has no label.
Volume Serial Number is C23C-F876

Directory of C:\Users\raj\Desktop

10/19/2020  12:43 PM    <DIR>          .
10/19/2020  12:43 PM    <DIR>          ..
10/19/2020  12:32 PM    <DIR>          Backup
10/19/2020  12:42 PM    <DIR>          jeenali
10/19/2020  12:20 PM    <DIR>          ShellBagsExplorer
               0 File(s)                0 bytes
               5 Dir(s)  23,212,498,944 bytes free

C:\Users\raj\Desktop>rmdir /s jeenali
jeenali, Are you sure (Y/N)? Y

C:\Users\raj\Desktop>dir
Volume in drive C has no label.
Volume Serial Number is C23C-F876

Directory of C:\Users\raj\Desktop

10/19/2020  12:44 PM    <DIR>          .
10/19/2020  12:44 PM    <DIR>          ..
10/19/2020  12:32 PM    <DIR>          Backup
10/19/2020  12:20 PM    <DIR>          ShellBagsExplorer
               0 File(s)                0 bytes
               4 Dir(s)  23,212,498,944 bytes free

C:\Users\raj\Desktop>
```

Yes, the shellbags store the entry even though the folder was deleted later.

P8												
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	M	N	O	P	Q
10	BagMRU	8	0	9	Desktop\	Directory	vishva	88868	59	1		
11	BagMRU	9	0	1	Desktop\	Directory	Backup	81410	10	1		
12	BagMRU	10	0	0	Desktop\	Directory	ShellBagsExplorer	33480	6	1		
13	BagMRU	13	0	4	Desktop\	Directory	jeenali	23685	5	1		
14	BagMRU	14	0	3	Desktop\	Directory	raaj	23685	6	1		
15	BagMRU	15	0	2	Desktop\	Directory	geet	23685	6	1		
16	BagMRU\	0	5	1	Desktop\	Root folder	Documents			0		
17	BagMRU\	1	6	2	Desktop\	Root folder	Downloads			0		
18	BagMRU\	2	7	0	Desktop\	Root folder	Desktop			1		
19	BagMRU\	3	8	3	Desktop\	Drive letter	C:			0		
20	BagMRU\	4	40	4	Desktop\	Root folder	Pictures			0		
21	BagMRU\	0	16	1	Desktop\	Directory	PassMark	91899	2	1		
22	BagMRU\	1	32	0	Desktop\	Directory	AnalysisSession2	114097	3	1		
23	BagMRU\	0	17	0	Desktop\	Directory	OSForensics	91900	1	1		
24	BagMRU\	0	42	1	Desktop\	Directory	TimelineExplorer	88994	59	1		
25	BagMRU\	1	44	0	Desktop\	Directory	ShellBagsExplorer	30113	3	1		
26	BagMRU\	0	43	0	Desktop\	Directory	TimelineExplorer	88995	58	1		
27	BagMRU\	0	45	0	Desktop\	Directory	ShellBagsExplorer	30116	3	1		
28	BagMRU\	0	9	5	Desktop\	Directory	WinDump	92379	18	1		
29	BagMRU\	1	20	4	Desktop\	Directory	RamCapturer	641	2	1		
30	BagMRU\	2	22	3	Desktop\	Directory	VolatilityWorkbench	83552	5	1		
31	BagMRU\	3	23	1	Desktop\	Directory	sdl-redline	29764	3	1		
32	BagMRU\	4	28	2	Desktop\	Directory	New folder	88310	15	1		
33	BagMRU\	5	30	0	Desktop\	Directory	prodiscoverrelease7003b	111344	8	1		
34	BagMRU\	0	21	0	Desktop\	Directory	x64	642	2	1		
35	BagMRU\	0	29	0	Desktop\	Directory	x64	113948	2	1		
36	BagMRU\	0	11	2	Desktop\	Directory	Program Files (x86)	1374	1	1		
37	BagMRU\	1	12	3	Desktop\	Directory	Program Files	66	1	1		

Shellbags stores the entries of the directories accessed by the user, user preferences such as window size, icon size. Shellbags explorer parses the shellbags entries shows the absolute path of the directory accessed, creation time, file system, child bags. The tool classifies the folders accessed according to the location of the folder. Shellbags are created for compressed files (ZIP files), command prompt, search window, renaming, moving, and deleting a folder.