

Application of BagIt-Serialized Research Object Bundles for Packaging and Re-execution of Computational Analyses

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Abstract—In this paper we describe our experience adopting the Research Object Bundle format with BagIt serialization (BagIt-RO) for the design and implementation of “tales” in the Whole Tale Project. A tale is an executable research object intended for the dissemination and publication of computational scientific findings that captures information needed to facilitate understanding, transparency, and re-execution for review and reproducibility at the time of publication. We describe the Whole Tale platform and requirements that led to our adoption of BagIt-RO, specifics of our implementation, and discuss migrating to the emerging Research Object Crate (RO-Crate) standard.

Index Terms—TBD

I. INTRODUCTION

Whole Tale (<http://wholetale.org>) is a web-based, open-source platform for reproducible research supporting the creation, sharing, execution, and verification of “tales” [?], [?]. Tales are executable research objects that capture the code, data, and environment along with narrative and workflow information needed to re-create computational results from scientific studies. A goal of the Whole Tale platform (WT) is to produce an archival package that is exportable, publishable, and can be used for verification of computational reproducibility, for example as part of the peer-review process.

Since its inception, the Whole Tale platform has been designed to bring together existing open science infrastructure. Researchers can ingest existing data from various scientific archival repositories; launch popular analytical tools (e.g., Jupyter and RStudio); create and customize computational environments (using `repo2docker`¹); conduct analyses; create/upload code and data; and publish the resulting packages back to archival repositories. Tales are also downloadable and re-executable locally, including the ability to retrieve remotely published data.

With version 0.7 of the platform we adopted the Research Object Bundle BagIt serialization (BagIt-RO) format². By combining the BagIt-RO serialization with our `repo2docker`-based execution framework and the BDBag tools [?], we were able to define and implement a standards-compliant, self-describing, portable, re-executable research object with the ability to retrieve remotely published data.

This paper is organized as follows. In section II, we present a motivating example of the use of the Whole Tale platform

¹<https://repo2docker.readthedocs.io/>

²<https://github.com/ResearchObject/bagit-ro>

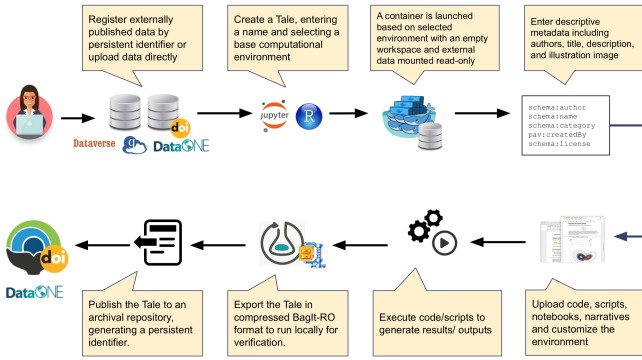


Fig. 1. Prototypical Whole Tale workflow

followed by a brief description of the system architecture in section III. In section V we outline the requirements that led to our adoption of the BagIt-RO format. In section VI we describe our implementation in more detail followed by a discussion and conclusions.

II. EXAMPLE SCENARIO: ANALYZING SEAL MIGRATION PATTERNS

The following scenario and Figure 1 illustrate the end-to-end Whole Tale workflow for exporting and publishing a tale based on existing data archived using the Research Workspace, a DataONE member node. This example is based tutorial material described in [?].

A research team is preparing to publish a manuscript describing a computational model for estimating animal movement paths from telemetry data. The source data for their analysis, tracking data for juvenile seals in Alaska [?], has been published in Research Workspace, a DataONE network member. Using the Whole Tale platform, the researchers register the external dataset. They then create a new "tale" by launching an RStudio environment based on images maintained by the Rocker Project [?]. Using the interactive environment, they clone a Github repository, modify an R Markdown document, customize the environment by specifying OS and R packages via repo2docker configuration files, and execute their code to generate outputs. They download the package in a compressed BagIt-RO format and run locally to verify their results. Finally, they enter descriptive metadata for the and publish the final package back to DataONE to obtain a persistent identifier to include in publication.

III. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

This section provides a brief overview of the Whole Tale system architecture. Whole Tale provides a scalable platform based on the Docker Swarm container orchestration system, exposing a set of core services via REST APIs and Single Page Application (SPA). Key components include:

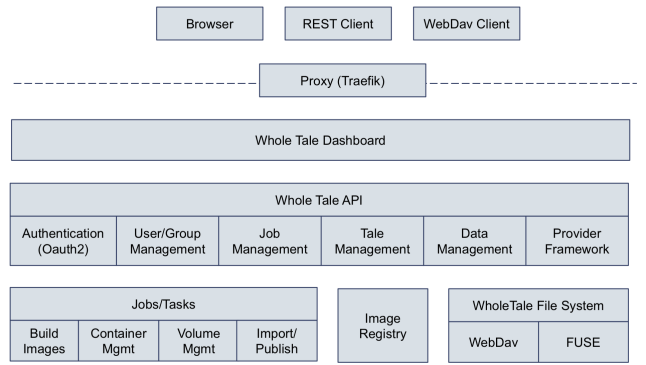


Fig. 2. Whole Tale system architecture

- **Whole Tale Dashboard:** An Ember.js single page application
- **Whole Tale API:** A REST API built using the Girder³ framework to expose key features including authentication, user/group management, tale lifecycle, data management, and integration with remote repositories (or "providers")
- **Whole Tale File System:** A custom filesystem based on WebDav and FUSE used to mount user and registered data into running container environments
- **Image registry:** A local Docker registry used to host images associated with tales
- **Jobs and task Management:** A task distribution and notification framework based on Girder and Celery
- **Data Management System (DMS):** System for fetching, caching, and exposing externally published datasets

Several aspects of the system of are related to the BagIt-RO serialization format including filesystem organization, user-defined environments, metadata as well as the export and publication functions. We describe these in more detail below.

1) *Tale workspace:* Each tale has a *workspace* (folder) that contains user-created code, data, workflow, documentation and narrative information. The workspace also contains repo2docker-compatible configuration files defining the tale environment, described below. This appears as the *workspace* folder mounted into the running tale environment.

2) *External data:* Optionally, each tale can include references to externally published data. This data is registered with the Whole Tale system and managed by the DMS. Externally referenced data appears in the *data* folder, sibling to the *workspace*.

3) *Environment customization:* Users can customize the tale environment using repo2docker-compatible configuration files. Whole Tale extends repo2docker via our `repo2docker_wholetale`⁴, adding buildpacks to support Rocker, Spark, and OpenRefine images.

³<https://girder.readthedocs.io>

⁴https://github.com/whole-tale/repo2docker_wholetale

4) *Metadata*: Tales have basic descriptive metadata including creator, authors, title, description, keywords as well as information about the selected environment, license, and associated persistent identifiers.

5) *Exporting tales*: Tales can be exported in a BagIt-RO serialized archive that contains the contents of the tale workspace (code, local data, narrative, workflow, repo2docker configuration files) as well as references to external data, tale metadata, and a script to run the tale locally. BDBag [?] is used to materialize “holey” bags by downloading files specified in the `fetch.txt` file, initially via HTTP and eventually via DOI, Globus, Agave schemes.

IV. AN EXAMPLE TALE

In this section, we outline the contents of an exported tale. The complete example is available at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2641314>.

File	Description
<code>bag-info.txt</code>	Bag metadata using the bdbag-ro-profile ⁵
<code>bagit.txt</code>	Bag declaration
<code>data/ LICENSE workspace/ apt.txt postBuild requirements.txt wt_quickstart.ipynb</code>	Payload directory containing tale license and workspace contents including repo2docker compatible configuration files.
<code>fetch.txt</code>	Fetch file
<code>manifest-[md5, sha256].txt</code>	Payload manifest (checksums)
<code>metadata/ manifest.json environment.json</code>	Tag directory containing RO manifest.json and Whole Tale environment metadata (required by repo2docker_wholetale)
<code>tagmanifest-[md5, sha256].txt</code>	Tag manifest (checksums)
<code>README.md</code>	Tale top-level readme
<code>run-local.sh</code>	Tale local execution script

V. REQUIREMENTS

The scenario described in section II highlights several key requirements of the Whole Tale platform that led to our selection of the BagIt-RO serialization. These requirements include:

