

Trip report E.W. Dijkstra, Tulsa, 1-6 March 1985

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For a two-day visit to The University of Tulsa, Oklahoma, Ria and I left Austin on Friday morning by car: knowing neither Northern Texas nor Oklahoma, we felt we should use the opportunity to get acquainted. On Friday we drove 225 miles, up to Tyler; on Saturday we drove 425 miles, through Northern Texas and Eastern Oklahoma, arriving in Tulsa in the evening. On Sunday, we had a day off: in the morning we went to the Tulsa Zoo - very hard to find - and the afternoon we spent in our hotel room, mostly writing and reading. After dinner our social obligations started. Monday and Tuesday were spent at the University of Tulsa, where we left at 17:30. That evening we drove 225 miles to Sherman; on Wednesday we drove the remaining 325 miles to Austin, where we returned at 16:00.

We drove 1254 miles in toto; it was our first opportunity to try out the new Audi 4000 S on a long trip. On the whole it passed the test with flying colours: it made on the average 36.3 miles/gallon (= 15.4 km/liter), but the engine still seems a bit new - at a moment no sheriff was looking, I tried its maximum speed on a deserted road, but in its 5th gear it stopped to accelerate around 90 m/h -. It has, however, evidently been designed with the German Autobahn in mind: like its predecessors - this is our 4th Audi - it transmits on a bumpy road - and we encountered some! - all shocks and noises to the interior. On Tuesday

evening we had an uncomfortable hour with road constructions and very heavy oncoming traffic on a two-lane road; Ria had the bad luck that she was driving on that stretch.

When we left Austin, we left Interstate Highway 35 as soon as possible, and took at Round Rock the U.S. 79 in the direction North-East. It is a route we can recommend: we liked the trip very much. Later we found ourselves -by accident!- on what is advertised as the Texas Forest Trail, the countryside was nice and did not strike us as monotonous at all. The stretch from Tyler to the border with Oklahoma is at first less exciting but becomes more and more interesting when one realizes one is crossing a river delta of impressive proportions. (The Red River, which forms the border between the two states, is really red!) Eastern Oklahoma is really beautiful: rough, hardly populated, impressive and beautiful. We drove most of State Highway nr.1 - "at our own risk", as we were officially notified!- just along the mountain ridge, with the surrounding countryside far below at both sides of the road. Then we drank something in The Hilltop Bar - what else!- : a wooden shed where four men and a woman were playing billiards in the middle of nowhere. We observed them for half an hour and I realized that I was absolutely unable to envisage the rest of their lives; in honour of our presence they threw coins in the Wurlitzer.

On our way back we came down on the US 281,

now passing Dallas at the other side. Our way led through the hills, and, again, it is a trip we can recommend: the views were often breathtaking. (And we saw genuine ranches!)

But perhaps one should do it with a "motor home" or something like that, taking enough of one's own comfort with one to be independent. The catering was terrible. The Sheraton Inn in Tyler and the Ramada Inn in Sherman are places I hope never to visit again, and from my confession that we have allowed ourselves to be fed in places like McDonald and Golden Fried Chicken you can draw the rest of your conclusions. The Westin Hotel in the heart of Tulsa, however, was excellent; our room had even a desk at which I could write very comfortably (and so I did).

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My official and widely publicized obligations in Tulsa were to give two talks at The University of Tulsa in their "Distinguished Lecture Series in Computer Science," on Monday on "The Snapshot Algorithm of Chandy and Lamport" — chosen because that is a technical topic I can lecture on when the "visual aids" are defective, and one never knows! — and on Tuesday on "Future of Computing Science" — because my host was very keen on such a talk —, both days at 15:00 in one of their largest lecture halls. Both talks went very smoothly, but the PA system was too weak, and that hurt during the last talk when I had a full house.

On Monday I met with a junior level computing science class, on Tuesday morning with a senior level one. With one or two exceptions, the students seemed totally unfamiliar with formal techniques. The most important part of my visit was probably a long discussion on Monday morning with William Coberly, the Chairman of the Department of Mathematical and Computer Science. I encouraged them to keep the two in a single department.

The University of Tulsa seemed to be a proud private university of modest size (6000 students). They wanted - as a department or as a university - not to cover "everything" but to concentrate on "what matters most", and for the selection implied they sought my guidance. I found them well-intended and open-minded, and as a result I liked the place. Whether they will succeed, however, is quite a different matter. They seemed to have their major stress in their undergraduate education, and somehow undergraduate courses seem always to be unduly knowledge-oriented. To me it is not obvious at all that computing science is an appropriate topic for an undergraduate curriculum here. (Typically, the most frequent question asked was what textbooks to use, a question I have never asked myself. The faculty members had fortunately the grace not to ask which programming language to use, but in the discussions the students did.)

On campus it was quite noticeable that Amoco

was the dominant industry in town. I met a few people from Amoco Research and was in general favourably impressed by their views on the rôle of research in industry and on the rôle of industry in the scientific enterprise. The cooperation seemed to work (without unrealistic expectations at either side).

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