

Critical Sets in Back Circulant Latin Rectangles

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In memory of Derrick R. Breach

Abstract

A *latin rectangle* is an $m \times n$ array, $m \leq n$, from the numbers $1, 2, \dots, n$ such that each of these numbers occur in each row and in each column at most once. A *critical set* in an $m \times n$ array is a set S of given entries, such that there exists a unique extension of S to a latin rectangle of size $m \times n$. If we index the rows and columns of an $m \times n$ array, $m \leq n$, by the sets $M = \{1, 2, \dots, m\}$ and $N = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$, respectively, then the array with integer $i + j - 1 \pmod{n}$ in the position (i, j) is said to be a *back circulant latin rectangle*. We show that the size of smallest critical set in a back circulant latin rectangle of size $m \times n$, with $4m \leq 3n$ is equal to $m(n - m) + \lfloor (m - 1)^2/4 \rfloor$.

1 Introduction

A *latin rectangle* is an $m \times n$ array, $m \leq n$, from the numbers $1, 2, \dots, n$ such that each of these numbers occur in each row and in each column at most once. A *critical*

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set in an $m \times n$ array is a set S of given entries, such that there exists a unique extension of S to a latin rectangle of size $m \times n$. There are some papers on critical sets of latin squares. The interested reader may start with [2] and [5] and their references. If we index the rows and columns of an $m \times n$ array, $m \leq n$, by the sets $M = \{1, 2, \dots, m\}$ and $N = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$, respectively, then the array with integer $i + j - 1 \pmod{n}$ in the position (i, j) is said to be a *back circulant latin rectangle*. A critical set which contains no proper subset as a critical set is called a *minimal critical set*, and the one with the minimum cardinality is called a *minimum critical set*. What we define as a “minimum critical set”, other authors define as a “critical set”. The following important result can be found in [1].

Theorem A. [1] *Let L be a back circulant latin square of order n . Then L contains a minimal critical set of size $\lfloor n^2/4 \rfloor$.*

A minimal critical set of size $\lfloor n^2/4 \rfloor$, given in [1] is easily seen to be a minimum critical set when n is even. But whether the size of minimum critical set is $\lfloor n^2/4 \rfloor$, in the case of n being odd is an open question. Mahmoodian, Naserasr and Zaker [4] proved the following,

Theorem B. [4] *Let L be an $m \times n$ back circulant latin rectangle, where $2m \leq n$. Then L contains a critical set of size $m(n - m) + \lfloor (m - 1)^2/4 \rfloor$, which is the smallest critical set for such a latin rectangle.*

We prove further that the result of Theorem B holds when $4m \leq 3n$. We refer to [4] for further definitions and notation. We make two new definitions. A *circular movement* is a permutation, $(a_{i,1}, a_{i,2}, \dots, a_{i,r})$ of the numbers from some row i of an $m \times n$ latin rectangle such that if the permutation is applied to the numbers in that row of the latin rectangle (i.e. if in the row i the element $a_{i,2}$ is replaced with $a_{i,1}$, $a_{i,3}$ with $a_{i,2}$, \dots , and $a_{i,1}$ with $a_{i,r}$) then the result is also a latin rectangle. We let the set of allowable differences between successive elements in the permutation be called the *difference* of the circular movement. We call it the set D .

Example 1.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2
4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3
5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4
6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5
7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6

is a 7×9 back circulant latin rectangle.

$(2, 5, 8)$ is a circular movement in row 2. If it is applied to the latin rectangle we get:

the latin rectangle must intersect in $(n + (n - 2m + 2i - 1) - 1)/2 = n - m + i - 1$ elements. Note that $n - 2m + 2i - 1 > 0$, giving the stated hypothesis. \square

Lemma 2. *In a back circulant $m \times n$ latin rectangle, if $\lfloor m/2 \rfloor < i \leq n/2$, then row i must intersect any critical set in at least $n - i$ elements.*

Proof. It follows by symmetry and by previous lemma. \square

Using Lemma 1 and 2, Mahmoodian, Naserasr and Zaker [4], proved Theorem B. They construct and prove that the following:

$$\{(i, j) \mid i \leq \lfloor m/2 \rfloor, 1 \leq j \leq n - m + i - 1\} \cup \{(i, j) \mid i > \lfloor m/2 \rfloor, i + 1 \leq j \leq n\}$$

is a set which uniquely completes to the back circulant latin rectangle. This set has $m(n - m) + \lfloor (m - 1)^2/4 \rfloor$ elements and intersects row i in $n - m + i - 1$ elements if $i \leq \lfloor m/2 \rfloor$ and in $n - i$ elements if $i > \lfloor m/2 \rfloor$. By previous lemmas, no critical set could be smaller.

In [4] they got their result by looking at circular movements that were transpositions. We will look at circular movements that are larger.