- **Interoperability with archival repositories**: Since tales will be published to archival repositories including DataONE network members, we must adopt standard formats and vocabularies that facilitate interoperability. This includes the use of supported archival formats and identifiers (e.g., digital object identifiers). We also note here that some repositories do not support publishing hierarchical file structures, while many research objects contain data and code organized in folders. In the future, we plan to support publishing to Dataverse network members, the Dryad repository, and Zenodo.
- **Interoperability with source code management (SCM)**: For many researchers, source code repositories such as Github are central to their workflow in the creation of research objects. The tale format must support

publishing research objects based on content in SCM repositories.

- **Ability to reference external data**: A central feature of the Whole Tale platform is to enable researchers to reference externally published data by persistent identifier and include references to those items in their published tales. Both in the Whole Tale web service and when executed locally, externally referenced data must be resolved prior to re-execution. Whole Tale currently supports HTTP resources as well as those published via Globus and in the future via the Agave Platform.
- **Ability to add metadata**: The tale format must support all metadata attributes required by DataCite and schema.org as well as attributes specific to the Whole Tale platform. In the future, we expect to also support additional metadata required by researchers in specific domains.
- **Ability to export and re-execute**: One feature of the system is the ability for users to export tales to a local machine. To re-run locally, we must be able to rebuild the environment (e.g., via Docker/repo2docker) and fetch remote data as needed.
- **Ability to store provenance information**: Future releases of Whole Tale, tales will include computational and archival provenance information.
- **Simplicity and understandability**: When users view the contents of an exported or published tale, they should be able to easily understand the contents and how to explore or re-execute the tale.
- **Verifiability**: Future releases of Whole Tale will include information to allow the automatic re-execution and verification of included computational workflows.
- **Versioning**: Since researchers iterate on their tales, share them and extend them, it is important to be able to version them over time.
- **Interoperability with search engines**: Google recently unveiled Dataset Search which parses and aggregates JSON-LD embedded on dataset landing pages as an effort to lower barriers for finding datasets. Choosing JSON-LD as a representation for tale metadata provides flexibility in case we decide to expose tale information for Google. It also allows for further integration with third party publishers such as Dataverse and DataONE who may expose such metadata for Google.

VI. ADOPTING THE BAGIT-RO MODEL

Whole Tale uses the RDF data model to encode tale information for export and exchange. We selected a JSON-LD representation for human readability, extensibility, compatibility with Whole Tale APIs, and potential interoperability with search engines and third party publishers. After developing an ad-hoc internal format, we explored emerging standards in the research object space and settled on BagIt-RO for serialization. The RO-Bundle specification and BagIt serialization including compatibility with BDBag tools met many of our initial requirements. Additional tale metadata attributes which were

not included in the BagIt-RO model could be added using vocabularies such as schema.org and MADS. Throughout this section, we use the manifest.json from the above example, included in Appendix A.

A. Filesystem Artifacts

One strong point of RO-Bundle is that it treats file system artifacts as aggregates of the manifest. Doing so satisfies our requirement of being able to track where files belong, enabling us to both export and re-import tales even in the case where we must publish a hierarchical structure to a repository that can only represent a flat structure. In the case of Whole Tale, artifacts include data that were retrieved from external repositories as well as files that the user uploaded to the system from their local machine to the tale workspace. The tale workspace contents are included in the payload "data/workspace" directory and the external data are fetched into the payload "data/data" directory, mirroring filesystem organization on the web-based platform.

```
"aggregates": [
  {
    "uri": "../data/workspace/wt_quickstart.ipynb"
  },
  {
    "uri": "../data/workspace/apt.txt"
  }
]
```

Local system artifacts are easily described with a single URI entry. Some files, such as the system generated readme are tagged with additional metadata, shown below. In this case the additional metadata specifies the ?type? of the file as a ?HowTo? file.

```
{
  "@type": "HowTo",
  "uri": "../README.md"
}
```

B. External data

Whole Tale supports two types of external data: data that resides in a repository identified by persistent identifier (e.g., DOI) and data that exists at a generic HTTP address. In addition to including information about external data in the manifest.json, regardless of type the URL for each remote file is included in the fetch.txt for retrieval using BDBag tools.

