Elliptic curves of large rank and small conductor

Noam D. Elkies[1⋆] and Mark Watkins[2⋆⋆]

[1] Department of Mathematics, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138
elkies@math.harvard.edu
[2] The Pennsylvania State University
watkins@math.psu.edu

Abstract. For $r = 6, 7, \ldots, 11$ we find an elliptic curve $E/\mathbf{Q}$ of rank at least r and the smallest conductor known, improving on the previous records by factors ranging from 1.0136 (for $r = 6$) to over 100 (for $r = 10$ and $r = 11$). We describe our search methods, and tabulate, for each $r = 5, 6, \ldots, 11$, the five curves of lowest conductor, and (except for $r = 11$) also the five of lowest absolute discriminant, that we found.

1 Introduction and Motivation

An elliptic curve over the rationals is a curve E of genus 1, defined over $\mathbf{Q}$, together with a $\mathbf{Q}$-rational point. A theorem of Mordell [23] states that the rational points on E form a finitely generated abelian group under a natural group law. The rank of E is the rank of the free part of this group. Currently there is no general unconditional algorithm to compute the rank. Elliptic curves of large rank are hard to find; the current record is a curve of rank at least 24 (see [17]).[1]

We investigate a slightly different question: instead of seeking curves of large rank, we fix a small rank r (here $5 \leq r \leq 11$) and try to make the conductor N as small as possible, which, due to the functional equation for the L-function of the elliptic curve, is more natural than trying to minimize the absolute discriminant $|\Delta|$. The question of how fast the rank can grow as a function of N has generated renewed interest lately, partially due to the predictions made by random matrix theory about ζ-function analogues [9]. However, there are at present two different conjectures, one that comes from a function field analogue, and another from analytic number theory considerations. We shall return to this in Section 5.

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[1] Conrey wrote of a curve of rank 26 [8, p. 353], but confirms in e-mail to the authors that "26" was a typographical error for "24" as in [17].

We try to find $E/\mathbf{Q}$ of high rank and low conductor by searching for elliptic curves that have many integral points. As stated, this strategy is ill-posed, as integrality of points is not invariant under change of model (defining equation). However, if we only consider (say) Néron models then the question makes sense, and a conjecture of Lang [16, p. 140] links the number of integral points to the rank, at least in one direction. More explicitly, one might conjecture that there is an absolute constant C such that the number of integral points on an elliptic curve E of rank r is bounded by C^{r+1}. The best result is due to Silverman [27], who shows the conjecture is true when the j-invariant $j(E)$ is integral, and in fact proves that for every number field K there is a constant C_K such that the number of S-integral points over K is bounded by $C_K^{(1+r)(1+\delta)+|S|}$, where δ is the number of primes of K at which $j(E)$ is nonintegral. Explicit constants appear in [14]. Szpiro's conjecture [31], which is equivalent to the Masser-Oesterlé ABC conjecture [24], states that $\Delta \ll N^{6+o(1)}$; Hindry and Silverman [15] show this implies that the number of S-integral points on a quasi-minimal model of E/K is bounded by $C_K^{(1+r)\sigma_{E/K}+|S|}$ where $\sigma_{E/K}$ is the Szpiro ratio, which is the ratio of the logarithms of the norms of the discriminant and the conductor of E/K. Finally, Abramovich [1] has shown that the Lang-Vojta conjecture (which states that the integral points on a quasi-projective variety of log general type are not Zariski dense, see [35, 4.4]) implies the uniform boundedness of the number of integral points on rational semistable elliptic curves, but the lack of control over the Zariski closure of the integral points makes this result ineffective.

