HP Handhelds Meeting in Allschwil

Włodek Mier-Jędrzejowicz

Allschwil is a suburb of the Swiss city of Basel, on the border between France, Switzerland and Germany. That makes it an appropriate place for a meeting of HP handhelds fans from these three countries, with a few from further afield. Last year the meeting was on the same weekend as the HP handhelds conference in America, but this time the organisers were kind enough to select a date when I could come.

So I went – it was an excellent opportunity to meet HP enthusiasts from mainland Europe, including a few HPCC members, whom I had not met before, and to learn what they are doing. I flew from Heathrow to Basel-Mulhouse airport (in France, but also a Swiss airport, with French/Swiss border posts inside the airport itself) on Friday 26 November, and spent Friday afternoon sightseeing in Basel with Matthias Wehrli, the main organiser. On the morning of Saturday 27 November we gathered in Matthias' apartment, then in the afternoon we went to the school he teaches at, where he had booked a large room so we could put lots of equipment on tables and talk about it. In the evening we went for a meal in a local Turkish restaurant, then back to Matthias' place to continue talking till 2am. I barely got an hour's sleep in a local hotel before having to get up early for a lift back to the airport. I shall present the people, and what they said on Saturday afternoon, as:

Cast, in order of appearance

Matthias Wehrli (Switzerland), HPCC member, who hosted the meeting, is an avid collector of HP handhelds and desktops, specialising in accessories. He did not make any presentations on Saturday afternoon, but had already shown us some interesting items from his collection in the morning, especially his comprehensive collection of HP-41 plug-in modules, and he acted as master of ceremonies.

Christoph Klug (Germany), HPCC member, well known to Datafile readers for his enthusiastic articles about the HP-41 and HP-IL interfaces for it. He was the first speaker on Saturday afternoon when he showed us three applications of his latest HP-IL interface, even sending text messages to the display of an HP-IL multimeter. Christoph gave me some new articles for Datafile, which I have passed on to our Editor, and he also encouraged everyone present to support HPCC more!

Meindert Kuipers (Netherlands), showed us prototype boards for his new HP-41 MLDL-2000. This has been much discussed in online discussion areas and on the HP museum web site, and it was very nice to see real hardware. The three boards will go into an HP-41 card reader case (you have to provide your own), will provide memory space in which several HP-41 plug-in ROMs can stored, and in which new machine code can be written. The device will also provide a USB connection for an HP-41!

At this point Christoph Klug took a few minutes to enthuse over Matthias' power supply for the HP-41 – a large battery pack that plugs in through the port at the side of the HP-41 and replaces the internal battery pack.

Christoph Gieselinck (Germany) spoke next, showing his development of an Input/Output system for the HP-28 which did not have an input system other than the keyboard. I was particularly enthusiastic about this as I hope it will be possible

to adapt it for HP-42S calculators. Christoph is best known for maintaining the EMU48 emulator, created by Sébastien Carlier, that HP themselves use (see http://www.hpcalc.org for details of EMU48). He also showed his programs to emulate Pioneer calculators, details at http://privat.swol.de/ChristophGiesselink/

Michael Faulhaber (Germany), has programmed an HP-41 emulator in Fortran for mainframe computers, but has found that this will not work on IBM PCs and clones because the bit order is reversed on those compared to the mainframes. He talked about a program that emulates the old mainframes on a PC, and on which his HP-41 emulator might work. He is also an expert on the HP200LX.

I was invited to speak next: Włodek Mier-Jędrzejowicz (England), HPCC member, special guest. I advertised HPCC, described HPCC meetings and mini-conferences, and also the US conferences, inviting those present to come. I introduced the HP schematics CD-ROM described in this issue, and also sold and signed a few books.

Jean-Francois Garnier (France) showed hardware and software – a Kristal, Inc. HP-IL interface, for a small Centronics plotter which was once popular in France, and his HP-41 emulation program with true support for HP-IL. He also showed versions of EMU41 for the HP Portable Plus and for the HP…LX palmtops.

Raymond del Tondo (Germany, formerly known to some of us as Raymond Hellstern), who joined HPCC at the meeting, has been developing software for the HP48 family of calculators for years, including gems such as the Assembler ROM for the HP48SX, sold by W&W. I was delighted to meet him at last after about 15 years of contact by letters and email. He demonstrated W&W's HP-IL interface for the HP48, made mainly for HP-41 users who wanted to keep using HP-IL with their HP48s; a neat piece of kit, that unfortunately never sold well.

Patrice Torchet (France) is a (prizewinning) second-generation HP handhelds programmer – his father was an HP-71B programmer. He did not present anything on Saturday afternoon, but on Saturday evening he showed us his web page (http://perso.sirtem.fr/totor/encul_en.html) describing his very clever "Enculator" algorithm for factorising large numbers. This can be used on HP handhelds as his web site shows. Beware, his web site refuses to work with Internet Explorer!

Christophe Humbert (France, but only just across the border from Basel) did not show anything either, but was looking for a way to transfer his customer data records from an HP Portable Plus to a PC spreadsheet and was very interested in the potential use of HP Palmtops as an intermediate step in this process. I have left him last in this list, but as he was the person who very kindly gave me a lift back to the airport at 5.30 in the morning, I am especially grateful to him.

This was a fascinating meeting, showing how HP handhelds fans support and use old HP hardware, but also software such as EMU48 that is used in the development of the latest HP models. I am delighted I went and I thank everyone I met there.