1) *Generic HTTP Data*: For data that doesn't belong to a remote repository, a simple bundle is created in the aggregation section. The URI points to the HTTP address where the file may be retrieved and the bundle object holds the filesystem relevant information. The combination of information allows us to retrieve the file and place it in the correct folder (i.e., data/data).

2) *Repository Data*: Additional metadata can be incorporated when files included from published datasets are brought into the system. The individual files are described with a single bundle object, and linked to an additional structure that describes the dataset in more detail.

The following snippet describes a remote dataset that resides in DataONE and the aggregation recording the relationship

between a file in that dataset and its ultimate location after retrieval:

```
"dataset": [
  {
    "@type": "Dataset",
    "identifier": "doi:10.5065/D6862DM8",
    "name": "Humans and Hydrology at High Latitudes...",
    "eid": "doi:10.5065/D6862DM8"
  }
],
"aggregates": [
  {
    "size": 1558016,
    "schema:isPartOf": "doi:10.5065/D6862DM8",
    "uri": "https://cn.dataone.org/cn/v2/resolve/urn:
      ...",
    "bundledAs": {
      "filename": "usco2000.xls",
      "folder": "../data/data/"
    }
  }
]
```

C. Describing the Computing Environment

Whole Tale uses a customized version off the Binder repo2docker system. In addition to including configuration files in the workspace, Whole Tale exports information about the environment including runtime information in the exported package. One shortcoming of the BagIt-RO model is that there is not a well-defined place for this metadata. To address this need, we define an additional tag file, environment.json, which encodes sufficient information about the environment so that it can be re-created. The metadata contained in this file is represented as JSON and is not described using standard vocabularies.

D. Describing Additional Attributes

A number of properties that describe additional tale attributes (e.g., authors) are defined at the manifest root. Schema.org's vocabulary sufficed for describing these general metadata fields.

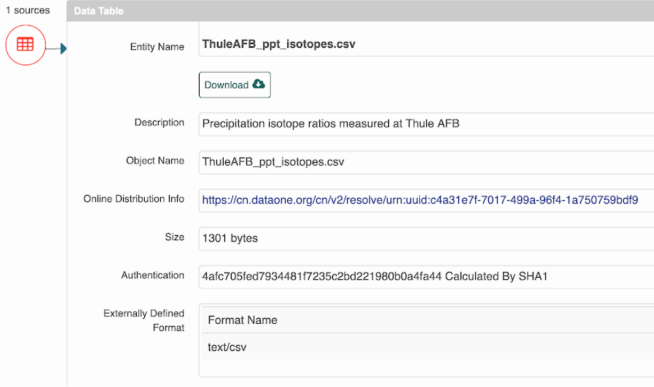
Attributing authorship to a tale is a requirement for tracking researcher contributions and is also used during metadata generation with publishers. The Provenance, Authoring and Versioning (PAV) vocabulary is used instead of schema because it is already included in by RO-Bundle:

```
{
  "eid": "https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7523-5539",
  "@type": "schema:Person",
  "schema:familyName": "DeBruine",
  "schema:givenName": "Lisa"
}
```

E. Provenance Tracking

A planned feature of Whole Tale is the ability to track executions and steps in researchers' workflows. The BagIt-RO model provides an easy way to represent this on disk with our proposed method through the inclusion of a provenance.json. One difference is that we plan to use the Prov-ONE ontology, an extension to W3C PROV.

The URI of each file in the manifest can be referenced inside the provenance.json file, enabling rich linkings of information. This information can also be transcribed to publisher-specific formats, provided that they support PROV. Figure 3 illustrates how provenance information is rendered in DataONE.



Data Table	
Entity Name	ThuleAFB_ppt_isotopes.csv
	Download
Description	Precipitation isotope ratios measured at Thule AFB
Object Name	ThuleAFB_ppt_isotopes.csv
Online Distribution Info	https://cn.dataone.org/cn/v2/resolve/urn:uuid:c4a31e71-7017-499a-96f4-1a750759bdf9
Size	1301 bytes
Authentication	4a4c705fed7934481f7235c2bd221980b0a4fa44 Calculated By SHA1
Externally Defined Format	Format Name
	text/csv

Fig. 3. Provenance rendering of a file in DataONE

VII. DISCUSSION

In this section, we highlight and discuss several issues related to our implementation of BagIt-RO that we hope will be of interest to workshop participants and possible input into current work on the RO-Crate specification. We discuss the importance of re-executability; the ability to reference and retrieve external data; the relationship between tales and source control repositories; and our ongoing work on computational provenance and verification workflows.