Conversely, it is frequently the case that elliptic curves of high rank, and especially those with relatively small conductor, have many integral points, and thus our search method is likely to find these curves. In fact, for each r in our range $5 \leq r \leq 11$ we found a curve E of rank at least r whose conductor N is the smallest known. For $r = 5$ this was a previously known (see [5]) curve with $N = 19047851$. For the other r our curve is new, with N smaller than the previous record by a factor ranging from 1.0136 for $r = 6$ to over 100 for $r = 10$ and $r = 11$. As a byproduct we also find the curves of rank r whose discriminants Δ have the smallest absolute values known. We estimate that finding a similarly good rank 12 curve would take 20–25 times as much work as for rank 11.

Since rational elliptic curves are modular [36, 32, 10, 7, 3], the tables of Cremona [11] are complete for $N \leq 20000$. Hence the lowest conductors for ranks 0–3 are respectively 11, 37, 389, and 5077. The rank 4 record was found by Connell and appears in his Maple$^{\mathrm{TM}}$ package APECS [6]; the curve has $[a_1, a_2, a_3, a_4, a_6] = [1, -1, 0, -79, 289]$ (see Section 2.1 for notation) and its conductor of 234446 is more than twice as small as the best example in [5]. Stein, Jorza, and Balakrishnan have verified [28] that there is no rank 4 elliptic curve of prime conductor less than 234446.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section we describe the methods we used to search efficiently for curves with many small integral points. We then report on the curves of low conductor and/or absolute discriminant that we found, and compare them with previous records. The next section reports on our computation of further integral points on each of these record curves and on many others found in our search. Finally we compare our numerical results with previous speculations on the growth of the minimal N as a function of r.

2 Algorithms

We describe two algorithms that each find elliptic curves with numerous integral points whose x-coordinates have small absolute value. The input to our algorithms is an ordered triple (h, I, b_2) where h is a height parameter, I is a lower bound on the number of integral points we want, and $b_2 \in \{-4, -3, 0, 1, 4, 5\}$, these being the possible values of $b_2 = a_1^2 + 4a_2$ for an elliptic curve in minimal Weierstrass form (see below). We then try to find elliptic curves E with an equation $y^2 = 4x^3 + b_2x^2 + 2b_4x + b_6$ such that there are at least I integral points on E with $0 \le y \le 2h^3$, $|x| \le h^2$, and $|2b_4| \le 4h^4$. In modifications of the algorithm, we use variants of these bounds, and in general only have a high probability of finding the desired curves.

2.1 First Algorithm

An elliptic curve $E/\mathbf{Q}$ can be written in its minimal Weierstrass form as $Y^2 + a_1XY + a_3Y = X^3 + a_2X^2 + a_4X + a_6$, where a_1 and a_3 are 0 or 1 and $|a_2| \le 1$. We can obtain the "2-torsion" equation[2]

$$y^2 = 4x^3 + b_2x^2 + 2b_4x + b_6$$

by completing the square via $y = 2Y + a_1X + a_3$ and $x = X$, so that we get $b_2 = a_1^2 + 4a_2$, $b_4 = a_1a_3 + 2a_4$, and $b_6 = a_3^2 + 4a_6$. Note that this transformation preserves integral points; we use the 2-torsion equation rather than the minimal equation since it is relatively fast to check whether its right-hand side is square. Fixing a choice of $b_2 \in \{-4, -3, 0, 1, 4, 5\}$ and a

[2] The second-named author suggests this term because such a model makes it easy to locate the 2-torsion points on E: $(x, y) \in E[2]$ if and only if $y = 0$.

height-bound h, we search for curves with integral points by looping over the coordinates of such points. In particular, we first fix a b_4-value with $|2b_4| \le 4h^4$ and then loop over integral values of x and y with $|x| \le h^2$ and $0 \le y \le 2h^3$, and finally calculate the value of b_6 from the above equation, counting how often each b_6-value occurs. Note that the above bounds imply that $|y^2|$, $|4x^3|$, and $|2b_4x|$ are all bounded by $4h^6$.

