CSE 537 Assignment 1 Report: Peg Solitaire

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1 Introduction

This report describes our submission for assignment 1 in the CSE 537 course on artificial intelligence. Assignment 1 requires us to implement three algorithms for solving a game of Peg Solitaire: iterative-deepening depth-first search (ID-DFS), and A* search with two different heuristics. In this report, we discuss the implementation details and compare the performance of six solutions (ID-DFS and five A* heuritsics, of which we settled on two).

2 Implementation

We were given four Python code files implementing the assignment framework: *readGame.py*, *pegSolitaireUtils.py*, *search.py*, and *pegSolitaire.py*. We did not need to edit *readGame.py* or *pegSolitaire.py*, but only had to implement utility classes and methods in *pegSolitaireUtils.py* and the search algorithms in *search.py*.

2.1 Data structures

The original data structure given in *pegSolitaireUtils.py* was a single class *game* containing the game state as a 2-dimensional 7×7 array of integers, a trace of the moves taken to reach that state, and an overall count of the nodes expanded by the search algorithm. To make the implementation more clear, we split this into two classes: *game*, a singleton class storing overall state for a search (the original game state, final move trace, and expanded node count), and *gameNode*, a class which a search algorithm can repeatedly create as it explores the game tree.

The *gameNode* class contains some optimizations. We flattened the game state into a 1-dimensional array of 49 integers to speed up indexing and simplify copying. Thus, an index $gameState[i][j]$ would become $gameState[i * 7 + j]$. (We did not change the state representation of *game*, only of *gameNode*.) We also cache two pieces of data when a *gameNode* is created: a count of pegs remaining on the board, and a *key* state chosen from the eight symmetric states under rotation and reflection. This data is used by our search algorithms to prune search trees.

2.2 Utility methods

We were required to implement four utility methods in *pegSolitaireUtils.py*:

1. $is\_corner(self, pos)$:

```
def is_corner(self, pos):
    """
    Return whether a position is a corner/wall,
    i.e. not a hole or peg.
```

```
    """
    return 0 <= pos < 49 and self.state[pos] != -1
```

In implementation, we actually used another function $\_\_getitem\_\_(self, pos)$ instead:

```
def __getitem__(self, pos):
    """
    node[pos] is bounds-checked shorthand for node.state[pos].
    """
    return self.state[pos] if 0 <= pos < 49 else -1
```

2. $is\_validMove(self, oldPos, direction)$:

```
def is_validMove(self, oldPos, direction):
    """
    Return whether it is valid to move a peg from a given
    position in a given direction. The position must have a
    peg, the destination must be empty, and the intermediate
    position must have another peg.
    """
    midPos = self.getNextPosition(oldPos, direction)
    newPos = self.getNextPosition(midPos, direction)
    # 1 is a peg, and 0 is a hole
    # Since oldPos is valid, don't use bounds-checked
    # indexing for it
    return (self.state[oldPos] == self[midPos] == 1
        and self[newPos] == 0)
```

3. $getNextPosition(self, oldPos, direction)$:

```
@staticmethod
def getNextPosition(oldPos, direction):
    """
    Return the new position after moving in the given
    direction (-7 is north/up, 1 is east/right, 7 is south/
    down, and -1 is west/left). Invalid movements outside
    the bounds of the board will return positions such that
    is_corner(position) returns True.
    """
    newPos = oldPos + direction
    # If direction is 7 or -7 (changing rows),
    # newPos is already correct
    return (newPos if direction == 7 or direction == -7 or
    # If direction is 1 or -1 (changing columns),
    # the row should not change
        newPos // 7 == oldPos // 7 else -1)
```

4. $getNextState(self, oldPos, direction)$:

```
def getNextState(self, oldPos, direction, pegSol):
    """
    Return a child node of the current one, created by a
    given valid move. The given game has its count of
    expanded nodes incremented.
```

```
    """
    pegSol.nodesExpanded += 1
    if not self.is_validMove(oldPos, direction):
        print "Error, You are not checking for valid move"
        exit(0)
    midPos = self.getNextPosition(oldPos, direction)
    newPos = self.getNextPosition(midPos, direction)
    # x[:] makes a copy of x (necessary to avoid mutating
    # self.state when updating childState)
    childState = self.state[:]
    childState[oldPos] = 0 # The peg moves from here
    childState[midPos] = 0 # The jumped-over peg is removed
    childState[newPos] = 1 # The peg moves to this hole
    # Convert positions back into pairs for printing
    childTrace = self.trace + [(oldPos // 7, oldPos % 7),
        (newPos // 7, newPos % 7)]
    return gameNode(childState, childTrace,
        self.pegCount - 1, self.heuristic)
```

2.3 Search functions

We were required to implement our search functions and heuristics in *search.py*.

