Half-Duplex 10Base-T on an ATtiny85

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Abstract

The ATtiny85 Processor by Atmel is an 8-bit RISC microcontroller with 8kB of flash, 512 bytes of RAM, and a nominal operating frequency of 20 MHz. 10Base-T Ethernet is an interface standard supported by most modern networking hardware and enables devices to talk to eachother on a network. Ordinarily, specialty hardware is needed to send and receive. However, by abusing the USI and PLL and overclocking the ATtiny85 processor, while violating the 802.3 standard, we can communicate to some devices via 10Base-T on a network.
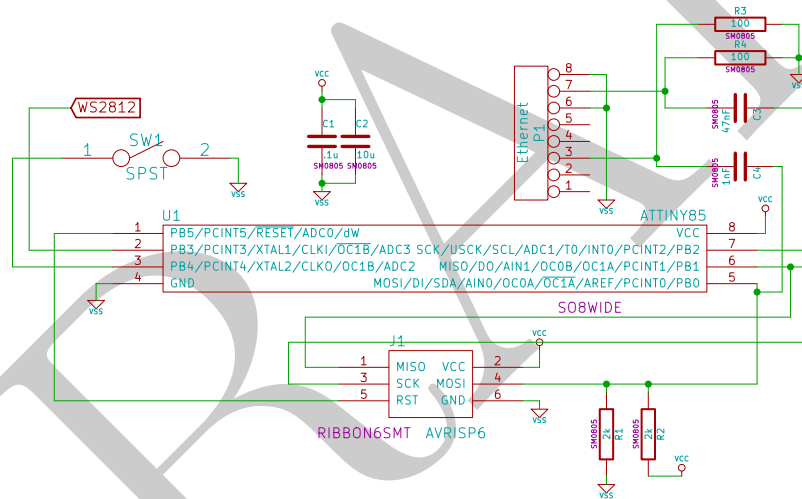
Figure 1: System Schematic

1   Introduction

Although there have been those who have successfully sent packets from an AVR to the Ethernet on an AVR[1], their approaches have been limited to fixed packets with at most one byte of payload changing. This is not ideal for a general Ethernet device.

The ATtiny85 processor has a core that operates at one clock cycle per instruction for most instructions[2]. It has a USI (Universal Serial Interface) that we can use as a high frequency shift register. If clocked with Timer 0, we can achieve a sample rate of the system clock frequency. This makes it possible to send out Manchester-encoded Ethernet frames from RAM when operating at 20 MHz.

When receiving packets, we need to sample at $\approx$31.5 MHz. This can be achieved by using the AVR's internal PLL. Once the AVR is running above 30 MHz, the USI's buffer register is polled. When an Ethernet frame begins, the AVR can dump the bitstream to RAM, and at a later time can decode the Ethernet frame in place.

Our physical interface to the Ethernet is intentionally poor and cheap, as can be seen in Figure 1. While it would be wise in more practical situations to use magnetics and proper termination even a line driver would be great. We opted to see what the bare minimum is.

2   Background

2.1   Ethernet Topology

Ethernet uses a point-to-point communication scheme over separate differential pairs of copper wires, one pair for TX one pair for RX. All communication to other devices on the network is done through the use of switches and hubs. Switches expect the TX and RX lines to be opposite that of the client device. We use the client-style +/- pairs. If we wish to connect directly to another client, i.e. a laptop, we would need a crossover or the other computer would need to support MDIX.

The pairs, TX and RX are differential to aid in common-mode rejection. Noise will affect both pairs similarly, and the effective noise on the signal will be minimized. Additionally, 802.3-2002 mandates all Ethernet devices isolated the incoming signal to help with noise rejection and prevent ground loop issues, but most prominently, safety benefits. [3]

While detectable, it generally is not a big deal if the +/- on an individual pair is swapped. Our algorithm doesn't care which one is + or -.

Because we ground our signals instead of using magnetics, we will get neither of these benefits.