This algorithm takes on the order of h^9 time, with memory requirements around h^5 for the recording of the b_6-values. There are various methods of speeding this up. We can note that neither positive b_4 nor negative b_6 are likely to give curves with many integral points, due to the shape of the cubic. From Table 1 we see that b_4 cannot be odd when b_6 is even. Also, we know that b_6 is a square modulo 4. We can extend this idea to probabilistic considerations; for instance, a curve with $b_2 = 1$ is not that likely to have numerous integral points unless b_4 is odd and b_6 is 1 mod 8. We ran this algorithm for $h = 20$, and an analysis showed that the congruence restrictions most likely to produce good curves had (b_2, b_4, b_6) mod 8 equal to one of $(1, 1, 1)$, $(1, 3, 1)$, $(5, 2, 4)$, $(5, 0, 0)$, $(0, 2, 1)$, $(0, 0, 0)$, or $(4, 0, 1)$. Of course, there are curves that have many integral points yet fail such congruence restrictions, but the percentage of such is rather low (only 10–20%), and even those that do have numerous integral points appear less likely to have high rank. However, our table of records does contain some curves that fail these congruence restrictions, so there is some loss in making them. With these congruence restrictions, our computation took 15–20 hours on an Athlon MP 1600 to handle one b_2-value for $h = 20$; with no congruence restrictions, this would be about 5 days. Note that our congruence restrictions imply that the trials for $b_2 = \pm 4$ should only take half as long as the others. With this algorithm, we broke the low-conductor records of Tom Womack (from whose work this sieve search was adapted) for ranks 6, 7, and 8 (see Tables 2 and 3).[3]

Table 1. Congruence relations with a_1 and a_3

a_1	a_3	b_4	b_6	x and y
0	0	even	even	y even
0	1	even	odd	y odd
1	0	even	even	$y \equiv x$ (2)
1	1	odd	odd	$y \not\equiv x$ (2)

[3] In our tables the stated value of the "rank" is actually the rank of the subgroup generated by small integral points on the curve, which is very likely to be the actual rank, though in general such results can be quite difficult to prove.

2.2 Second Algorithm

The number of elliptic curves E with $b_4 \ll h^4$ and $b_6 \ll h^6$ grows as h^{10}. The typical such curve has no small integral points at all: as we have seen, the number of (E, P), with E as above and $P \in E(\mathbf{Q})$ a small integral point, grows only as h^9, as does the time it takes to find all these (E, P). But we expect that even in this smaller set the typical E does not interest us, because it has no integral points other than $\pm P$. We shall see that there are (up to at most a logarithmic factor) only $O(h^8)$ curves E in this range together with a **pair** of integral points P, P' such that $P' \neq \pm P$, and that again we can find all such (E, P, P') with given b_2, b_4 in essentially constant time per curve. We thus gain a factor of almost h compared to our first algorithm.[4] Further improvements might be available by searching for elliptic curves with three or more points, but we do not know how to do this with the same time and space efficiency.

We wish to compute all $b_4, b_6, x_1, y_1, x_2, y_2$ in given ranges that satisfy the pair of equations $y_j^2 = 4x_j^3 + b_2x_j^2 + 2b_4x_j + b_6$ $(j = 1, 2)$. Subtracting these two equations, we find that

$$(y_2 - y_1)(y_2 + y_1) = (x_2 - x_1)[2b_4 + b_2(x_2 + x_1) + 4(x_2^2 + x_1x_2 + x_1^2)].$$

We can thus write

$$x_2 - x_1 = rt \qquad \text{and} \quad y_2 - y_1 = rs \qquad \text{and} \quad y_2 + y_1 = tu$$