We implemented ID-DFS straightforwardly, based on figure 3.17 (section 3.4, page 88) and figure 3.18 (section 3.4, page 89) in the textbook. However, we also maintain a set of explored nodes (modulo symmetry) to avoid revisiting, which helps prune the search tree.

We implemented A* based on figure 3.14 (section 3.4, page 84) in the textbook. However, we take the set of *explored* nodes modulo symmetry to further prune the search tree. (One game state can be solved if and only if its seven symmetrical states can be solved, so when one has been expanded the other seven can be pruned.)

2.3.1 First A* heuristic

```
def heuristicOne(node):
    """
    This heuristic counts the number of "dangling" pegs (those
    without any neighbors) and adds it to twice the number of
    pegs remaining on the board.

    We penalize dangling pegs because they cannot be removed
    without first moving another peg to a neighboring hole,
    which may not be possible.
    """
    num_dangling = 0
    for i in xrange(49):
        if node.state[i] != 1: continue
        for direction in [7, 1, -7, -1]:
            if node[i + direction] == 1:
                break
        else:
            num_dangling += 1
    return node.pegCount * 2 + num_dangling
```

2.3.2 Second A* heuristic

```
def heuristicTwo(node):
    """
    This heuristic sums the estimated difficulty of removing
    each peg and adds it to twice the number of pegs remaining
    on the board.

    We chose the difficulty values after some trial and error.
    The outer four areas of the board are generally less
    maneuverable than the center, and further from the eventual
    goal of the very central hole. This applies especially to
    the eight outer corners, which have fewer neighbors to jump
    over. The four inner corners are only slightly easier, since
    they have more neighbors but are still not in the ideal rows
    or columns. (Note that pegs in the outer and inner corners
    can only move within those positions, never to a non-corner
    hole.) The center peg is the end goal of the game, but prior
    to that having a peg sit there is not quite useful (since if
    you are left with two pegs and one is in the center, the
    game is unsolvable).
    """
    difficulties = [
        0, 0, 4, 1, 4, 0, 0,
        0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0,
        4, 1, 2, 0, 2, 1, 4,
        1, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 1,
        4, 1, 2, 0, 2, 1, 4,
        0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0,
        0, 0, 4, 1, 4, 0, 0,
    ]
    return node.pegCount * 2 + sum(difficulties[k]
        for k in xrange(49) if node.state[k] == 1)
```

2.3.3 Other A* heuristics

We tested various other heuristics before settling on our chosen two. One of them was a baseline heuristic that simply returned the number of remaining pegs. The other three were all variations on *heuristicTwo* with a different *difficulties* array.

1. Manhattan distance from center neighbors:

```
distances = [
    5, 4, 3, 2, 3, 4, 5,
    4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4,
    3, 2, 1, 0, 1, 2, 3,
    2, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 2,
    3, 2, 1, 0, 1, 2, 3,
    4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4,
    5, 4, 3, 2, 3, 4, 5
]
```

2. Alternative difficulties #1:

```
difficulties = [
    0, 0, 4, 0, 4, 0, 0,
    0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0,
    4, 0, 3, 0, 3, 0, 4,
    0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0,
    4, 0, 3, 0, 3, 0, 4,
    0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0,
    0, 0, 4, 0, 4, 0, 0
]
```

3. Alternative difficulties #2:

```
difficulties = [
    0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0,
    0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0,
    1, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1,
    1, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1,
    1, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1,
    0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0,
    0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0
]
```

3 Results

3.1 Test cases

Our first test case was the given *game.txt*, a board with 6 pegs in a cross shape.

We wrote ten more test cases manually based on actual game boards that people play, such as a 9-peg plus shape, a 16-peg pyramid, a 24-peg diamond, or the 32-peg "central game" with only one hole in the center.