2.2   Manchester Encoding

Ethernet data is encoded in Manchester encoding at 10 MBits/sec. Manchester encoding is a continuous stream that focuses on the changes in bits.

With Manchester decoding, focus is on the location of a rising or falling edge. Falling edges on clock pulses indicate a 0, rising edges indicate a 1. Manchester guarantees that there should be approximately as many 1's on the wire as 0's, thus preventing DC offsets. Figure 2 shows an example Manchester encoded stream.

This data is transmitted on-wire MSB first. At any one point in time, it is impossible to determine if a bit is a 1 or a 0 unless the start-of-message bit is found, as there is no clock source for Ethernet. Therefore, it is impossible to know if the signal is falling or rising on the clock edge.

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[1] Igor Češko "Implementation UDP into microcontroller Igor Atmel-UDP device: UDP/IP infrared remote control" http://www.cesko.host.sk/IgorPlugUDP/IgorPlug-UDP%20%28AVR%29_eng.htm (Retrieved Sept 2, 2014)

[2] Atmel "8-bit AVR Instruction Set" 0856DAVR08/02 (Retrieved Sept 2, 2014)
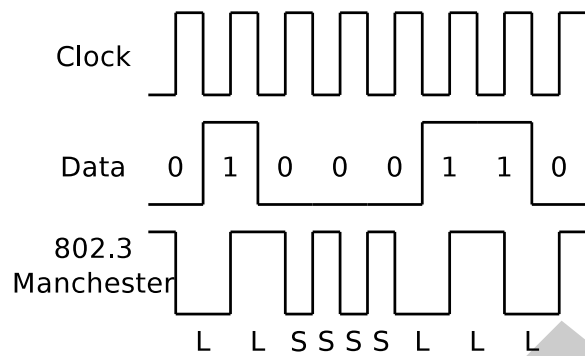
[3] 802.3-2002 Section 14.3.1.1
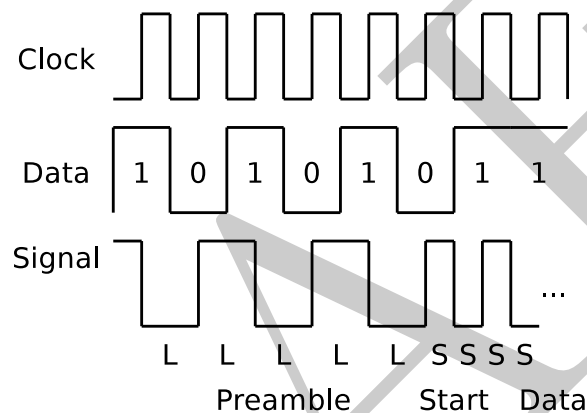
Figure 2: Manchester Example

Figure 3: Beginning of frame

One way to decode the Manchester if you know what the first bit is, is to look for any long pulses. Each long pulse indicates a change in bits, and any pairs of short pulses indicate a repeat in bit. When the data transitions from a 0 to a 1 or a 1 to a 0, there is a long pulse. For the section of the packet with many 0's, there are pairs of short pulses. Making sure that all short pulses are paired up helps us detect errors early.

If there are many repeated output 1's or 0's in a row that can mark the end of an Ethernet packet. While the Ethernet packet is transmitting, there should never be a period when the line is low or high for longer than .2us.

In order to match up the first bit of the packet, we have to look for the start signature. Figure 3 shows what the beginning of the data in an Ethernet packet looks like. Once we see the pair of 1's, we now know that the packet is starting and can begin decoding the packet.

2.3   IEEE 802.3 Ethernet frame

The Ethernet frame consists of a preamble, i.e. repeating 0x55's for 7 bytes, with the last byte being a 0xD5, i.e. the highest bit is flipped to break the chain of alternating low and high. This makes it possible for receivers to sync up to the packet at any time during the preamble. This can be seen in Figure 3. Practically speaking that gives us ≈5uS to begin recording an Ethernet before we'll miss the start token and be unable to recover the packet.

