8.2.1.12 Block Nested-Loop and Batched Key Access Joins

In MySQL, a Batched Key Access (BKA) Join algorithm is available that uses both index access to the joined table and a join buffer. The BKA algorithm supports inner join, outer join, and semijoin operations, including nested outer joins. Benefits of BKA include improved join performance due to more efficient table scanning. Also, the Block Nested-Loop (BNL) Join algorithm previously used only for inner joins is extended and can be employed for outer join and semijoin operations, including nested outer joins.

The following sections discuss the join buffer management that underlies the extension of the original BNL algorithm, the extended BNL algorithm, and the BKA algorithm. For information about semijoin strategies, see Section 8.2.2.1, “Optimizing IN and EXISTS Subquery Predicates with Semijoin Transformations”

- Join Buffer Management for Block Nested-Loop and Batched Key Access Algorithms
- Block Nested-Loop Algorithm for Outer Joins and Semijoins
- Batched Key Access Joins
- Optimizer Hints for Block Nested-Loop and Batched Key Access Algorithms

Join Buffer Management for Block Nested-Loop and Batched Key Access Algorithms

MySQL can employ join buffers to execute not only inner joins without index access to the inner table, but also outer joins and semijoins that appear after subquery flattening. Moreover, a join buffer can be effectively used when there is an index access to the inner table.

The join buffer management code slightly more efficiently utilizes join buffer space when storing the values of the interesting row columns: No additional bytes are allocated in buffers for a row column if its value is `NULL`, and the minimum number of bytes is allocated for any value of the `VARCHAR` type.

The code supports two types of buffers, regular and incremental. Suppose that join buffer `B1` is employed to join tables `t1` and `t2` and the result of this operation is joined with table `t3` using join buffer `B2`:

- A regular join buffer contains columns from each join operand. If `B2` is a regular join buffer, each row ***r*** put into `B2` is composed of the columns of a row ***r1*** from `B1` and the interesting columns of a matching row ***r2*** from table `t3`.
- An incremental join buffer contains only columns from rows of the table produced by the second join operand. That is, it is incremental to a row from the first operand buffer. If `B2` is an

incremental join buffer, it contains the interesting columns of the row ***r2*** together with a link to the row ***r1*** from `B1`.

Incremental join buffers are always incremental relative to a join buffer from an earlier join operation, so the buffer from the first join operation is always a regular buffer. In the example just given, the buffer `B1` used to join tables `t1` and `t2` must be a regular buffer.

Each row of the incremental buffer used for a join operation contains only the interesting columns of a row from the table to be joined. These columns are augmented with a reference to the interesting columns of the matched row from the table produced by the first join operand. Several rows in the incremental buffer can refer to the same row ***r*** whose columns are stored in the previous join buffers insofar as all these rows match row ***r***.

Incremental buffers enable less frequent copying of columns from buffers used for previous join operations. This provides a savings in buffer space because in the general case a row produced by the first join operand can be matched by several rows produced by the second join operand. It is unnecessary to make several copies of a row from the first operand. Incremental buffers also provide a savings in processing time due to the reduction in copying time.

In MySQL 8.0, the `block_nested_loop` flag of the `optimizer_switch` system variable works as follows:

- Prior to MySQL 8.0.20, it controls how the optimizer uses the Block Nested Loop join algorithm.
- In MySQL 8.0.18 and later, it also controls the use of hash joins (see Section 8.2.1.4, “Hash Join Optimization”).
- Beginning with MySQL 8.0.20, the flag controls hash joins only, and the block nested loop algorithm is no longer supported.

The `batched_key_access` flag controls how the optimizer uses the Batched Key Access join algorithms.

By default, `block_nested_loop` is `on` and `batched_key_access` is `off`. See Section 8.9.2, “Switchable Optimizations”. Optimizer hints may also be applied; see Optimizer Hints for Block Nested-Loop and Batched Key Access Algorithms.

For information about semijoin strategies, see Section 8.2.2.1, “Optimizing IN and EXISTS Subquery Predicates with Semijoin Transformations”

Block Nested-Loop Algorithm for Outer Joins and Semijoins

The original implementation of the MySQL BNL algorithm was extended to support outer join and semijoin operations (and was later superseded by the hash join algorithm; see Section 8.2.1.4, “Hash Join Optimization”).

When these operations are executed with a join buffer, each row put into the buffer is supplied with a match flag.

If an outer join operation is executed using a join buffer, each row of the table produced by the second operand is checked for a match against each row in the join buffer. When a match is found, a new extended row is formed (the original row plus columns from the second operand) and sent for further extensions by the remaining join operations. In addition, the match flag of the matched row in the buffer is enabled. After all rows of the table to be joined have been examined, the join buffer is scanned. Each row from the buffer that does not have its match flag enabled is extended by `NULL` complements (`NULL` values for each column in the second operand) and sent for further extensions by the remaining join operations.

