

A simple shell for the Beetle virtual machine version 2.0.3

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1 Introduction

This is the manual for the shell for C Beetle [2], which provides access to Beetle's registers, allows the stacks to be displayed, and provides assembly, disassembly and single-stepping.

There are two main ways to access the shell: either start `beetle` with no arguments, or, when passing an object file on the command line, give the `--debug` option, which causes the shell to be entered on exception (interpreted as a negative value being passed to `HALT`). The shell can also be used in batch mode, by supplying commands on standard input. Refer to the man page `beetle(1)` or `beetle --help` for more details and options.

2 Initialisation

When the virtual machine is started, an embedded Beetle is created. The registers are initialised as described in [2, section 2.5 Using the interface call subsection.2.5]; additionally, `'THROW` is set to `$0`, and `I` is uninitialised. `A` is set to zero: this has the effect that when a `STEP` or `RUN` command is given, a `NEXT` instruction will be performed. The main memory is zeroed.

3 Commands

The shell is command-driven. All commands and register names may be abbreviated to their first few letters; where ambiguities are resolved with a set order of precedence, aimed at giving the most commonly used commands the shortest minimum abbreviations, and commands take precedence over registers. Alternatively, if you have `beetlei` (which uses `rlwrap`), you can use Tab-completion (press the Tab key to show possible commands and instructions starting with the letters you have typed so far). All commands are case-insensitive.

The following registers are renamed for ease of typing:

| Register | Name in shell |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| <code>'THROW</code> | <code>THROW</code> |
| <code>'BAD</code> | <code>BAD</code> |
| <code>-ADDRESS</code> | <code>NOT_ADDRESS</code> |

If an unrecognised command is given, or the command has too few arguments, or they are badly formed, an error message is displayed. Command lines containing extraneous characters after a valid command are generally accepted, and the extra characters ignored.

Numbers are all integral, and may be given in either decimal or hexadecimal (which must be preceded by `"$"`), with an optional minus sign.

For some arguments a machine instruction may also be used, preceded by “0”, for opcode. The value of a machine instruction is its opcode. Opcodes are byte-wide values; when used as a cell, the most significant three bytes are set to zero.

The syntax of the commands is shown below; literal text such as command names and other characters are shown in `Typewriter` font; meta-parameters such as numbers are shown in angle brackets, thus: $\langle number \rangle$. Square brackets enclose optional tokens.

There are three types of numeric meta-parameter: $\langle number \rangle$, which is any number; $\langle address \rangle$, which is a valid address (see [1, section 2.6Exceptionssubsection.2.6]); and $\langle value \rangle$, which is a number or an opcode.

3.1 Comments

The string `//` starts a comment, which runs to the end of the input line, and is ignored.

3.2 Registers

Beetle’s registers may be displayed by typing their name. The registers may also (where appropriate) be assigned to using the syntax

$$\langle register \rangle = \langle value \rangle$$

where $\langle value \rangle$ is in the form given in section 3. An error message is displayed if an attempt is made to assign to a register such as `CHECKED`, which cannot be assigned to, or to assign an unaligned or out of range address to a register which must hold an aligned address, such as `SP`. The `FROM` command (see section 3.6) should be used in preference to assigning to `EP`.

Two additional pseudo-registers are provided by the shell: they are called `S0` and `R0`, and are the address of the base of the data and return stacks respectively. They are set to the initial values of `RP` and `SP`, and are provided so that they can be changed if the stacks are moved, so the stack display commands will still work correctly.

The command `REGISTERS` displays the contents of `EP`, `I` and `A`, useful when following the execution of a program.

3.3 Stacks

The stacks may be manipulated crudely using the registers `SP` and `RP` but it is usually more convenient to use the commands

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{TOD } \langle number \rangle \\ \text{DFROM} \end{array}$$

which respectively push a number on to the data stack and pop one, displaying it, and

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{TOR } \langle number \rangle \\ \text{RFROM} \end{array}$$

which do the same for the return stack.

The command `DATA` displays the contents of the data stack, and `RETURN` the contents of the return stack. `STACKS` displays both stacks.

If a stack underflows, or the base pointer or top of stack pointer is out of range or unaligned, an appropriate error message is displayed.

3.4 Code and data

$\langle opcode \rangle$ LITERAL $\langle number \rangle$ BLITERAL $\langle number \rangle$ ILITERAL $\langle number \rangle$ PLITERAL $\langle number \rangle$

Code and literal data values may be directly assembled into memory. Assembly starts at the last value explicitly assigned to EP in the shell, defaulting to \$0 whenever Beetle is initialised (see section 2). An opcode or byte literal (BLITERAL) takes one byte, and a cell literal (LITERAL) is stored in the next whole cell. An inline literal (ILITERAL) is stored in the remainder of the current cell, if it fits; otherwise an error is given. PLITERAL assembles the instructions required to push the given native pointer on to the stack in the form required for the LINK instruction.

