Old formulation of branch paths
w/o prediction

bne $2,$3,foo
subu $3,..
Id $2,..
Cleaner formulation of Branching

Invariant: is_correct(PC) → is_correct(Instr[PC])

On restart (branch misprediction) must –
  a. kill all incorrectly fetched instructions (to ensure correct execution)
  b. refill pipeline (takes # cycles == latency of pipeline up to execute stage)
Aside: Decoupled Execution

Buffering Smooths Execution and Improves Cycle time by Reducing Stall Propagation

The front end runs ahead .. stalls + cache misses are overlapped.

without decoupling .. stalls + cache misses are not overlapped.
Pipelined Front End

branch direction predictor

Instruction Cache

Instr FIFO

br. imm

pc

EA

+4

GPC

Bne+ $2,$3,foo

Back End

checker

restart

new pc

PC FIFO
Branch Predicted-Taken Penalty

fetch instructions that follow branch

squash speculatively
Branch Misprediction Penalty

“restart at address X”

Basic Pentium III Processor Misprediction Pipeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fetch</td>
<td>Fetch</td>
<td>Decode</td>
<td>Decode</td>
<td>Decode</td>
<td>Rename</td>
<td>ROB Rd</td>
<td>Rdy/Sch</td>
<td>Dispatch</td>
<td>Exec</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pentium 3 – ~10 cycles

Basic Pentium 4 Processor Misprediction Pipeline

Pentium 4 – ~20 cycles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TC Nxt IP</td>
<td>TC Fetch</td>
<td>Drive</td>
<td>Alloc</td>
<td>Rename</td>
<td>Que</td>
<td>Sch</td>
<td>Sch</td>
<td>Disp</td>
<td>Disp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since misprediction penalty is larger, we first focus on branch (direction) prediction

- Static Strategies:
  - #1 predict taken (34% mispredict rate)
  - #2 predict (backwards taken, forwards not) (10%, 50%) mispredict rate
    - same backwards behavior as #1
    - better forwards behavior (50%-50% branches)
      penalty: #1 taken 2 cycle  \sim taken 20 cycle
      #2 taken 20 cycle  \sim taken 0 cycle
  
  #1 forward branch ave execution time = 50% * 2 + 50% * 20 = 11 cycles
  #2 forward branch ave execution time = 50% * 20 + 50% * 0 = 10 cycles
Since misprediction penalty is larger, we first focus on branch (direction) prediction

- **Static Strategies:**
  
  #3 profile (see next slide for misprediction %’s)
  
  - choose a single prediction for each branch and encode in instruction
  
  - some studies show that sample runs are fairly representative of inputs in general
  
  - negative: extra programmer burden

See next slide for misprediction rates
Each branch is permanently assigned a probable direction.

To do better we would need to change the prediction as the program runs!

Profiling Based Static Prediction

15% ave. (specint92), 9% ave. (specfp92) misp rate
A note on prediction/misprediction rates

Qualitatively, ratio of misprediction rates is better indicator of predictor improvement.

15% ave. (specint92), 9% ave. (specfp92) misp rate

(assumes misprediction probability independent between branches)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prediction Rate (p)</th>
<th>Misprediction Rate</th>
<th># Consecutive Branches Predicted Correctly (w/ 50% prob)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bernoulli Process:

\[ p^k = 0.5 \]

\[ k = \frac{\log(0.5)}{\log(p)} \]

2% makes a huge difference here
Compiler also can take advantage of Static Prediction / Profiling / Knowledge

• Static Strategies:
  - #1 predict taken (34% mispredict rate)
  - #2 predict backwards taken, forwards not (10%, 50% mispredict rate)
  - #3 profile (see previous slide)
  - #4 delayed branches
    always execute instructions after branches
    avoids need to flush pipeline after branch
    \(\rightarrow\) eliminates branch taken penalty
    and branch direction prediction penalty
    for loops where branch direction is determined early enough
Observation: Static Prediction is limited because it only uses instructions as input + has a fixed prediction

branch direction predictor

GPC

Instruction Cache

EA

Instr FIFO

br. imm

PC FIFO

+4

gpc

pc

restart

new pc
Dynamic Prediction: More inputs allow it to adjust the branch direction prediction over time.

branch (direction) predictor

Instr FIFO

Instr

Feedback

branch info

mispredict

feedback

Instr

FIFO

Instr

FIFO

restart

new pc

branch info

Dynamic Prediction: More inputs allow it to adjust the branch direction prediction over time.
Dynamic Prediction: More detailed

branch (direction) predictor

Instruction Cache

Feedback

GPC

+4

PC FIFO

Instr FIFO

branch-info mispredict instr

EA

branch-info descr

restart new pc
Dynamic Branch Prediction – Track Changing Per-Branch Behavior

- Store 1 bit per branch – the last outcome.
- Use that to predict!
1-bit Predictor Loop Behavior

*wishy washy on loops*

---

**Single Bit Predictor Analysis**

(No data – either use what is left over from before or initialize on i. fill with “predict taken” for backwards branches)
Two Bit Dynamic Predictor

- Store 2 bits per branch
- Change the prediction after two consecutive mistakes!
Two bit dynamic predictors