A. Executable research objects

Tales are executable research objects. By this we mean that the research object itself may be built and re-executed for exploration, re-use or verification. This is now a unique capability as many systems have recently been developed to support the creation of similar artifacts (for example Binder, CodeOcean). Executable research objects contain not only data, code, and documentation, but also information about the computational environment. This executability leads to additional capabilities, such as generation and comparison of computational provenance or methods of automated verification.

B. External data

In the Whole Tale platform, users are presented with a fixed filesystem hierarchy that includes "workspace" and "data" directories. The workspace directory contains code, local data, and additional files (e.g., documentation) and the sibling "data" directory contains externally reference data files (read-only).

In our v0.7 release, the payload directory of an exported tale similarly contains "workspace" and "data" directories. The manifest.json contains information about remotely registered datasets that is also included in the BagIt fetch.txt. When BDBag tools are used to fetch remote datasets, they are downloaded to the payload/data directory, matching the online filesystem organization and system capabilities. The concept of the fetch.txt, while primitive, was surprisingly effective when used with BDBag. We also foresee taking advantage of other BDBag capabilities, such as transferring Globus data or using DOI protocol. However, there is redundancy in tracking

external information in both in the BagIt fetch.txt and the RO manifest.json. While we originally considered serializing tales in multiple formats, settling on the BagIt-RO serialization provided significant convenience.

C. Relationship to SCM

Many researchers use source control repositories (e.g., Github) to organize and collaborate on research projects. Repositories can be released and published via external tools such as Zenodo or Whole Tale. In the Whole Tale platform, the "workspace" directory can be mapped to a version controlled repository. This raises the question of whether or not the workspace (or repository) should contain everything, including information currently stored in the manifest.json or environment.json. This information is essential to the understandability and re-executability of the tale, but is currently modeled as external to the primary tale contents (as is common with descriptive metadata). During the local execution process, for technical reasons we bind mount files from the "metadata" directory into the workspace to support building the tale image. In future releases, we are considering exposing the manifest information along with computational provenance information (below) as part of the workspace instead of external to it, such as in the RO-Bundle metadata directory. This means that even simple metadata would be in the workspace and easily added to version control.

D. Computational provenance information

Computational provenance refers to methods of capturing provenance ("the source or origin of an object") for computational tasks [?]. We are beginning to explore methods of capturing and storing computational provenance information for tales. In the RO-Bundle specification, provenance information is defined as "describing creators, dates, and sources" and is more concerned with the provenance of the research object itself, which we term archival provenance. Computational provenance information is internal to the tale and could be generated by the user or the Whole Tale system directly.

E. Supporting verification workflows

Research communities and journals are increasingly adopting artifact review processes that include re-execution of computational analysis. Examples include the workflow implemented by the Odum Institute for the American Journal for Political Science [?], the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Artifact Review and Badging policy⁶, and the ACM Transactions on Mathematical Software (TOMS) Replicated Computational Results⁷ program. We see tales and related research objects being used to simplify and possibly automate aspects of the verification process.

⁶<https://www.acm.org/publications/policies/artifact-review-badging>

⁷<http://toms.acm.org/replicated-computational-results.cfm>

F. BagIt Understandability

One drawback of the BagIt serialization is that the BagIt configuration is foregrounded and difficult to understand for the average researcher/user while the "payload" directory is less apparent and confusingly named "data". Although out of scope for the RO discussion, we are supportive of the idea of a ".bagit" directory that contains the relevant configuration information.

G. Migrating to RO-Crate

Since our adoption of the BagIt-RO model, the community has moved forward on the Research Object Crate (RO-Crate) specification⁸. In this section, we report the results of a preliminary analysis of changes needed to migrate to the new format. Doing so will require versioning the tale export format and will not make changes until the community settles on a near-final version of the specification.