Figure 4 shows us that from there, we have the destination MAC, source MAC, and the rest of our IP packet. When we're done with the IP Packet, we can have padding so that the frame adds up to 64 bytes, and then at the end, we have an Ethernet CRC. We had to use a table-less CRC
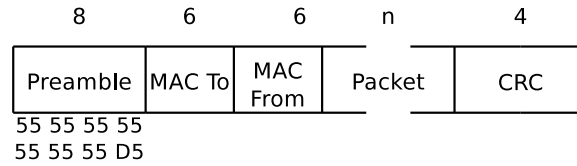
8	6	6	n	4
Preamble	MAC To	MAC From	Packet	CRC

55 55 55 55
55 55 55 D5

Figure 4: Ethernet Packet Example

because of the excessive RAM/Flash usage of tabled ones.

2.4 Link Detection

Ethernet Links are detected using different autonegotiation schemes depending on speed. Conveniently, 10Base-T, Half-Duplex is trivial to indicate. It does not need any codes and simply needs to emit a new NLP pulse every 16ms that's 100-200ns wide. This pulse is only in one direction and is not a full up-and-down.

3 Hardware

Figure 1 shows the specific schematic we used when developing the software stack. It is particularly terrible. It terminates poorly, doesn't have any isolation, doesn't drive very strong (violating the voltage template) [4] and doesn't cleanly receive data. This is the most minimal set up we were able to use to send and receive packets.

While it worked with short cables (<10 meters) with all hardware we connected it. When tested >10 meters, to a switch it did not link.

- C1, C2 are bypass capacitors that maintain power to the chip during brief points where it needs extra power, i.e. transitioning states on the TX pin.

- P1 is any ethernet connector, it may be female or male.

- C3 is the TX capacitor. It develops a 2.5v bias, so the output swing (if no load were applied) would be ±2.5v.

- C4 is the RX capacitor. It develops a biased voltage across, so the AVR does not interface with negative voltages.

- R1, R2 produce a bias in order to raise or lower the DC offset of the incoming signal so that the AVR receives approximately as many 1's as 0's. It also helps prevent state transitions from being missed entirely. 2k was selected because it happens to have lined up with what I had and worked surprisingly well.

- R3, R4 are termination resistors, to terminate the signal from the network cable.

- U1 is the ATtiny85 Processor.

- J1 is the programming header, compliant with the 6-pin AVR ISP header.

- WS2812 is any series of WS2812 LEDs.

- SW1 is a switch. Because PB4 has an internal pull-up resistor. This switch will ground that pin.

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[4]IEEE 802.3-2002 Figure 14-9

Listing 1: AVRDude Fuse Command Line

```
avrdude −c usbtiny −p t85 −U lfuse:w:0x41:m
```

Hardware warnings include:

- Neither TX nor RX are terminated. There should be termination resistors.

- There is no isolation. There should be magnetics to help to:

    - Reject common-mode noise.
    - Clean up the signal.
    - Add safety to prevent DC transients.

- There is no differential receiver. We are relying on the AVR's Schmitt trigger. [5]

4   Software Implementation

IEEE 802.3 specifies a few different speeds for Ethernet. One of which that is still widely supported is 10Base-T, which runs at 10 mbits/sec on-wire transfer - and Ethernet devices today are still reverse compatible with it. [IEEE 802.3 Section 28.1.4]. We will mimic a 10Base-T device. For this we will focus on these aspects:

- Clocking

- Use of the USI (Universal Serial Interface)

- Normal Link Pulses (NLP)

- Transmitting Manchester encoded packets

- Receiving Manchester encoded packets

- Overall process.

All source code is available on github in the "ethertiny" project. At the time of initially writing this paper, all code for this paper was in the "t85spi" folder.

