



# A cornucopia of facts

*Everything you wanted to know about psychoactive substances but were afraid to ask*

*by Lawrence C.*

For those curious individuals who are interested in learning more about psychoactive substances, Erowid.org, or the Vaults of Erowid, contains a cornucopia of information about plants, chemicals, and other related topics. Rather than a traditional medical database brimming with scientific babble, it is an on-line comprehensive compendium of mind-altering substances—everything from 2C-I, 2C-B, and 5-MeO-AMT, to methamphetamine, kava-kava, peyote, and nutmeg.

The interwoven Web pages contain a wealth of information collected from experienced professionals, including doctors, researchers, teachers, sociologists, pharmacists, and lawyers, as well as from users of these drugs. The Web site contains over 20,000 documents, incorporating thousands of charts, graphs, photographic images, research summaries, abstracts, editorialized papers, and “experience reports.” The site also contains information about the chemical and biological effects of psychoactive substances on people and the legality of these potentially harmful substances. These substances, in higher or lower dosages, are traditionally used in medical treatments, spiritual healing, and for recreational purposes.

For each psychoactive drug listed on the Web site, there is a corresponding “vault” of information. Each vault offers colourful buttons leading to basic information that any novice would need to know.

Delving even deeper into the maze of the Web site, readers will find a variety of

cultivation and preparatory techniques for these substances, user and abuser personal experiences, and a variety of cross-referenced writings and articles.

With an average of 25,000 hits per day, Erowid.org, founded in 1995, has demonstrated its popularity among students and professionals alike. Some information on the Web site is based on reliable science; however, to a large degree, the information is highly anecdotal. The founders of the

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site, self-named Earth and Fire Erowid, do not hold PhDs in any field. However, they have collected a range of information from other sources and professionals that may or may not be contained in a traditional scientific medical database.

Recently, *LA Weekly* reported on a young man who checked himself into an emergency ward complaining about paranoia and irrational thoughts. Hospital staff discovered that he had taken 2C-I. Unfamiliar with this illegal recreational drug, the staff searched their databases and found no information. Fortunately, a well-informed third-year medical student had heard about Erowid.org and searched the

database. To the surprise of many well-trained and educated medical professionals, the Erowid.org vaults contained detailed information on 2C-1, including its chemical structure and a link to a recent scientific review. Armed with this information, the emergency professionals were able to use their medical expertise to respond with an appropriate treatment that would completely resolve the symptoms.

In spite of this apparent success story, readers should exercise caution regarding the contents of the vaults. The *LA Weekly* also reports that though the site’s founders post many pieces themselves, Erowid is essentially a collection of other people’s documents, many of which contradict one another. “They do not attempt to vet every wild and wacky claim,” the article claims, “though they strive to maintain an overall tone of caution, pragmatism, and healthy skepticism. Warnings of known dangers are prominently posted, but moralizing is abandoned in favor of fact and reasonable conjecture.”

Overall, Erowid.org is a well organized Web site with an abundance of apparently well researched and anecdotal information. It is easy to navigate and the multitude of graphics helps to maintain reader interest. Happy surfing! ☺

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