

1 Introduction

The purpose of these notes is examples in undergraduate mathematics that the author considers to be interesting; this could be from applications or pure mathematical interest.

2 One Variable Integral Calculus

2.1 The Mercator Map and the Integral of Secant

Historical Motivation

The Mercator Map of the world spaces out the lines of latitude in a particular way in order to solve a problem in naval navigation. The problem is that ships would navigate by sailing with a fixed angle to due north (e.g. as seen on a compass). This creates an issue for making map. Consider a map where the lines of latitude are spaced out evenly in the vertical direction (so NOT the Mercator map); for such a map, a course with fixed angle to magnetic north is NOT a straight line on the map.

The problem is that the lines of latitude get represent shorter and shorter distances as you move from the equator towards either of the poles. This means that there is a complicated relationship between the angle measured on this map and the true angle to magnetic north it represents.

In 1569, Mercator had the idea that he could create a map where the lines of latitude are NOT spaced evenly; if you choose the variation in spacing in the correct manner, then a course with fixed angle to magnetic north will be a straight line on this new map. Furthermore, the angle measured on the map will match the true angle to magnetic north.

Unfortunately, Mercator didn't give a clear formula to precisely describe how to space out the lines of latitude. However, in 1599, Edward Wright found a precise mathematical description of how to space out the lines; he found that the spacing depended on the area under the secant function. He didn't know how to precisely compute this area, but he was able to approximate it.

Later in the 1640's, Henry Bond looked at a table of these approximate areas and a table of logarithms of trigonometric functions. He noticed a similarity in the two tables, and he was able to conjecture a precise formula for the area under the secant function. We now know that his conjecture was correct, but at the time there was no proof beyond numerical tables.

A proof was later given by Isaac Barrow; this proof is the earliest known publication of the use of integration by partial fractions.

The Problem

Compute the integral

$$\int_0^x \sec(u) du. \tag{1}$$

The Solution

Recall that $\sec(u) = \frac{1}{\cos(u)}$. First, let's use algebraic manipulation combined with the trigonometric formula $\cos^2(u) + \sin^2(u) = 1$.

$$\int_0^x \frac{1}{\cos(u)} du = \int_0^x \frac{\cos(u)}{\cos^2(u)} du, \quad (2)$$

$$= \int_0^x \frac{\cos(u)}{1 - \sin^2(u)} du. \quad (3)$$

Now, we do a u -substitution. However, we are already use the variable u , so let's make it a " w -substitution". We use $w = \sin(u)$, and so $dw = \cos(u) du$. Then we have that our integral is:

$$\int_0^{\sin(x)} \frac{1}{1 - w^2} dw. \quad (4)$$

Now, we use partial fractions:

$$\frac{1}{1 - w^2} = \frac{1}{(1 - w)(1 + w)}, \quad (5)$$

$$= \frac{A}{1 - w} + \frac{B}{1 + w}. \quad (6)$$

Combining terms and comparing numerators, we get $A + B + (A - B)w = 1$. So we have

$$\begin{cases} A + B = 1, \\ A - B = 0. \end{cases} \quad (7)$$

Solving we get $A = B = \frac{1}{2}$.

Therefore, our integral becomes

$$\int_0^{\sin(x)} \frac{1}{2(1 - w)} + \frac{1}{2(1 + w)} dw = \frac{1}{2} \log \left(\frac{1 + w}{1 - w} \right) \Big|_0^{\sin(x)}, \quad (8)$$

$$= \frac{1}{2} \log \left(\frac{1 + \sin(x)}{1 - \sin(x)} \right). \quad (9)$$

To simplify things, we can now use some trigonometric identities.

$$\frac{1}{2} \log \left(\frac{1 + \sin(x)}{1 - \sin(x)} \right) = \log \sqrt{\frac{1 + \sin(x)}{1 - \sin(x)}}, \quad (10)$$

$$= \log \sqrt{\frac{(1 + \sin(x))^2}{1 - \sin^2(x)}}, \quad (11)$$

$$= \log \left(\frac{1 + \sin(x)}{\cos(x)} \right), \quad (12)$$

$$= \log(\sec(x) + \tan(x)). \quad (13)$$

3 Multivariable Differential Calculus

Here are examples related to differential calculus in more than one variable.

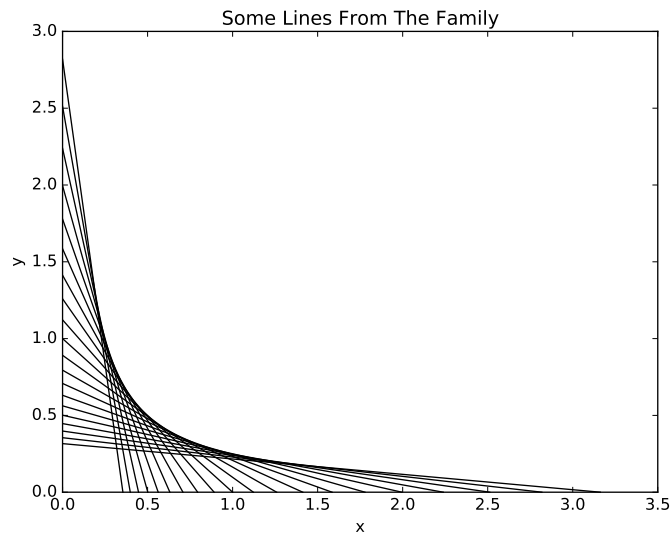
3.1 Envelopes

In the simplest cases, the **envelope** of a family \mathfrak{F} of curves is a curve γ that is in some sense extremal to the entire family of curves. What is often the case, is that every point of the curve γ touches exactly one curve from the family \mathfrak{F} , and furthermore this touching is only tangential (i.e. they cross at an angle of zero). This is best illustrated with examples.