for some integers r, s, t, u. From the latter two equations, we see that we need rs and tu to have the same parity in order for the y's to be integral. Our expectation is that generically we shall have $r, t \ll h$ and $s, u \ll h^2$ when the x-values are bounded by h^2 and the y-values by h^3. It is unclear how often this expectation is met. One way of estimating the proportion is to consider pairs of points $(x_1, y_1), (x_2, y_2)$ with $|x_i| \leq h^2$ on various curves and see what values of (r, s, t, u) are obtained. This is not quite well-defined from the above; for instance, the quadruple $(x_1, x_2, y_1, y_2) = (7, 3, 6, 2)$ could have (r, s, t, u) as either $(4, 1, 1, 8)$ or $(2, 2, 2, 4)$. However, it becomes well-defined upon imposing the additional condition that $r = \gcd(y_2 - y_1, x_2 - x_1)$. Experiments show that about 18% of the (r, s, t, u) obtained from this process satisfy $1 \leq r, t \leq h$, though the exact percentage can vary significantly with the curve. Note that swapping r and t or negating either leads either to a switching of (x_1, y_1) and (x_2, y_2) or to a negation of y-values. Thus we can assume that $1 \leq r \leq t$.

[4] This pair-finding idea is also used in [12] to find curves $x^3 + y^3 = k$ of high rank.

We rewrite the above equation in the form

$$rstu = rt[2b_4 + b_2(x_1 + x_2) + 3(x_1 + x_2)^2 + (x_1 - x_2)^2]$$

and define $z = x_1+x_2$ so that $su = 2b_4+b_2z+3z^2+(rt)^2$. Our algorithm is now the following. Given one of the six possible values of b_2, we loop over $2b_4$-values between $-4h^4$ and 0 (implementing our above comment that positive b_4-values are not that likely to give curves with many integral points). For each value of b_4 we loop over pairs of integers (r, t) that satisfy $1 \le r \le t \le h$. We then compute $l = rt$ and loop over values of $2x_2$ (that is, $z+l$) with $-2h^2 \le 2x_2 \le 2h^2$. Next we compute the quantity $W = 2b_4 + b_2z + (l^2 + 3z^2)$ and factor this in all possible ways as $W = su$. We then take $y_2 = (rs + tu)/2$ (assuming that rs and tu have the same parity) and compute $b_6 = y_2^2 - 4x_2^3 - b_2x_2^2 - 2b_4x_2$. As before, we record the b_6-values and count how many times each occurs. This algorithm takes about $h^8 \log h$ time, where the logarithmic factor comes from solutions of $W = su$, assuming we can find these relatively fast via a lookup table. Already at $h = 20$, a version of this algorithm ran in under an hour and found most of the curves found by the first algorithm. One can view this algorithm as looping over pairs of x-values (both of size h^2), or more precisely the sum (given by z) and difference (given by l) of such a pair, and then reconstructing the y-values by factoring. Thus the inner loop takes time $h^4 \log h$ instead of h^5 as in the first algorithm.

2.3 Implementation Tricks

We now describe the various tricks we used in the implementation. We shall see that our b-congruence restrictions allow us to limit the z and l values in a productive way. First we consider the cases where b_2 is odd. Given a fixed b_4-value we only loop over z's and l's that are both odd, and can note that this makes W odd. Actually we do not loop over l but determine it as $l = rt$; thus we are looping over odd r and t with $1 \le r \le t \le h$. It may seem that this loses a factor of 4 of (r, s, t, u) quadruples (with the z-restriction losing nothing because z must be of the same parity as rt), but we claim that it is actually only a factor of 2 for "interesting" curves. Indeed, though our yield of b_6-values will drop by a factor of 4 because of this parity restriction on both r and t, many of these values of b_6 will correspond to curves on which all integral points have x-coordinates of the same parity. Since l is the difference of two x-coordinates, this implies that l must be even for all pairs of integral points. These curves, which are plainly less likely to have a large number of integral points, are over-represented in the curves we ignore through not considering even l. From this we get our heuristic assertion that restricting to odd l loses only a factor of about 2.