4.1   Clock

We opted to use the USI on the ATtiny85, clocked at the system clock. This enables us to write one byte at a time that will be shifted out of the USI over the next eight clock cycles. This gives us enough time to Manchester encode bytes of Ethernet traffic in RAM on-the-fly. This is good because it means we do not need to pre- process the packet and we do not need to use extra RAM to store it.

In order to obtain 20 MHz, we arbitrarily picked an OSCCAL value of 0xbb on our hardware. Although this should change from chip to chip, we've found that in most cases, surprisingly, this value seems to hold. Additionally, we have to configure the clock fuses to CKSEL=1. Our fuses for this are found in Listing 1. Default EFUSEs and HFUSEs are acceptable. We also enable PLLE and PCKE for any additional hardware as seen in Listing 2.

To move to ≈31.5 MHz for receiving, we simply set OSCCAL to 0xff. Once done, we move it back to 0xbb for all other operations.

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[5]AVR ATtiny85 Datasheet (2586K-AVR-01/08), Figure 10-2

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Listing 2: Clock Setup

```
PLLCSR = _BV(PLLE) | _BV( PCKE );
OSCCAL = OSC20;
```

Listing 3: USI Setup

```
//Setup timer 0 to speed along.
//Timer 0 will be dedicated.
TCCR0A = _BV(WGM01); //CTC mode.
TCCR0B = _BV(CS00);  //Use system clock with no divisor.
OCR0A = 0;

USICR = _BV(USIWM0) | _BV(USICS0) |
        _BV(USITC);

//setup port B
PORTB &= ~_BV(0);
DDRB &= ~_BV(0);
PORTB &= ~_BV(1);
USICR &= ~_BV(USIWM0);  //Disable USICR

DDRB |= _BV(1);

//Optional, changes bias.
//PORTB |= _BV(0);
```

4.2 USI

The USI on the ATtiny must be clocked at the system clock in order to input and output the data fast enough. To do this, we configure Timer 0 to clock at the system clock rate in CTC mode, with a "top" time of 0. Provided we operate on it every eight clock cycles, we can create or read a continuous stream of 1's and 0's at the clock rate.

Listing 3 shows the code to activate Timer 0 and configure the USI to use it. When reading from the USI, it is important to use the USIBR. When writing to it, it is important to use the USIDR.

We have to keep the USI disabled when not in use. If we leave it enabled, data coming in will be shifted through. That means that whenever the USI is enabled, we must be constantly filling the incoming buffer or reading the buffer. We do not want the incoming data from the network to be shifted back out. It is convenient to leave the USICR setup and then set the flag to enable it once we're ready to load in new data and go.

4.3 NLPs

10Base-T Ethernet uses link pulses, or a single up-going pulse that lasts 10-20us every 16ms $\pm$ 8ms IEEE802.3 Section 14.2.1.1. This is used to tell the connected Ethernet device that this device is here, that it's alive, and that it's a 10Base-T, Half-duplex device. Instead of using the USI on the AVR to create this signal, we opt to manually turn the pin on and off at the correct times in Listing 4. Provided the USI is turned off, DDRB is configured as an output, and we're operating at 20 MHz. This will produce a $\approx$.15us pulse.

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Listing 4: NLP Code

```
PORTB |= _BV(1);   //2 cycles
NOOP;   //1 cycle
PORTB &=~_BV(1);   //2 cycles
```

Listing 5: Manchester Lookup Table

```
char ManchesterTable[16] __attribute__
        ((aligned (16))) = {
        0b10101010, 0b01101010,
        0b10011010, 0b01011010,
        0b10100110, 0b01100110,
        0b10010110, 0b01010110,
        0b10101001, 0b01101001,
        0b10011001, 0b01011001,
        0b10100101, 0b01100101,
        0b10010101, 0b01010101,
};
```

4.4 TX Manchester-encoded packets

When operating at 20 MHz, it would be possible to manually bit-bang out a message via two GPIOs.
If we do that, we also get the added bonus of differential signaling. However, if we do this, then
there is very little room to modify the packet. In fact, we would only be able to modify at most one
byte and a few bits.