Each cell is always filled before moving on to the next available cell, so for example the sequence

(LITERAL) , \$12345678 +

assembles the two instructions (LITERAL) and + in consecutive bytes, and then the cell \$12345678.

3.5 Memory

The contents of an address may be displayed by giving the address as a command. If the address is cell-aligned the whole cell is displayed, otherwise the byte at that address is shown.

A larger section of memory may be displayed with the command DUMP, which may be used in the two forms

DUMP [$\langle address \rangle$ [+ $\langle number \rangle$]]
DUMP $\langle address_1 \rangle$ [$\langle address_2 \rangle$]

where the first displays $\langle number \rangle$ bytes (or 256 if the number is omitted) starting at address $\langle address \rangle$ (or 64 bytes before EP if the address is omitted, or 0 if that would be negative), and the second displays memory from address $\langle address_1 \rangle$ up to, but not including, address $\langle address_2 \rangle$. An error message is displayed if the start address is less than or equal to the end address or if either address is out of range.

A command of the form

$\langle address \rangle = \langle value \rangle$

assigns the value $\langle value \rangle$ to the address $\langle address \rangle$. If the address is not cell-aligned, the value must fit in a byte, and only that byte is assigned to. When assigning to an aligned memory location, a whole cell is assigned unless the number given fits in a byte, and is given using the minimum number of digits required. This should be noted the other way around: to assign a byte-sized significand to a cell, it should be padded with a leading zero.

3.6 Execution

The command STEP may be used to single-step through a program. It has three forms:

STEP [$\langle number \rangle$]
STEP TO $\langle address \rangle$

With no argument, STEP executes one instruction. Given a number, STEP executes $\langle number \rangle$ instructions. STEP TO executes instructions until EP is equal to $\langle address \rangle$.

The command TRACE, has the same syntax as STEP, and performs the same function; in addition, it performs the action of the REGISTERS command after each bForth instruction is executed.

The command RUN allows Beetle to execute until it reaches a HALT instruction, if ever. The code passed to HALT is then displayed. The code is also displayed if a HALT instruction is ever executed during a STEP command.

The command FROM sets the point of execution:

FROM [*<address>*]

With no argument, FROM performs the function of Beetle's NEXT instruction, that is, it loads A from the cell pointed to by EP, and adds four to EP. With an argument, FROM sets EP to *<address>*, and then performs the function of NEXT. FROM should be used in preference to assigning directly to EP.

The command DISASSEMBLE disassembles bForth code. It may be used in the two forms

DISASSEMBLE [*<address>*] [+ *<number>*]]
DISASSEMBLE *<address₁>* *<address₂>*

where the first disassembles *<number>* bytes (or 64 if the number is omitted) starting at address *<address>* (or 16 bytes before EP, or 0 if that would be negative, if the address is omitted), and the second from address *<address₁>* up to, but not including, address *<address₂>*. The addresses must be cell-aligned, and the number of bytes must be a multiple of four. An error message is displayed if the start address is less than or equal to the end address, or if either the address or number of bytes is not aligned or is out of range.

The command COUNTS displays the number of times that each Beetle instruction has been executed during STEP or TRACE execution since the last initialisation (including loads).

3.7 Object modules

The command

LOAD *<file>* [*<address>*]

loads the object module in file *<file>* into memory at address *<address>* (or address \$0 if the argument is omitted). The address must be cell-aligned; if it is not, or if the module would not fit in memory at the address given, or there is some filing error, an error message is displayed.

The command SAVE saves an object module. It has the two forms

SAVE *<file>* *<address>* + *<number>*
SAVE *<file>* *<address₁>* *<address₂>*

where the first saves *<number>* bytes starting at address *<address>*, and the second saves from address *<address₁>* up to, but not including, address *<address₂>*. The addresses must be cell-aligned, and the number of bytes must be a multiple of four. An error message is displayed if the start address is less than or equal to the end address, or if either the address or number of bytes is not aligned or out of range.

The module is saved to the file *<file>*. An error message is displayed if there is some filing error, but no warning is given if a file of that name already exists; it is overwritten.

3.8 Exiting

The command QUIT exits Beetle. No warning is given.

References

- [1] Reuben Thomas. The Beetle Forth virtual machine, 2018. <https://rrt.sc3d.org/>.
- [2] Reuben Thomas. An implementation of the Beetle virtual machine for POSIX, 2018. <https://rrt.sc3d.org/>.