We also consider only the values of z for which $|W|$ is less than a certain bound. This serves a dual purpose in that it speeds up the algorithm and also reduces the size of the tables used for factoring. We see that $W = 2b_4 + b_2 z + (l^2 + 3z^2)$ should be of size h^4, and so we restrict the size of W via the inequality $|W| \leq 2h^4/U$, where U is a parameter we can vary (we had $U = 1$ for the experiments with $h = 30$ and $h = 40$). Again it is not immediately clear how many (r, s, t, u) quadruples we miss by making this restriction on W, and again the proportion can depend significantly upon the curve (curves with b_4 near $-2h^4$ lead to more quadruples with large $|W|$ than those with b_4 close to 0). Experimentation showed that with $U = 1$ we catch on average about 83% of the relevant b_6-values under this restriction. Our expectation might be approximate inverse linearity of the catch rate in U, though only in the limit as $U \to \infty$. Experimentation showed that with $U = 8$ our catch rate is down to 27%, while at $U = 32$ it is about 10%. However, there is interdependence between this restriction and that on the size of r and t — when r and t are both small, this corresponds to a small x-difference, which implies a small y-difference, and so $W = su$ should also be diminished in size. In a final accounting of the proportion of (r, s, t, u) quadruples, including the loss of a factor of 2 from the parity restriction on l, we find that with $U = 1$ we catch 7.4% of the quadruples, with $U = 8$ we catch 2.5%, and with $U = 32$ we catch just under 1%. Most of the curves of interest to us have at least 40 integral points within the given bounds $|x| \leq h^2$ and $0 \leq y \leq 2h^3$, and thus have at least 780 pairs of integral points. So missing 93% or more of the (r, s, t, u) quadruples does not trouble us — indeed, our "laziness" in not finding all the possible (r, s, t, u) is quadratically efficient compared to what we would achieve via similar "laziness" in our first algorithm.

So far we assumed that b_2 was odd, but similar ideas apply also for even values of b_2. When $b_2 = \pm 4$, we took l and z to be even but not congruent modulo 4. This ensures that W is 4 mod 8. Similarly, when $b_2 = 0$ and b_6 is odd, we take l and z to be even and congruent modulo 4, again ensuring that W is 4 mod 8. To implement these restrictions, we took $r \equiv 2 \bmod 4$ with no restriction on t other than $t \geq r$ if t itself is also 2 mod 4 (with both variables less than h as before). Again we required that $|W| \leq 2h^4/U$, and here we have various restrictions on the decomposition $W = su$ depending on t mod 4. Specifically, we can always take s odd and $4|u$, we can take both s and u even if t is odd, and we can take $4|s$ and u odd if t is 2 mod 4, as we need for y to be odd in these cases. When $b_2 = 0$ and b_6 is even, we take z and l both to be odd, which makes W be 4 mod 8, and we need both s and u to be even (hence each 2 mod 4) for y to be even. As above, the loss in the number of interesting b_6-values from these restrictions is not much more than a factor of 2.

2.4 More Tricks

To reduce the memory needed for the counting of b_6 values, we used the following idea. We create a array of 2^L counters (of size 16 bits each); for instance, for $h = 30$ we used $L = 19$. Then for each b_6-value we obtain from above, we reduce $\lfloor b_6/8 \rfloor$ modulo 2^L, and increment the corresponding counter. In other words, we only record b_6 modulo 2^{L+3}. At the end of the loops over r, t, and z, we extract the counters with at least 10 hits. These residue classes are then passed to a secondary test phase. Here we set up counters for the values of b_6 with $0 \leq b_6 \leq 4h^6$ that are in the desired residue class $b_6^{\#}$ modulo 2^{L+3}. We then run through integral x with $|x| \leq h^2$, and for each x-value determine the corresponding positive y-values such that $y^2 \equiv 4x^3 + b_2x^2 + 2b_4x + b_6^{\#} \bmod 2^{L+3}$ via a lookup table of square roots modulo 2^{L+3}. Most of these y-values exceed $2h^3$, and we thus ignore them. If not, we compute b_6 exactly from x and y, and increment the corresponding counter. After running over all the x-values, we then check for large counter values. By taking 2^L somewhere around h^4 (note that this is about how many b_6-values we generate), we can use this method to handle a b_6-congruence-class in essentially h^2 time. This is generically small compared to the h^4 time for the loops over r, t, and z; when $h = 30$ we averaged about 100 congruence classes checked for each b_4-value, but the time for the loops still dominated.