RO-Crate 0.2-DRAFT introduces the following changes from the RO-Bundle 1.0

- Addition of ro-crate-metadata.jsonld (RO-Crate Metadata File). The relationship to the RO-Bundle manifest.json is unclear, since the RO-Crate Metadata File "does not necessarily list or describe all files in the package." We have viewed the "manifest.json" as an inventory of all files in the RO (excluding those introduced by BagIt).
- The RO-Crate metadata file changes vocabulary from the set used by RO-Bundle to primarily schema.org, no longer using ore:aggregates. This also adds support for referencing external datasets, a feature not available in RO-Bundle but added in our tale format.
- The "bagged" RO-Crate structure will differ from the BagIt-RO structure as the "metadata" folder is no longer included. Our assumption is that the ro-crate-metadata.jsonld along with our environment.json will now be included in the BagIt payload. We've come to a similar conclusion about the tale format – that this metadata belongs in the payload not external to it.
- It is unclear whether there will be support for separate provenance metadata or whether this will need to be included in the payload.

RO-Crate promises many benefits that align with Whole Tale, namely the adoption of schema.org as the primary vocabulary and its ability to be used alongside a variety of export formats.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

By implementing an extension to RO-Bundle with BagIt serialization and leveraging existing open science infrastructure tools including repo2docker and BDBag, we were able to effectively create an exportable, publishable, and executable research object package. While not a perfect fit, BagIt-RO met many of our platform requirements. We expect to continue work in this area as we add support for computational provenance information and automated verification and hope

to contribute to the use cases and discussions that inform the development of a broader community standard.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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IX. APPENDIX A

```
{
  "createdBy": {
    "@type": "schema:Person",
    "schema:givenName": "Craig",
    "@id": "willis8@illinois.edu",
    "schema:email": "willis8@illinois.edu",
    "schema:familyName": "Willis"
  },
  "schema:description": "Demonstration of how to use
  Whole Tale to develop custom analysis and
  visualization for data published externally via
  DataONE. See https://wholetale.readthedocs.io/en/
  stable/users_guide/quickstart.html for more
  information.",
  "@context": [
    "https://w3id.org/bundle/context",
    {
      "schema": "http://schema.org/"
    },
    {
      "Datasets": {
        "@type": "@id"
      }
    }
  ],
  "schema:author": [
    {
      "@type": "schema:Person",
      "schema:givenName": "Craig",
      "@id": "https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6148-7196",
      "schema:familyName": "Willis"
    }
  ],
  "schema:version": 7,
  "schema:identifier": "5cb4ffead9323600016c4d4c",
  "schema:image": "http://use.yt/upload/dclda723",
  "Datasets": [
    {
      "@type": "Dataset",
      "identifier": "doi:10.5065/D6862DM8",
      "name": "Humans and Hydrology at High Latitudes
      : Water Use Information",
      "@id": "doi:10.5065/D6862DM8"
    }
  ],
  "createdOn": "2019-04-15 22:04:26.970000",
  "schema:name": "Example Water Tale",
  "schema:category": "Examples",
  "aggregates": [
    {
      "uri": "../data/workspace/wt_quickstart.ipynb"
    },
    {
      "uri": "../data/workspace/apt.txt"
    },
    {
      "uri": "../data/workspace/requirements.txt"
    },
    {
      "uri": "../data/workspace/postBuild"
    },
    {
      "size": 1558016,
      "schema:isPartOf": "doi:10.5065/D6862DM8",
      "uri": "https://cn.dataone.org/cn/v2/resolve/
      urn:uuid:62e1a8c5-406b-43f9-9234-1415277674
      cb",
      "bundledAs": {
        "filename": "usco2000.xls",
        "folder": "../data/data/"
      }
    }
  ],
}
```

⁸<https://researchobject.github.io/ro-crate/>

```
{
  "schema:license": "CC-BY-4.0",
  "uri": "../data/LICENSE"
},
{
  "@type": "schema:HowTo",
  "uri": "../data/README.md"
}
],
"@id": "https://data.wholetale.org/api/v1/tale/5
cb4ffead9323600016c4d4c"
}
\end{verbatim}
```