We can store a pre-computed Manchester, Listing 5 table for each possible nibble of output
and look up into that table while we're shifting the data out. In that table, the data in address
0 represents the data that would need to be shifted out to represent a binary 0000, the value in
address address 13 "d" (1011 binary), is 01100101, pattern we saw in Figure 3. The reason for the
alignment is because the bottom nibble of its address must be 0x0, so we can use bitwise operations
to look up into the table.

The function that handles sending packets is SendTestASM, and it is written in assembler for
the AVR as to tightly control the timing of writing to the USIDR register. Figure 5 shows the
progression of a transmit operation. We first read the byte we want to send out of RAM, look at
its bottom nibble, look that up in the Manchester table, send the bottom nibble's Manchester, read
the high nibble, look it up in the Manchester table, and send that. Then, we look at the next byte
and do the same, all in groups of 4 bytes.

Unfortunately, in order to actually accomplish this, we have to heavily interleave the code. The
reason we must interleave the code is some operations such as checking to see if we are done with
sending all of the bytes take three operations, and there is only one free operation every time we
send another byte. By sending groups of four bytes, that extra free cycle we gain per-byte can build
up so we can do our three-cycle compare and jump at the end.

4.5 RX Manchester-encoded packets

Doing the Manchester decoding is the difficult part. Without using external hardware to lock onto
the loop, or to detect the phase, it means we have to do that entirely with the AVR. Because it is
also difficult to tweak the AVR's clock to get in phase with the Ethernet signal, we opted to stream

Turn on USI

Send Preamble

Read next byte

Read top nibble → Output top nibble's Manchester

Read bottom nibble → Output bottom nibble Manchester

Repeat 4x

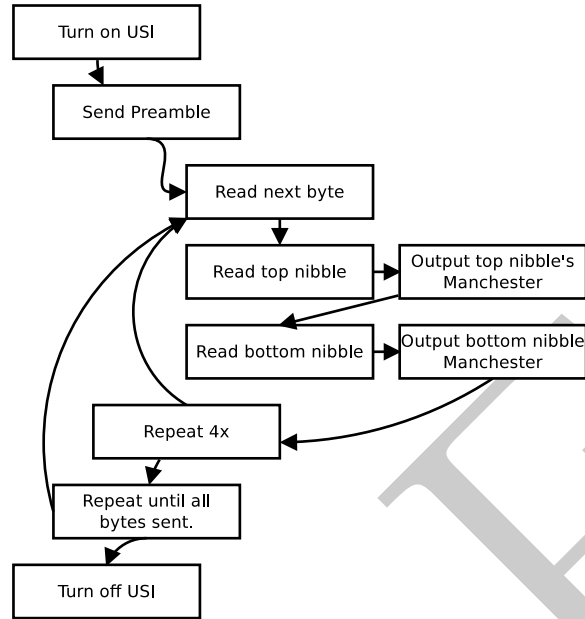Repeat until all bytes sent.

Turn off USI

Figure 5: High-level SendTestASM

the bits in software.

Manchester encoding can be decoded entirely in software with a sample rate that exceeds three times the symbol rate. That would means our AVR would have to run above 30 MHz, which conveniently is possible.

By sampling at three times the rate, we can identify "Long" and "Short" transitions. Additionally, the fact that a signal is a "1" or a "0", incoming becomes irrelevant, and we can focus only on the transitions. In order to read in the data, we operate in much the same way we TX'ed the packet. However we need to wait for a reading from USIBR that is not 0x00 or 0xff, i.e. it contains both 1 and 0 bits. That would mean we likely have a packet.

Once we see that change, provided we're operating at $\approx$31.5 MHz, we can begin to capture the packet by continuously reading USIBR every eight cycles. After every two packets, we can check to see if it is all 1's or all 0's. If it is, we can stop, if not, we continue to capture to RAM.

