

**PPC CD #4: Australian Club Newsletters
Plus
English-Language Conference Proceedings (1979-1999)**

Jake Schwartz

Following completion of the third CD in the PPC set containing the first twenty years of issues of Handheld and Portable Computer Club's (HPCC) publication *Datafile*, a couple of ideas were considered for a follow up. More than one individual suggested that the seventeen issues of Melbourne, Australia's HP41-based *PPC Technical Notes* should be included. Due to the total amount of material there being relatively small compared to CD capacity, a worthwhile companion needed to be selected. It was later decided to go with my personal choice, which was to include the conference proceedings from all the formal English-language HP calculator conferences. (It would not be necessary however, to duplicate any material from the most recent conferences which had their own CDs, starting with the year-2000 affair in Los Angeles.) Original materials from the Australian groups such as PPC Melbourne and CHHU Sydney came from the loaned collection of Jeremy Smith along with some of my own copies. Conference items consisted of my own proceedings plus additional loaned items from Richard Nelson, particularly for the earliest of the events.

The introduction of the HP41C in July of 1979 generated the greatest increase in calculator club activity around the world; with no other era, past or future, coming even close (despite the advent of the Internet, and probably due to the steep drop in cost of personal computers). Along with this, a large number of satellite PPC chapters sprung up in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This spawned "peripheral" publications (such as *Datafile*, *PPC Technical Notes* and the *CHIP Chapter Newsletter*) and an increasing desire for users to gather and share information in person. Starting with the Santa Clara, California PPC Western Calculator Conference on 22 September, 1979, Hewlett-Packard calculator and handheld computer conferences have continued virtually annually until the present day. During the "frenzied" 1980s, either two conferences were held each year (with one on each U.S. coast) or one "formal" conference and one less formal gathering in conjunction with another event, such as the Winter or Summer Consumer Electronics Shows in Las Vegas or Chicago, respectively. In 1983, three conferences were held in Las Vegas, Providence and Orlando. It was a time to explore, meet people and exchange ideas. The current status of this CD has it only approximately three-fourths completed due to lack of sufficient spare time over the Summer, but the scanning will continue until the job is done. Nevertheless, there are already 3966 pages of material spanning the twenty-one year period from the HP41 to the HP49G.

The Australian materials consist of four publications, (1) the *PPC Club Melbourne Chapter* newsletters; (2) the *PPC Technical Notes* (also from the Melbourne group); (3) "*Technical Notes – The Newsletter of PPPM Inc. and CHHU Sydney*"; and (4) the *HPHH Melbourne* newsletters. Of all these, it can only be guaranteed that the set of *PPC Technical Notes* is complete – it is a sure thing that other issues of the three remaining publications exist, and every attempt will be made to obtain copies of the missing issues. Outside of Australia, the *PPC Technical Notes* gained the most fame as the bible of HP41 Synthetic Programming, and anyone who was seriously interested in advanced applications of the HP41 would study these issues from cover to cover. When the "m-code" (or HP41 machine code) craze started, the Aussies were there in the forefront again. The fruits of their labors culminated with their "Assembler 3" EPROM set for the HP41, an m-code assembler/disassembler for use with HP41 ROM-image RAM boxes, EPROM devices and other development tools. Hewlett-Packard gave the HP41 four ports for plug-ins, but that didn't stop us "crazies" from working with up to *ten* simultaneous peripheral devices and memory modules via a handy Port-X-Tender from AME. Those days were frantic and fun.

The other items on the CD are the conference proceedings (and supplementary printed materials obtained at each conference) from 1979 to 1999. Of the 23 conferences in this time period, 14 sets of materials have been included so far. Over the years, one will notice the same names appearing repeatedly, as this group of enthusiasts is close-knit and has remained relatively intact through the decades. This is despite the rise of the personal computer and "instant-access" of the Internet. There is still something special about handheld computing devices which one can carry at all times and utilize at a moment's notice. As Richard Nelson has stressed at many conferences during the "eras" of Corvallis, Singapore, Australia and now San Diego, the dedicated users seem to stay the same; it is the manufacturer's people who are constantly changing and end up relying on us to educate them on historical events.

Australian Publications

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Jan			TN 5	TN 12				PPPM 5	PPPM 16	PPPM 28			HPHH	HPHH	HPHH					
Feb			TN 6				TN 16		PPPM 6		PPPM 17				HPHH	HPHH	HPHH			
Mar		Melb	TN 7			TN 17		PPPM 7	PPPM 18					HPHH	HPHH					
Apr		Melb								PPPM 19				HPHH	HPHH					
May		Melb	TN 8					PPPM 9	PPPM 20				HPHH							
Jun		Melb								PPPM 21				HPHH	HPHH					
July		Melb	TN 9					PPPM 11					HPHH	HPHH						
Aug		Melb TN 1							PPPM 12	PPPM 23				HPHH						
Sep	Melb	Melb TN 2	TN 10		TN 14			PPPM 13	PPPM 24				HPHH							
Oct		Melb TN 3			TN 15		PPPM 3	PPPM 14	PPPM 25					HPHH	HPHH					
Nov	Melb	TN 4	Melb TN 11	TN 13			PPPM 4	PPPM 15	PPPM 26				HPHH							
Dec									PPPM 16	PPPM 27					HPHH					