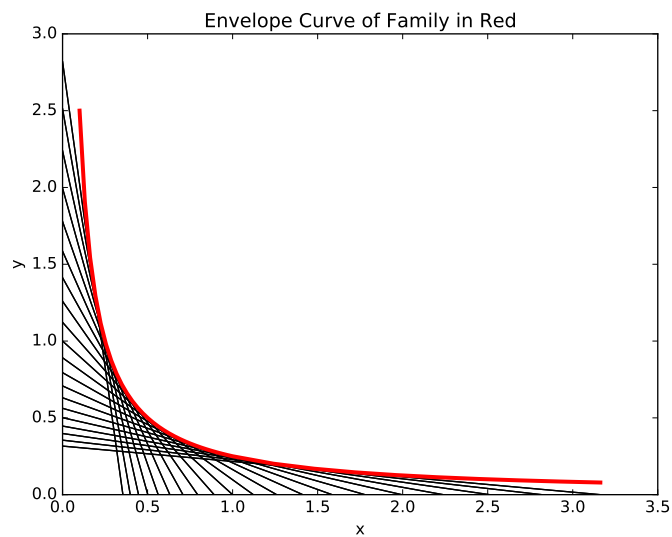
3.1.1 The Hyperbola as an Envelope

The Set Up

Consider the family \mathfrak{F} of straight lines in \mathbb{R}^2 , where each line crosses the x-axis and y-axis at pairs of points of the form $(s, 0)$ and $(0, 1/s)$ for some $s > 0$. So we see that each line is of the form $\frac{1}{s}x + sy = 1$ for some $s > 0$. Some of the lines from the family are pictured in the following figure.



We can see that external to the family of lines is a curve concave up in the first quadrant $\{x, y > 0\}$. In the following figure, you can see the curve superimposed with some of the lines from the family.



The Problem

Let us consider computing the envelope curve $\gamma(x)$ of the family \mathfrak{F} .

The Solution

To compute the envelope curve $\gamma(x)$, let us consider the auxilliary function $g(x, y, s) = \frac{1}{s}x + sy - 1$. Let us see how the Implicit Function Theorem of vector calculus let's us use $g(x, y, s)$ to find the extremal envelope curve $\gamma(x)$. As we discuss this, please consider the similarities to the ordinary first derivative test.

First, consider any point (x_0, y_0) NOT on the extremal envelope curve $\gamma(x)$, but is touched by some line in \mathfrak{F} . So there is some $s_0 > 0$ such that $\frac{1}{s_0}x_0 + s_0y_0 = 1$; note that this is equivalent to $g(x_0, y_0, s_0) = 0$. Since (x_0, y_0) isn't on the boundary of the region of points touched by lines in \mathfrak{F} , we know that for any other points (x_1, y_1) close to (x_0, y_0) we may find another line in \mathfrak{F} touching (x_1, y_1) . That is, for every (x_1, y_1) close to (x_0, y_0) , we may find $s_1 > 0$ such that $g(x_1, y_1, s_1) = 0$.

This can be summarized as saying that for all points (x_0, y_0) that are touched by a line in \mathfrak{F} and also isn't on the envelope γ , we can locally solve $s = S(x, y)$ such that $g(x, y, S(x, y)) = 0$. Now, you may begin to see the connection to the Implicit Function Theorem.

Recall that the Implicit Function Theorem can only confirm that we CAN locally solve $s = S(x, y)$ such that $g(x, y, S(x, y)) = 0$. However, we seek for the extremal points where we CAN'T locally solve. This is similar to the first derivative test of ordinary calculus. Technically, the first derivate test only says when a point is NOT an extemum of a function; then the candidate points for extrema are reduced to some finite list by solving for the vanishing of the derivative.

Here, we are in a similar situation. We solve for a set of candidate points that must contain our extremal curve γ . It will happen to be the case that our candidate set will allow only one curve and so this must be the envelope. However, we are being a little reckless here as we haven't proven the curve must exist; we will consider the picture to be very convincing and ignore this technical detail.

So we seek for when we can't locally solve $s = S(x, y)$ such that $g(x, y, S(x, y)) = 0$. The Implicit Function Theorem tells us this will only be possible for those (x, y, s) with $g(x, y, s) = 0$ and $\frac{\partial g}{\partial s}(x, y, s) = 0$.

So we look for

$$0 = \frac{\partial g}{\partial s}, \quad (14)$$

$$= -\frac{x}{s^2} + y \quad (15)$$

We wish to find an equation restricting x and y ; so it is most efficient to solve the above for s . Also, from the picture it is clear that we should restrict to $x, y > 0$. Therefore, for $x, y > 0$, we have $s = \sqrt{\frac{x}{y}}$. Plugging this into the equation for $g(x, y, s) = 0$, we get

$$\sqrt{xy} + \sqrt{xy} - 1 = 0. \quad (16)$$

Therefore, we find that the envelope curve must lie inside the set $S = \{xy = \frac{1}{4}\}$. However, one will recognize that for each point $x > 0$, there is only one y such that $y \in S$. Therefore, the envelope must be this curve.

So the envelope $\gamma(x)$ is the curve $y = \frac{1}{4x}$ for $x > 0$.

Final Remark

Note that the set S is actually a hyperbola. Therefore, the hyperbola can be realized as the envelope of a simple family of straight lines. For this reason, hyperbolas are (approximately) reproducible in "string art": art formed from straight line segments where each segment is made by tightened string.