3 Experimental Results

We ran this algorithm with $h = 30$ and $U = 1$ with a few more congruence classes in consideration, taking about a day for each (b_2, b_4, b_6) class. We then proceeded to run it for $h = 40$ and $U = 1$, and then $h = 60$ and $U = 8$, taking a few weeks for each (b_2, b_4, b_6) class. Other runs were done with the "better" congruence restrictions of (b_2, b_4, b_6) with varied parameters up to $h = 90$ and $U = 48$. Though with the $U = 48$ restriction we are catching less than 1% of the (r, s, t, u) quadruples, by this time we expect that most interesting curves have 60 or more integral points with $|x| \leq h^2$ and $0 \leq y \leq 2h^3$; indeed, even with the $h = 60$ search all the record curves we found had at least 70 integral points in this range.

Table 2. Low conductor records for ranks 5–11

$[a_1, a_2, a_3, a_4, a_6]$	N	$\lvert\Delta\rvert/N$	I	r
$[0, 0, 1, -79, 342]$	19047851	1	39	5
$[1, 0, 0, -22, 219]$	20384311	1	29	5
$[0, 0, 1, -247, 1476]$	22966597	1	40	5
$[1, -1, 0, -415, 3481]$	34672310	10	52	5
$[0, 0, 0, -532, 4420]$	37396136	32	52	5
$[1, 1, 0, -2582, 48720]$	5187563742	6	71	6
$[0, 0, 1, -7077, 235516]$	5258110041	243	67	6
$[1, -1, 0, -2326, 43456]$	5739520802	2	60	6
$[1, -1, 0, -16249, 799549]$	6601024978	184	68	6
$[1, -1, 1, -63147, 6081915]$	6663562874	32768	88	6
$[0, 0, 0, -10012, 346900]$	382623908456	32	101	7
$[1, 0, 1, -14733, 694232]$	536670340706	8	77	7
$[0, 0, 1, -36673, 2704878]$	814434447535	5	84	7
$[1, -1, 0, -92656, 10865908]$	858426129202	142	92	7
$[1, -1, 0, -18664, 958204]$	896913586322	26	109	7
$[1, -1, 0, -106384, 13075804]$	249649566346838	14	124	8
$[1, -1, 0, -222751, 40537273]$	292246301470558	2	101	8
$[0, 0, 0, -481663, 128212738]$	314214346667560	160	141	8
$[1, -1, 0, -71899, 5522449]$	314658846776578	34	130	8
$[1, -1, 0, -124294, 14418784]$	315734078239402	106	131	8
$[1, -1, 0, -135004, 97151644]$	32107342006814614	122	191	9
$[1, -1, 0, -613069, 98885089]$	43537345103385386	242	203	9
$[0, 0, 1, -3835819, 2889890730]$	62986816173592807	67	142	9
$[1, 0, 1, -1493028, 701820182]$	72070075910145406	2	139	9
$[1, 0, 1, -1076185, 496031340]$	77211251506212554	344	156	9
$[0, 0, 1, -16312387, 25970162646]$	10189285026863130793	1331	262	10
$[1, -1, 0, -10194109, 12647638369]$	22006161865320788846	58	241	10
$[0, 0, 1, -21078967, 35688990786]$	22630148490190627609	2173	238	10
$[1, -1, 0, -1536664, 648294124]$	25440555737235843986	2	207	10
$[1, -1, 0, -4513546, 3716615296]$	39432942782223365758	2	179	10
$[0, 0, 1, -16359067, 26274178986]$	1803173772593563652084 3	1	229	11
$[1, -1, 0, -38099014, 115877816224]$	6648435476837218317774 2	34	281	11
$[1, -1, 0, -41032399, 106082399089]$	21957602029348581216927 4	2	236	11
$[1, -1, 0, -34125664, 69523358164]$	22794611002565766024068 6	2	215	11
$[1, -1, 0, -56880994, 168642718624]$	25294816661591819288889 4	2	235	11

