

A SPRING AT SFU - MY CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

I was overjoyed when I got accepted to the C&CofMARS program in the Spring semester of 2009. The cooperation program was established between several Canadian and European universities and offers academic mobility to the participating students. I had the opportunity to spend four months at Simon Fraser University (SFU) doing research work in the area of robotics.

Since the Hungarian and Canadian schedules overlapped one another I had to travel one week later than the start of the semester. After a long but pleasant flight I finally arrived in Vancouver. Gergely, the other Hungarian student in the project helped me a lot settling in as he was already familiar with the place having arrived a couple of days earlier. Despite living on-campus tended to be more expensive I still decided to live on residence. I got a room in the Townhouses Complex which was nothing like the usual dorms in Hungary. Each townhouse unit was a 3-level unit with a living room, dining room, kitchen, bathrooms and private bedrooms. My flatmates were also exchange students coming from Australia and we got along quite well. Instead of cooking for my own I signed up for the meal plan because it was less time consuming and hence I could taste various fine cuisines in the Dining Hall.

The ultimate goal of the research project was to develop a common platform for the participating universities in which hockey playing robot teams can compete against each other. My personal task was to evaluate and enhance the existing image processing system. The visual feedback is designed to provide reliable information about the positions and orientations of the moving robots for the controller PC. Having worked on motion tracking tasks before I was familiar with the problem. The work was however still very exciting as I could apply my knowledge in practice as well as broaden my horizons during researching for new methods. Occasionally I helped Mihaly, the student from Romania, in his electric circuitry design and testing work therefore I also gained considerable experience in hardware development.





I took two regular courses in addition to the project work. The first one was compulsorily about culture but I never regretted enrolling to it. I learned many things about Canada which helped me to better understand the country: from its history to its current cultural, political life and also economic status. The engineering course concentrated on the problems encountered when dealing with real-time and embedded applications, demonstrated through the QNX operating system.

I was amazed by the countless recreational opportunities at SFU. We entered the intramural soccer league with a team mainly consisting of people working in the lab but often played friendly games on the nearby field too. I usually went to the swimming pool and the gym multiple times a week and was even able to try myself out in kung fu classes. There was a weekly event called the Rez Challenge, a competition in various sports held among students who live on-campus. Along with Gergely and Mihaly as members of the Townhouse Exchange Students we played soccer, basketball, handball and many more. It was a great initiative where one could meet, befriend and have fun with others.

One of my best decisions was, however, to join the SFU Guitar Club and the SFU Jazz Band as a guitar player. The Jazz Band, as its name suggests, was a jazz big band consisting of trumpets, trombones, saxophones, guitars, drums and a piano. We had weekly rehearsals and also performed on numerous gigs. Never have played jazz before it was quite challenging for me but I really enjoyed it. The SFU Guitar Club, on the other hand, was not as organized as the Jazz Band and we usually just got there and had jam sessions. Motivated by the highly





skilled guitar players I was able to improve on my technique a lot. We also had several social events and I got many new friends thanks to these clubs.

The weather in Vancouver was really unpredictable as sometimes snowfall and sunshine followed each other. However the climate was still much temperate than what I thought it would be. The city is located in the neighbourhood of the Pacific Ocean and the Rocky Mountains thus provides a fantastic view. I was able to visit some amazing places, most notably the Stanley Park and the Vancouver Aquarium where I could observe the life of many marine animals. I managed to visit Whistler on the last days, home to the 2010 Winter Olympics. It was cold but also very refreshing as I took a gondola to the top of the mountains. But Vancouver is not only beautiful, it is also very multicultural. I could meet people from all over the world: China, Iran, Korea, Philippines, Austria, France, Netherlands, Poland, Nigeria and the list goes on infinitely. It is indeed a "fruit cake".

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