

[1.22] TI Calc-Con '02 Trip Report

(In the spring of 2002, Ray Kremer, Bhuvanesh Bhatt and I met in Indiana, just to get together. Ray started calling this "Calc-Con '02", obviously as a joke. I posted the following report to the TI-89 / TI-92 Plus discussion group).

I am happy to report that TI Calc-Con '02 was a success. No arrests were made and no emergency medical equipment was summoned. No live animals were used in the testing of various products. What follows is a more-or less chronological report ...

In attendance were Ray Kremer, Bhuvanesh Bhatt, myself, my wife, Janet, and my daughters Katie and Carrie. We arrived at the designated meeting place early, about 12:00, making much better time than we expected. The weather was cloudy and intermittently rainy for the trip from Eaton, but all in all, a nice drive. We had arranged to meet at the interpretive nature center at Fort Harrison State Park, which is just northeast of Indianapolis, Indiana.

Fort Harrison was actually a military facility from the 1950s, through the 1970s, and maybe earlier. However, it only became a state park in 1996, so they have a lot of work yet to do. Even so, this turned out to be a great place to meet for several different reasons.

As my family and I had a little extra time, we took advantage of the nature center. There were several interesting displays, including a diagram of a core sample of the earth beneath Indianapolis, down to 4000 feet, live exhibits of pond and creek fish, several species of turtles, and rat snakes, and microscopes with animal and botanical samples to inspect. There was also a tremendous display of about 200 animal skulls, and the labeled display called "The poop on scat" proved to be quite popular and informative.

Very shortly after 1:00PM, Ray and Bhuvanesh arrived. Both reported windy, rainy weather on the way in, but no major problems. As Bhuvanesh forgot about the time zone change, even with a reminder from Ray, he had to 'step on it' during the last leg of his trip. After introductions all around, and some general chatting, we revised our itinerary. The original plan was to explore Fort Harrison's hiking paths, then have a bit of a picnic, but unfortunately the weather did not cooperate. Continuous high winds were punctuated by dousing downpours, and the temperature was dropping rapidly. As none of us were outfitted for that kind of hiking, we repaired to the Fort Harrison restaurant for our midday repast, which was a quite satisfactory buffet. Lunch was quite enjoyable, as we talked about Ray's research project with copper tri-crystals, as well as Bhuvanesh's work at Wolfram. My wife acted as photographer for all of Calc-Con '02, and started soon after our luncheon.

I have to confess that I felt a bit underdressed for Calc-Con '02, as Bhuvanesh wore a spectacular oversized T-shirt with colorful math expressions, and Ray wore a shirt with the periodic table printed on the back. This is, perhaps, why he occasionally deprecates the need for calculator-based periodic tables - he's always wearing one!

So, instead of hiking, we decided to visit the Children's Museum in Indianapolis, which was also in keeping with the general technical theme of the convention. We found the Children's Museum with little trouble, although I was leading the caravan and forced Ray and Bhuvanesh to run every yellow light between Fort Harrison and the museum. We arrived at the museum a little before 4:00PM, so, with a closing time of 5:00PM, we had to get right to it. We enjoyed the water lab display and the mirror maze, but even my daughters found the life-size doll-house display a little boring. Ray turned out to be particularly good at building the 8' cantilevered arch. We managed to get several other activities in before closing time, including observing the albino raccoon. As the museum closed, we watched the very elaborate water-clock in the lobby, which was at least two stories tall. Because of our late lunch, no one was particularly in the mood for supper, so we attended a movie showing at the CineDome at the Children's Museum. The CineDome has a huge semi-spherical screen, with a resulting 'immersive'

experience. After a short promotional film for the state of Indiana, we all enjoyed the main feature on animal migrations.

The film ended at 6:30, at which point we returned to Fort Harrison, as my family and I had reserved a room at the Harrison House for the night. I checked in, then we all headed for the room. The Harrison House was once military housing for officers, with two small apartments sharing a large, comfortable common room. This was an ideal arrangement, as we spent the evening in the common room. After some confusion in getting a Papa John's pizza delivery set up, Ray taught us a dice game called Farkle. This is a reasonably complex game, for which he obviously made up most of the rules. Even so, it was plenty diverting until the pizzas arrived. After a delicious pizza supper, we were refreshed and invigorated, and the real work of the conference began.

Nah, not really. We did talk quite a bit about calculators in general, and TI calculators in specific, but it was mostly a review of old issues, including:

- the ti-calc CDROM fiasco,
- the flash app contest,
- Ray's appearance as 'feature' on the TI student web page,
- the annoying 24K asm limit,
- the violent-orange color theme of the TI student web pages,
- advantages and disadvantages of TIGCC vs. the TI SDK,
- the place of graphing calculators in education, both now and in the future,
- speculation about the Steen Machine,
- more speculation about Oliver Miclo's problems with TI-France,
- the enigma of E.W.'s true identity (yes, we could not escape this, even here), and
- the various cartoons on the TI student page.

I brought pretty much my entire calculator collection, so Ray and Bhuvanesh got a chance to see and play with many HP calculators, including the HP-49G. This prompted many interesting stories and observations from both Ray and Bhuvanesh, as the calculators reminded them both of various anecdotes.

After much more talk about calculators, math, science and technology, Ray and Bhuvanesh headed for home at about 2:00 AM. I was sad to see it end. The following day my family and I went to downtown Indianapolis. Since this was not part of Calc-Con '02, I won't go into any detail, except to say that future conventions should make the effort to visit the observation tower, in the Soldier's and Sailor's monument in the center of town. You can take an elevator nearly to the top of the tower, which results in a truly spectacular view of Indianapolis and a pretty big chunk of Indiana, too. Not for the claustrophobic, though.

I had a completely wonderful time, and I believe that Ray and Bhuvanesh did, too. It was really rewarding to meet Ray and Bhuvanesh in 'real life', and they're both just great guys. We plan to do it again next year, and it would be even better to have more people there. We may change the location so that more people can attend, and I would like to consider opening it up to users of any calculator brand, not just TI. I will also try to get a TI representative involved, although I have no idea in what capacity. I am open to suggestions on this.

Ray added these comments in another post:

[16:19, 3/11/02] Re: TI Calc-Con '02 trip report by Ray Kremer

Let's see here. The museum also has a marvelous setup involving pool balls rolling around on a track, on the way from the top to the bottom they would activate various bells and gongs. One section

requires someone to turn a knob that runs an Archimedes' screw in order to bring the balls to the top. Another impressive section dropped balls from the top onto a trampoline and back up into a basket. Doug won the Farkle game, thanks to a stunning two straights in a row (a straight occurs when you roll all six dice and get 1 through 6, it scores 1500 points in a game where the goal is to reach 10000 points).

Doug's older daughter had fun poking around with his various calculators, and when the HP49G came out the first thing she commented on was how funny the buttons are to press.