In MySQL 8.0, the `block_nested_loop` flag of the `optimizer_switch` system variable works as follows:

- Prior to MySQL 8.0.20, it controls how the optimizer uses the Block Nested Loop join algorithm.
- In MySQL 8.0.18 and later, it also controls the use of hash joins (see Section 8.2.1.4, “Hash Join Optimization”).
- Beginning with MySQL 8.0.20, the flag controls hash joins only, and the block nested loop algorithm is no longer supported.

See Section 8.9.2, “Switchable Optimizations”, for more information. Optimizer hints may also be applied; see Optimizer Hints for Block Nested-Loop and Batched Key Access Algorithms.

In `EXPLAIN` output, use of BNL for a table is signified when the `Extra` value contains `Using join buffer (Block Nested Loop)` and the `type` value is `ALL`, `index`, or `range`.

For information about semijoin strategies, see Section 8.2.2.1, “Optimizing IN and EXISTS Subquery Predicates with Semijoin Transformations”

Batched Key Access Joins

MySQL implements a method of joining tables called the Batched Key Access (BKA) join algorithm. BKA can be applied when there is an index access to the table produced by the second join operand. Like the BNL join algorithm, the BKA join algorithm employs a join buffer to accumulate the interesting columns of the rows produced by the first operand of the join operation. Then the BKA algorithm builds keys to access the table to be joined for all rows in the buffer and submits these keys in a batch to the database engine for index lookups. The keys are submitted to the engine through the Multi-Range Read (MRR) interface (see Section 8.2.1.11, “Multi-Range Read Optimization”). After submission of the keys, the MRR engine functions perform lookups in the index in an optimal way, fetching the rows of the joined table found by these keys, and starts feeding the BKA join algorithm with matching rows. Each matching row is coupled with a reference to a row in the join buffer.

When BKA is used, the value of `join_buffer_size` defines how large the batch of keys is in each request to the storage engine. The larger the buffer, the more sequential access is made to the right hand table of a join operation, which can significantly improve performance.

For BKA to be used, the `batched_key_access` flag of the `optimizer_switch` system variable must be set to `on`. BKA uses MRR, so the `mrr` flag must also be `on`. Currently, the cost estimation for MRR is too pessimistic. Hence, it is also necessary for `mrr_cost_based` to be `off` for BKA to be used. The following setting enables BKA:

```
mysql> SET optimizer_switch='mrr=on,mrr_cost_based=off,batched_key_access=on';
```

There are two scenarios by which MRR functions execute:

- The first scenario is used for conventional disk-based storage engines such as `InnoDB` and `MyISAM`. For these engines, usually the keys for all rows from the join buffer are submitted to the MRR interface at once. Engine-specific MRR functions perform index lookups for the submitted keys, get row IDs (or primary keys) from them, and then fetch rows for all these selected row IDs one by one by request from BKA algorithm. Every row is returned with an association reference that enables access to the matched row in the join buffer. The rows are fetched by the MRR functions in an optimal way: They are fetched in the row ID (primary key) order. This improves performance because reads are in disk order rather than random order.

- The second scenario is used for remote storage engines such as `NDB`. A package of keys for a portion of rows from the join buffer, together with their associations, is sent by a MySQL Server (SQL node) to MySQL Cluster data nodes. In return, the SQL node receives a package (or several packages) of matching rows coupled with corresponding associations. The BKA join algorithm takes these rows and builds new joined rows. Then a new set of keys is sent to the data nodes and the rows from the returned packages are used to build new joined rows. The process continues until the last keys from the join buffer are sent to the data nodes, and the SQL node has received and joined all rows matching these keys. This improves performance because fewer key-bearing packages sent by the SQL node to the data nodes means fewer round trips between it and the data nodes to perform the join operation.

With the first scenario, a portion of the join buffer is reserved to store row IDs (primary keys) selected by index lookups and passed as a parameter to the MRR functions.

There is no special buffer to store keys built for rows from the join buffer. Instead, a function that builds the key for the next row in the buffer is passed as a parameter to the MRR functions.

In `EXPLAIN` output, use of BKA for a table is signified when the `Extra` value contains `Using join buffer (Batched Key Access)` and the `type` value is `ref` or `eq_ref`.

Optimizer Hints for Block Nested-Loop and Batched Key Access Algorithms

In addition to using the `optimizer_switch` system variable to control optimizer use of the BNL and BKA algorithms session-wide, MySQL supports optimizer hints to influence the optimizer on a per-statement basis. See Section 8.9.3, “Optimizer Hints”.

To use a BNL or BKA hint to enable join buffering for any inner table of an outer join, join buffering must be enabled for all inner tables of the outer join.