To understand how we can go from a Manchester bitstream to a series of 1's and 0's, we first have to understand how we can determine the difference between short and long transitions. Figure 4.5 shows this conversion in the creation of the "counts" row from the "values" row. Once we have them, we can pair the shorts together and identify whether bits are flipping or not.

Considering that we can look for the start of packet flag, the 0xD5 from the beginning, we can maintain whether the current bit is a 0 or a 1 throughout the life of the packet.

A copy of the Demanchestrate function can be found in the code tree in `hlprocess.c`.

It is important to note that Demanchestrating the packet can be done in-place. It is safe to overwrite the raw data with the packet as it is decoded because the packet is always shorter than the raw data coming in.

Once a packet is decoded, provided there are no bit errors, i.e. unmatched shorts, or missed shorts, we can begin the CRC [6]. We can use the same CRC that we use for sending in order to verify that the packet was received successfully.

From there, we can pass it to the IP stack, where it will deal with the packet. An IP stack is outside the scope of this document.

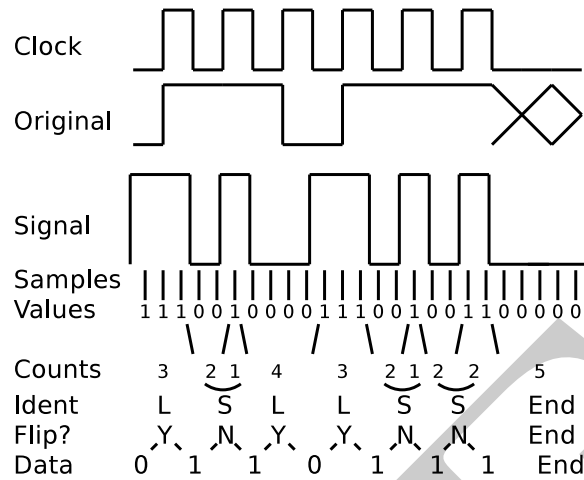[6]CRC Code from: http://www.hackersdelight.org/hdcodetxt/crc.c.txt

Figure 6: Demanchestration (33 MHz clock)

4.6 Overall Process

We have covered how we can set up the system, how we can send NLPs, and how we can send and receive packets. In order to make this work, we put it in a main loop.

We wait for packets for 8ms, send an NLP, wait for more packets for 8ms, do whatever house-keeping work we want, and then repeat the process.

5 Conclusion

We have been able to implement a UDP/IP stack with ARP, UDP, and ICMP on an attiny85. We have tested it with short wire runs to a few different types of switches and computers and found that we could communicate. We can send and receive packets up to a $\approx$90-bytes on-wire or 48-bytes of UDP payload. We have had very high packet loss, on the order of 10-30 % of the packets. This is important when considering applications for this technology, as all protocols the user would have to use must be robust, able to handle lost packets gracefully, and must not be CPU intensive.

Additionally, because the stack takes a considerable amount of RAM, very little RAM is left over for user applications unless the user decides to tune back the stack's buffer - which would further limit the maximum packet size.

When operating at full speed, our stack uses $\approx$25 mA at 4.5v - less than 1/8 of a watt.

Though impractical for most applications, this stack may prove useful in niche applications where cost, power size or other factors outweigh robustness, transfer speeds, or reliability.

6 Future Work

We could do a number of things from here that would be useful and interesting. A few are listed below:

- Use T0 input from PLL PWM on the AVR to increase sampling rate to 35 MHz, to improve input performance.

- Synchronize use of USIDR / USIBR to verify the AVR will not encounter a conflict with the shift register.

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- Use a differential driver/receiver to drive the actual signal.

- Use the internal pull-up to tune the bias, detect if this pull-up helps somehow.

- Optimize the Demanchestration function in assembly.

- Use interrupts to send NLPs.

- Use interrupts to trigger receives.

- Automatically calibrate the proper OSCCAL for sending based on incoming packets.

- Improve error correction based on matching pairs and long/short segments. (Improvements to the Demanchestrate function)