Calculator Conferences

1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Santa Clara, CA	Chicago, IL	Rockville, MD	Philadelphia, PA	Las Vegas, NV	Chicago, IL	Atlanta, GA	Reston, VA		Corvallis, OR	Chicago, IL
		Corvallis, OR		Providence, RI						
				Orlando, FL						
1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	
Chicago, IL	Corvallis, OR	Philadelphia, PA		Zandaam, Netherlands	Mall of America, MN	Anaheim, CA	London, England	Vancouver, WA	Vancouver, WA	
		London UK								

Figure 1. "Jump Table" for PPC CD4 (Note: shaded proceedings not yet scanned as of 14 Sept. '03)

It is interesting to scan through those proceedings and see similar topics repeating throughout the years, such as improving the calculator user interface, adding help capabilities, features and enhancements which were left off the latest machines that should have been considered, etc. I guess we'll be hammering home the same points until we feel they get it right. For those who attended any or all the conferences, I think there is general agreement that they are special events which are memorable in many ways. Lots of conferences represented points in time when a major project either completed or was born due to discussions which occurred by chance. Below is a stream-of-consciousness collection of memories from some of those events.

1979 - On my trip to the first conference in Santa Clara in 1979, I remember seeing a copy of a letter sent to HP, requesting that the PPC group would like to develop a custom ROM for the HP41 (which later became the PPC ROM, a project which would dominate the lives of many people for years to come).

1980 - At the 1980 conference in Chicago, many "firsts" were experienced: the night before the formal talks many people gathered in Jack Stout's backyard garage to share toys and stories and such with old and new acquaintances and meet Bill Wickes for the first time. In a recreational vehicle parked next to that garage, a bunch of us attempted (and succeeded!) to automatically print HP41 barcodes with the thermal printer of the HP85 computer (which CHIP member Ron Johnson had just purchased with his own money for over \$3000.) At the formal conference, the HP41 barcode wand was presented by HP's Dave Conklin, and this marked the beginning of a long effort to do a "PPC Barcode Book", an ambitious project which never really saw its just conclusion. This also turned out to be the event where Bill Wickes gave his first presentation on Synthetic Programming on the HP41C, first met with HP in person and eventually was offered a position in the calculator group.

1981 - At the Rockville, Maryland conference, two things come to mind. First, Jim DeArras revealed his "breadboard" version of his extended memory device for the HP41 for the first time. Also, between Saturday and Sunday, Richard Nelson, Irv Weiner (Providence, RI PPC chapter coordinator), Eric Vogel (HP engineer who worked on many projects through the years) and I stayed up until 6:30AM, conversing about everything under the sun.

The first Corvallis, Oregon conference was extremely memorable, with a record 160+ attendees from all over the place. Not only did we get a plant tour of the "cleansed" calculator R&D area, but a wonderful gathering which, at one point had Bill Egbert's presentation on the HP41 become a one-on-one conversation between himself and Jim DeArras (from the audience) discussing the Nut CPU instruction set while the rest of the room sat amazed in silence. HP also threw the group a wonderful barbecue right on the grounds, where members of the yet-unannounced HP75 development team wore their "Roo Crew" tee shirts.

1982 - This was the year of the first conference that our Philadelphia PPC chapter threw, and it was memorable. The biggest memory for me was that we booked a hotel which was under construction and was promised to be completed in time - until a construction strike caused the building to be still very much incomplete. A huge rainstorm left a deep puddle in the lobby, the elevator didn't work yet and many rooms were without plumbing and electricity. The conference meeting rooms were not ready, so they booked some rooms in a shabby place a mile down the road and we crammed over 150 people in there, with a cluster of rooms upstairs for third-party dealers. It was such an exciting time with the HP41, and it seemed that the only person who thought it was a disaster was me.

1983 - The January Las Vegas conference was the first where we really discussed HP41 "m-code" in detail, and EPROM and RAM boxes were getting into vogue. I purchased my first HP-IL EPROM burner there.

1984 - The Chicago conference which was billed as the Tenth Anniversary PPC Conference, was the most nervous time I can remember. This was the first affair held after the final separation of Richard Nelson from PPC, and both his allies and adversaries were represented. Despite the recent exciting announcement of the HP71B, you could cut the tension with a knife. This was also the time Bill Wickes spoke on his then-recently-developed, fascinating HP41 Translator ROM for the 71B.

1985 - The conference in Atlanta has one significant memory which, I think many of the attendees will keep in their minds: that was the session where Michael Markov helped to duplicate PPC "swap" disks via HP-IL with a setup containing a stack of roughly ten HP9114 disk drives connected together. It didn't take too much time to make floppies for the group when you could make 9 or 10 simultaneously.

