David,
thanks for the informative report. I appreciate it!

Haje

"David Fanning" <news@dfanning.com> wrote in message
news:MPG.22a8c605e111c93898970f@news.frii.com...
> Folks,
>
> The good folks at ITTVIS have been giving a series of occasional
> seminars for IDL users in Boulder (and perhaps elsewhere, I don't
> know). But, at least in Boulder, these are extremely well attended,
> and not just because they were giving out free T-shirts at the end.
> There has been some fairly good information coming out of them.
> I attended the "Numerical Analysis Techniques in IDL" session today
> and thought I would give you a report, just to keep everyone up to
> date.
>
> The purpose of the seminar was to "learn how to get the most out
> of your data using IDL's built-in math and statistics libraries."
> Then there was some information on how to unlock the IDL Analyst
> product. This caused some people in my group to feel like this
> would be an extended infomercial for IDL Analyst, but as it turned
> out, IDL Analyst was barely mentioned and all the examples used
> normal IDL routines.
>
> Mark Piper gave most of the presentation. In my travels in the IDL
> community I have heard nothing but great reports of Mark's teaching
> abilities, and now I know why. He is friendly, knowledgeable, an
> expert communicator, and he can keep a smile on his face even when
> his first unrehearsed foray into an iTool modification completely
> crashed IDL. (Oh, well, I've seen worse with the iContour command.)
>
> One of my gripes with IDL examples is that they are often
> so contrived as to me meaningless or misleading when it comes
> to applying the example to real-world data. None of that here.
> Mark used real data, simple enough to use in this setting, but
> sophisticated enough to make you think you could probably try
> this at home.
>
> The problem with teaching data analysis is the fear you encounter
> when you face a room full of people who's livelihood is nothing
> *but* data analysis, and you have to wave your hands at the little
> bit you *think* you know. (I speak of myself here, not Mark.)

> Mark is more knowledgeable about this stuff than I am, but clearly
> there were people in the audience who wrote their graduate theses
> on this stuff. Mark handled it all with grace and good humor, and
> with a minimum amount of handwaving.
>
> When Mark finished, a member of the IDL Professional Development
> group got up to do a short presentation on "particle swarm
> optimisation". I didn't follow too many of the technical details,
> but basically your throw a bizillion random "particles" at a
> curve fitting or minimization problem, and they can coalesce into
> a solution after some finite number of iterations. The examples
> were neat, and the code was sparse. (IDL always amazes me!)
>
> The most interesting part of this presentation to me personally
> was that this person had apparently never heard of the IDL
> Workbench (or perhaps he had) and had never used it. He showed
> us the code using the VI editor. Go figure. This part of the
> presentation seemed rather free of marketing input. :-)
>
> The final presentation of the day was by Peter Messmer of
> Tech-X Corporation. His company has developed some IDL code
> that allows you to take advantage of the processing capability
> built into the 128 processors of your graphics card! Wow.
> For the right application, this could be extremely useful.
> Best of all, Tech-X is making it available free (using a GPL
> license) for people to take advantage of. They plan to make
> their money by using this as an introduction to the companies
> other parallel processing products.
>
>   http://www.txcorp.com/technologies/GPULib/index.php
>
> Overall, I thought it was a useful seminar. I learned a couple
> of things, had my prejudices about iTools confirmed, and spent
> a pleasant morning in good company. I appreciate ITTVIS doing
> this kind of outreach. If you have a chance to attend a seminar,
> I would highly recommend it.
>
> Cheers,
>
> David
>
> --
> David Fanning, Ph.D.
> Fanning Software Consulting, Inc.
> Coyote's Guide to IDL Programming (www.dfanning.com)
> Sepore ma de ni thui. ("Perhaps thou speakest truth.")