We also created 100 random test cases with between 2 and 21 pegs, by implementing a generator for random valid test cases. It works by starting with the goal state (only one peg in the center) and randomly picking valid backward moves that could have reached that state. In pseudocode:

Algorithm 1 Random test case generator

$numSteps \leftarrow$ pick a random number between 1 and 33
$boardState \leftarrow$ goal board state, with only one peg in the center
for $j \leftarrow 1$ to $numSteps$ **do**
    $validStartPos, validDirection \leftarrow$ pick a random valid move
    $boardState[validStartPos] \leftarrow 0$
    $boardState[validStartPos + validDirection] \leftarrow 1$
    $boardState[validStartPos + validDirection + validDirection] \leftarrow 1$
end for
return *board_state*

3.2 Benchmarks

We compared the performance of our different search algorithms on a few test cases:

1. The given 6-peg *game.txt*

2. The 32-peg central game

3. The mean expanded node count of all 110 test boards

4. The median count of all 110 test boards

The performance results for our different search algorithms are shown in table 1:

Test case	**ID-DFS**	**A*1**	**A*2**	**A*Base**	**A*Manhattan**	**A*Diff1**	**A*Diff2**
game.txt	50	16	13	13	19	13	19
Central game	MemoryError	4,713,300	103,402	26,807	1,801,655	170	530,402
Mean	1,979,736	47,084	3,388	5,146	19,201	4,394	8,917
Median	6,417	74	98	92	95	128	114

Table 1: Expanded node counts for all algorithms in different test cases

We also tested each algorithm on a board with no solution (two noncontiguous pegs). They all succeeded in printing "Impossible to solve" instead of a solution move trace, without crashing or infinitely looping.

The heuristics A*2, A*Manhattan, A*Diff1, and A*Diff2 were conceptually very similar, so we only wanted to submit one of them. Our tests found that A*2 was the most efficient: it had the lowest mean count (of all the algorithms), and while A*Manhattan had a slightly lower median count, it could not solve the central game quickly enough.

We never intended to submit A*Base as a heuristic, since it was so simple, so we were surprised to see it perform as well as it did. It had a competitive mean expanded node count and the lowest median count. We hypothesize that our more complicated heuristics are better for particular game boards, but not for every possible random board that we were trying.

3.3 Performance notes

In our testing, we found an interesting phenomenon. When enumerating valid moves from a particular position in a particular game state, there can be at most four moves (north, south, east, and west). For several large test cases, if we test those four directions in a different order, performance can significantly vary. There are 4!, or 24 possible orders, so we tested all 24 of them against all six search algorithms. The 24 possibilities break down into two categories: "opposite order first" (such as "north, south, east, west") and"orthogonal order first" (such as "north, east, south, west"). By plotting the results in figure 1, it is clear that the "orthogonal order first" category had slightly better performance.

4 Conclusion

TODO: conclusion

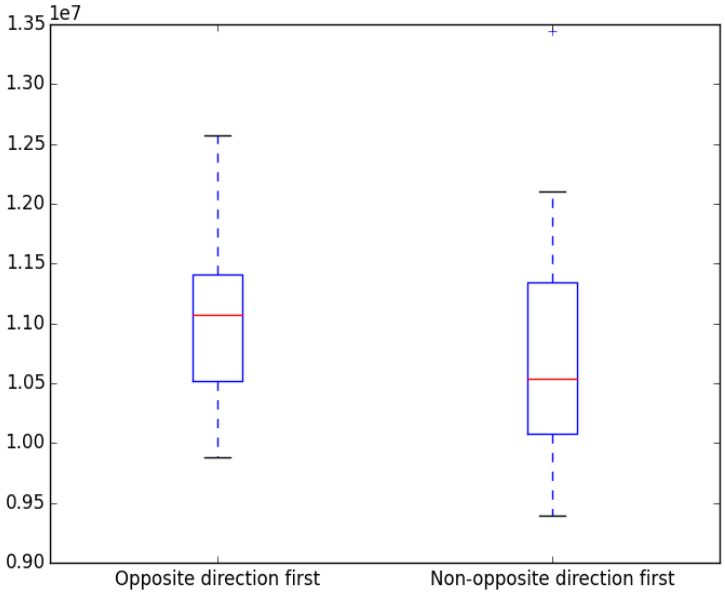

Figure 1: Box plot for two sets of summations