- Better behavior on loops

One misprediction per loop execution with two-bit prediction

Prediction

Outcome

Two Bit Predictor Analysis
n-bit implementation

Branch (direction) Predictor

blindly write into this hash table; branches may alias but that’s “ok”

Branch History Table (BHT)

ICache
Accuracy of simple dynamic branch predictor: 4096-entry 2-bit predictor on Spec89

somewhat old benchmarks – probably need slightly larger predictors to do this well on current benchmarks

vs profiling
Limits of 2-bit prediction

- $\infty$ table does not help much on spec89

- reportedly, more bits does not help significantly either.
Exploiting Spatial Correlation
Yeh and Patt, 1992

if (x[i] < 7) then
 y += 1;
if (x[i] < 5) then
 c -= 4;

If first condition false, second condition also false

*History bit:* H records the direction of the last branch executed by the processor

Two sets of BHT bits (BHT0 & BHT1) per branch instruction

H = 0 (not taken)  ⇒  consult BHT0
H = 1 (taken)      ⇒  consult BHT1

Adapted from Arvind and Asanovic’s MIT course 6.823, Lecture 6
Accuracy with 2 bits of global history

Less storage than 4k x 2bit but better accuracy (for these benchmarks)
Yale/Peh in action: PPro

*Pentium Pro (1995) uses the result from the last two branches to select one of the four sets of BHT bits (~95% correct)*

- **Fetch PC**
- 2-bit global branch history shift register
- Shift in Taken/¬Taken results of recent branch history
- Taken/¬Taken?
Benefit of longer histories for fixed-iteration loops with small iteration counts

- Unary encoding of branch patterns

No mispredictions per (5-iter) loop execution with &ge; 5-bits of history

Prediction | Outcome
---|---
T | T | T | T | T | N | T | T | T | T | T | N | T | T | T | T | T | N
T | T | T | T | T | N | T | T | T | T | T | N | T | T | T | T | T | N
T | T | T | T | T | N | T | T | T | T | T | N | T | T | T | T | T | N
T | T | T | T | T | N | T | T | T | T | T | N | T | T | T | T | T | N
T | T | T | T | T | N | T | T | T | T | T | N | T | T | T | T | T | N

Doesn’t work for many-iteration loops – but relative error is smaller! Issue: exponential space (see next slide)
Alpha 21264 Tournament Predictor

“Predictor-Predictor”: 4K 2-bit counters indexed by branch address
- chooses between two predictors:

A. **global predictor**: 4K 2-bit counters indexed by 12-bit global history
   -> good for memorizing those constant loop constants
   -> we don’t store it for each branch, but across all branches.

B. **local predictor**: track last 10 choices of a single branch
   1024 10-bit entries containing history for that entry
   This history indexes into 1K 3-bit saturating counters
Tournament, Correlating, Local Predictor Performance

Consecutively Correctly Predicted Branches w/ 50% probability:

2-bit ~10
Correlating ~18
Tournament ~25

Spec89 (size presumably in Kbit)
Top N List of Ways to Avoid Branch-Taken Penalties

1. Unroll thy loops

Unrolling loops reduces the number of backwards-taken branches in the program, and thus many of the predicted taken branches.

Matters most when loop bodies are small.

*Positive/Negatives?*  

*red arcs = common case in this example*
Top N List of Ways to Avoid Branch-Taken Penalties

2. Unroll+

Reorder code into common paths and off-paths.

- Often need profiling to get this kind of information.
- Avoid branch-taken penalties with the same accuracy limits as static branch prediction.
- Often more instructions added to off-paths
Top N List of Ways to Avoid Branch-Taken Penalties

3. Delayed Branches

top:

```
a \leftarrow
b \leftarrow
c
d
e\ bne \ b, \ \text{top}
```

- Requires extra work that is independent of the branch that can be scheduled often not available.

- Architecturally fixed number of delay slots.

- Messy semantics – branches within branch delay slots? Exceptions?

Positive/Negatives?
Top N List of Ways to Avoid Branch-Taken Penalties

4. Anulled Branches

+ Filler instruction are automatically independent of branch because they come from the next iteration of the loop. It is easier to fill these than standard delayed branches.

- Architecturally fixed number of delay slots.
- Messy semantics – branches within branch delay slots? Exceptions?

+ Filler instruction are automatically independent of branch because they come from the next iteration of the loop. It is easier to fill these than standard delayed branches.
5. Fetch Ahead (So as Not to Fall Behind)

Fetch unit can fetch more instructions per cycle than the backend can consume, filling the FIFO more quickly. Then, the front end can afford to spend a few cycles on each taken branch.
Top N List of Ways to Avoid Branch-Taken Penalties

6. Branch Target Buffer
Branch Target Buffer

branch (direction) predictor

Instruction Cache

branch info mispredict

Instr FIFo

EA

Feedback

cpc

pc

BTB

PC FIFo

new pc branch info

fix BTB guess?

+4

“btb override”

Positive/Negatives?
BTB Design

PC of instruction to fetch

Look up

Predicted PC

Number of entries in branch-target buffer

Positive/Negatives?

No: instruction is not predicted to be branch; proceed normally

Yes: then instruction is branch and predicted PC should be used as the next PC

override
to i-cache