

Trip report E.W. Dijkstra, London, 25-27 June 1985

The purpose was to attend with Netty van Gasteren the two-day Science and Engineering Conference of the BP Venture Research Unit.

We left our house at 6:40 and at 7:00 Ria dropped me at what is no longer "Welschap" but is now "Eindhoven Airport". We said goodbye and Ria immediately returned home (and to bed). Netty joined me a few minutes later, and at 7:35 we were in the air. At 8:00 - local time: there is a one-hour time difference - we "deplaned" at London, Gatwick, where a BP driver was waiting for us with the traditional battleship; 10 minutes later we were on the road. At 9:50 we checked in at the Great Eastern Hotel, while the driver waited to take us to Britannic House, where the conference started at 10:00. We were only a few minutes late.

On the first day of the conference we listened to 7 speakers, on the second day to 6, each filling a slot of 45 minutes. The first day I had to fight to keep my eyes open after lunch - audiences should not be fed - but, otherwise, I found the conference quite enjoyable and, at the moment itself, quite instructive. Yet, seeing the program + abstracts three days later, I must confess that with several speakers I have applied the most efficient way of information processing (= "One ear in, and out the other"). I fear this is unavoidable.

The lectures were very well presented with the exception of the one given by Dr. S.G. Davies (Oxford) who had ignored the advice of the Venture Research Unit to assume an ignorant but intelligent audience. Davies repeated each remark three or four times before proceeding to the next; he was so repetitive that it was almost offensive. It was in any case ridiculous. Later Don W. Braben told me, that the Davies lecture had been highly appreciated! We live in a difficult world. Was the audience less intelligent than the speakers had been told to assume? I don't think so; I think that one lecture was more like a light course at a heavy dinner.

Don W. Braben was very pleased with how the conference went, and I think rightly so. It has always been his ideal that the Venture Research Fellows would be meaningfully confronted with each other's work, and this time this seemed to happen. The discussions were lively and often included more than the closest colleagues of the speaker. And, of course, one cannot help learning all sorts of things (e.g. that control engineers are a very special brand of people).

On Tuesday evening we were offered a dinner, at which the inedibility of most of the food was for me more than compensated by sitting next to Wladislaw M. Turcki, who happened to be in London and had been invited by the Venture Research Unit so that we could meet. On Wednesday evening,

we dined again at Fredericks Restaurant, Camden Passage, where the food was excellent. (The place had been recommended by Sharon Wylie of the VRU, who had reserved a table for Wlad, Netty, and me. Eventually we were four, as we asked Dr. A.M. Paton of Aberdeen to join us; he had stolen our hearts by apologizing for the fact that he was going to show some pictures.) Before the dinner Wlad and I spoke for a while alone.

The presence of Robert S. Boyer at the conference was for me a fringe benefit, as I was thinking about how to rewrite EWD905 (= Chapter 2). Over the last years my agility in using (my version of) the predicate calculus has become well-oiled, but I have no experience in its axiomatic presentation, and in a number of illuminating conversations with Bob I got a clearer picture of from what I should abstain from. I should not care about the fact that the number of natural functions on the boolean domain is countable, but the number of boolean functions on the natural domain is uncountable; I should also stay within the realm of "total" functions. And I should explain the modesty of my targets.

Thursday morning, Netty and I spent another  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours at the Venture Research Unit: Don had a few things he wanted to talk about, and so had I. At 10:30, one of the battleships took us to Gatwick Airport; the first 40 minutes of that ride we inhaled the exhaust fumes of the London

traffic. We arrived at Gatwick well in time. At Gatwick it was a mess. The international departure hall was overcrowded, the control of the notice boards announcing the departures broke down and when we reached the gate, loudly ringing bells gave for more than 10 minutes a false fire alarm. The NLM flight to Eindhoven was on time (but so bumpy that Netty skipped her meal, which is saying a good deal). Ria was with our rented VW Jetta at the airport, and I was on time for my 16:00 appointment at the THE.

It had been an inspiring conference. It was, alas, also very easy to see how, in contrast, a funding policy carried out by bureaucrats could easily stifle all refreshing research.

Coincidence From E. Patterson (Aberdeen) I heard the same story as I would hear the next week at the THE, viz. students (Freshmen) "simplifying"

$$\frac{1}{a+b} \quad \text{to} \quad \frac{1}{a} + \frac{1}{b}$$

In both cases my spokesmen voiced the suspicion that this "simplification" was actually taught at secondary school. (End of Coincidence.)

Nuenen, 6 June 1985

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