1986 – This was the year of the last-minute conference arranged primarily (as I could remember) by John Baker and Bob Bradley in order to attempt to brainstorm ways to keep the CHHU group going despite insufficient membership numbers to financially support it. It was an enjoyable event, but did not ultimately generate the result it sought. Richard stopped regularly publishing calculator newsletters and went to work for PPC member Jim Carter at Educalc.

1989 – This conference in Chicago was hoped originally to not only celebrate the 50th anniversary of Hewlett-Packard and the 10th anniversary of the HP41, but to celebrate the release of what became the HP48. However, it wasn't ready, so we got no new news there, and discussed the HP28, newly-announced Sharp Wizard and speculated on the future.

1990 – Chicago was also the host this time, following (finally!) the announcement of the HP48SX. Bill Wickes and Eric Vogel of HP both attended and made interesting presentations. The evening "informal" presentations at Jack Stout's place of business, Ace Metal Crafts' metal shop were just as interesting as the daytime talks earlier. It was also at this meeting where the first known demonstration of two HP calculators communicating wirelessly via packet radio.

1991 – The Corvallis conference at Oregon State University saw discussions on the recently-announced HP95LX MS-DOS palmtop, data acquisition on the HP48 and the newly-created HP Bulletin Board System. Also, this was the time when Rick Greville demonstrated the features of the Jazz HP48 machine-code development environment, Jan Brittonson showed off other HP48 low-level applications and Alonzo Garipey spoke on Microsoft's then ongoing research into PDA voice and handwriting recognition.

1992 – This second of the Philly conferences was held at Drexel University where Dennis York spoke on HP48 development memories, Ted Dickens discussed the HP Forum on CompuServe, we got a glimpse at the new Sparcom HP95 peripheral disk drive and Brian Maguire drove 11 hours from Detroit to speak on his System-RPL Development ROM Card for the HP48. However, my best memory was Jeremy Smith's article which he submitted for the proceedings, called the "Handy Dandy Pocket Daemon", an early prediction of the ultimate PDA. Looking back over a decade, his predictions have been eerily accurate.

The fall HPCC Tenth-Anniversary conference in London was memorable for many reasons. We celebrated the 20th anniversary of the HP35; we got a videotaped Corvallis plant tour by Raan Young, on which he made Frank Wales vanish; and Lee Woodruff gave us a survey of Computer Algebra Systems. Bob Pulluard spoke on the state of the still-active European calculator clubs and HP's Jim Donnelly gave a short history of calculating devices predating the electronic calculator. In the afternoon of the second day, we all marched over the Science Museum and were treated to a "private" demonstration of the recently-completed full-scale working reproduction of Charles Babbage's Difference Engine #2 – a device never having ever been completed in Babbage's lifetime.

1994 – The Dutch conference sponsored by the Prompt group was the one held after announcing the postponement of it only around ten days prior to its original date back in May of 1993. I did not attend, however I did receive the videotape of the event, made by Jo Vandale of the Belgium group. Diana Byrne, then of the HP48GX and HP38G team, spoke about HP development.

1995 – This was Craig Finseth's do-it-yourself conference, held at the Mall of America in Minneapolis, Minnesota. HP was up to the HP200LX palmtop and shipped handheld development out to the Singapore division, where they basically put calculators "on hold". Wlodek Mier-Jedrzejowicz released the first edition of his book on the history of HP handhelds. Kheng-Joo Khaw of HP Singapore talked about their ongoing palmtop activities and Jim Donnelly of Corvallis did the HP38G development presentation.

1996 – The conference in Anaheim, California was Dave Shier's baby, with parallel "palmtop" and "calculator" tracks. With Singapore still in charge, HP continued to insist that they did not need to move forward with the calculator line. The HP OmniGo 100 was new and different, and the DOS palmtops were still the focus of attention.

1997 – The Handheld and Portable Computer Club in London hosted their 15th-Anniversary conference, and it was well attended. The calculators had been handed over to the new Australian Calculator Operation (ACO) and man-in-charge Chris Wallin explained to us how they would be making things exciting again. They seemed to be

interested in our opinions, but it ultimately became evident later that they were taking aim in gaining market share in Texas Instruments' high-school student arena. The professional user and HP fan from the past would take a back seat while the HP6S, HP30S and HP39G/40G machines attempted to gather users who had never even heard of RPN. In all fairness, following the release of the Meta Kernel by a group of French HP48 enthusiasts, ACO hired them to merge MK with the 48 and the HP49G ultimately became a reality. Meanwhile, Singapore began cranking out palmtops based on Microsoft's newly-developed Windows CE operating system.

1998 – This first of two consecutive HP-sponsored conferences held in Vancouver, Washington basically was a showing that ACO was somewhat interested in keeping ties with the user community. They opened their doors to us and were very hospitable, but had virtually nothing new to say.

1999 – Following a half year of major user-community HP49 beta testing, the machine was rolled out officially during this second conference in Vancouver. To a delighted crowd, all attendees were given a machine as a showing of support. Jean-Yves Avenard presented a detailed discussion on HP49 architecture, and later in the weekend, ACO gave a training session on the then-newly-developed Software Development Kit (SDK).

I hope to have all materials for this CD scanned and incorporated some time this fall. Stay tuned.