Lemma 3. *A row i in an $m \times n$ back circulant latin rectangle must intersect any critical set in at least $n - m$ consecutive numbers, where n is considered consecutive to 1 and wrap around is allowed.*

Proof. In row i of an $m \times n$ back circulant latin rectangle, the difference set D , which has $n - m$ elements, is $D = \{i, i + 1, \dots, n - m + i - 1\}$. We associate a (directed) graph G_i to row i , where $V(G_i) = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$, and jk is an arc in G_i (starting from j and ending in k) if the element k , in the row i , can be replaced by j ; i.e. $k - j \in D$. Note that any circuit (directed cycle) in G_i is a circular movement in row i . Thus, the intersection of any critical set with row i is a covering for the circuits of G_i . Suppose S is a covering for the circuits in row i . By removing the set of vertices in S from G_i , there will be no circuit left in the resulting subgraph. Thus there is at least one vertex v whose outdegree in the subgraph is equal to zero. In other words all of the vertices that v is adjacent to, in G_i , are removed. Therefore $|S| \geq n - m$. Hence there are $n - m$ consecutive numbers in row i that intersect with the critical set. \square

Lemma 4. *In a back circulant $m \times n$ latin rectangle, if $i \leq n - m$, and $i \leq \lfloor m/2 \rfloor$ then row i must intersect any critical set in at least $n - m + i - 1$ elements.*

Proof. For row i we have $D = \{i, i + 1, \dots, n - m + i - 1\}$. Let S be a critical set of the latin rectangle. By Lemma 3 we know that there are at least $n - m$ (therefore at least $i - 1$) consecutive elements in row i that intersect this critical

set. Consider the last $i - 1$ of these so that the next element is not in S . Without loss of generality let the $i - 1$ consecutive elements in the critical set and row i be $n - i + 2, n - i + 3, \dots, n - 1, n$ and let 1 not be in the critical set. Then consider the following $n - m$ circular movements, all starting with 1 and the numbers from $i + 1$ to $n - i + 1$, inclusive, written down in order in the columns of the circular movements:

$$\begin{array}{cccccccc}
(1, & i + 1, & i + 1 + n - m, & i + 1 + 2n - 2m, & \dots, & \cdot, & & a) \\
(1, & i + 2, & i + 2 + n - m, & i + 2 + 2n - 2m, & \dots, & \cdot, & & a + 1) \\
(1, & i + 3, & i + 3 + n - m, & i + 3 + 2n - 2m, & \dots, & \cdot, & & a + 2) \\
\vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & & \vdots \\
(1, & \cdot, & \cdot, & \cdot, & \dots, & \cdot, & n - i + 1) \\
(1, & \cdot, & \cdot, & \cdot, & \dots, & n - i + 2) \\
\vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & & \vdots \\
(1, & i + n - m, & i + 2n - 2m, & i + 3n - 3m, & \dots, & & & a - 1)
\end{array}$$

Here we have $m - i + 2 \leq a \leq n - i + 1$. All the differences are $n - m$, except for, perhaps, the wrap around differences and the difference between the first and second elements. Since $n - m \geq i$, so $n - m \in D$. The differences between the first and second elements are $i, i + 1, \dots, n - m + i - 1$ from top to bottom. The wrap around differences are also from the set $\{i, i + 1, \dots, n - m + i - 1\}$, but not necessarily in that order. Hence these are circular movements that must intersect S . Since 1 is not in S and the rest of the elements of the circular movements are disjoint, there must be $n - m$ intersections between S and the elements $i + 1, i + 2, \dots, n - i + 1$. But $n - i + 2, n - i + 3, \dots, n$ are also in the critical set. Hence row i and S intersect in $n - m + i - 1$ elements. \square

Theorem. (MAIN) *Let L be an $m \times n$ back circulant latin rectangle, where $4m \leq 3n$. Then L contains a critical set of size $m(n - m) + \lfloor (m - 1)^2/4 \rfloor$, which is the smallest critical set for such a latin rectangle.*

Proof. Suppose $i \leq \lceil m/2 \rceil$. Since $4m \leq 3n$ we have either $n - 2m + 2i - 1 > 0$ or $i \leq n - m$. Thus by Lemma 4, row i and a critical set must intersect in at least $n - m + i - 1$ elements. By symmetry, as in Lemma 2, if $\lceil m/2 \rceil < i \leq m$, then row i must intersect any critical set in at least $n - i$ elements. Hence, if S is a critical set, then

$$\begin{aligned}
|S| &\geq [(n - m) + (n - m + 1) + \dots + (n - m + \lceil m/2 \rceil - 1)] \\
&\quad + \frac{1}{2}(1 + (-1)^{m+1})(n - m + \lceil m/2 \rceil) \\
&\quad + [(n - m + \lceil m/2 \rceil - 1) + \dots + (n - m + 1) + (n - m)] \\
&= m(n - m) + \lfloor (m - 1)^2/4 \rfloor.
\end{aligned}$$

If in a back circulant latin rectangle of size $m \times n$ we take the entries of the set S , where

$$S = \{(i, j) | i \leq \lfloor m/2 \rfloor, \lfloor m/2 \rfloor - (i - 1) \leq j \leq n - \lceil m/2 \rceil - 1\} \\ \cup \{(i, j) | i > \lfloor m/2 \rfloor, \lfloor m/2 \rfloor + 1 \leq j \leq n + \lfloor m/2 \rfloor - i\},$$

then S is a critical set of size $m(n - m) + \lfloor (m - 1)^2/4 \rfloor$. □

Remark 1. Note that the condition $4m \leq 3n$ is the best possible we can get with our method of using Lemma 3 and 4. For example in a 7×9 back circulant latin rectangle (see Example 1) we do not necessarily need 4 elements in any critical set from row 3. In fact, if we take all elements of that rectangle, except a set of 6 consecutive elements from row 3, we will get a critical set.

Remark 2. It is conjectured by both of the present authors, independently, that

Conjecture . ([3] and [5]) *For any latin square of order n the cardinality of any critical set is greater than or equal to $\lfloor n^2/4 \rfloor$.*

The results such as the one in the main theorem above, are attempts toward settling that conjecture.

Remark 3. We thank M. Mahdian for his comments on this paper.

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