Table 3. Value of $\log N$ for old and new rank records

	6	7	8	9	10	11
Old	22.383	27.703	33.962	40.721	49.033	55.852
New	22.370	26.670	33.151	38.008	43.768	51.246

Table 2 lists minimal equations for each of the five curves of smallest conductor N for each rank from 5–11 that were found by the above method. Table 4 lists similar data for smallest absolute discriminant $|\Delta|$. The rank 5 data agree with the data from the Elliptic Curve Database [29]. The I column gives how many x-coordinates of integral points we found (see Section 4) for the given equation. Some of the curves fail our congruence conditions on (b_2, b_4, b_6), but they still can be found via a non-minimal model; indeed, letting c_4 and c_6 be the invariants of the minimal model, the model with invariants $12^4 c_4$ and $12^6 c_6$ has $b_2 = 0$ and $4|b_4$ and $8|b_6$ and is thus in the $(0,0,0)$ class. In this way, from $(b_2, b_4, b_6) = (0, -1826496, 2637633024)$ we recover the curve $[1, 0, 0, -22, 219]$.

Table 4. Low absolute discriminant records for ranks 5–10

$[a_1, a_2, a_3, a_4, a_6]$	$\|\Delta\|$	I	r
$[0, 0, 1, -79, 342]$	19047851	39	5
$[1, 0, 0, -22, 219]$	20384311	29	5
$[0, 0, 1, -247, 1476]$	22966597	40	5
$[0, 1, 1, -100, 110]$	55726757	33	5
$[0, 0, 1, -139, 732]$	59754491	32	5
$[1, 0, 0, -9227, 340354]$	6822208199	36	6
$[0, 0, 1, -277, 4566]$	7647224363	49	6
$[0, 0, 1, -379, 5172]$	8072781371	51	6
$[0, 0, 1, -889, 9150]$	8796007189	54	6
$[0, 1, 1, -390, 5460]$	9694585723	43	6
$[0, 0, 1, -1387, 68046]$	1829517077483	71	7
$[0, 0, 1, -5707, 151416]$	1991659717477	68	7
$[1, 0, 1, -5983, 164022]$	2010552189452	72	7
$[1, 0, 1, -14505, 667472]$	2132568452204	71	7
$[0, 0, 1, -15577, 744876]$	2206378706437	71	7
$[0, 1, 1, -23846, 1022562]$	409086620841461	78	8
$[0, 0, 1, -23737, 960366]$	457532830151317	96	8
$[0, 1, 1, -16440, 1394010]$	561715239383323	84	8
$[1, -1, 0, -222751, 40537273]$	584492602941116	101	8
$[1, -1, 0, -201814, 34925104]$	643509175703572	109	8
$[0, 0, 1, -167419, 30261330]$	95276302704064331	135	9
$[1, 0, 1, -1493028, 701820182]$	144140151820290812	139	9
$[0, 0, 1, -514507, 140806716]$	151673348057775877	126	9
$[0, 0, 1, -402157, 96291336]$	157107745029925477	131	9
$[0, 0, 1, -826609, 289956150]$	172539371946838571	120	9
$[1, -1, 0, -1536664, 648294124]$	50881111474471687972	207	10
$[0, 0, 1, -1788817, 843180666]$	59202439687694448757	176	10
$[1, -1, 0, -4513546, 3716615296]$	78865885564446731516	179	10
$[0, 1, 1, -1856500, 1072474760]$	87950374485438204043	154	10
$[0, 0, 1, -2438527, 1545098346]$	103294665688000244363	173	10

How good is this method at finding elliptic curves of low conductor N and relatively high rank? Obviously if such a curve has few integral points then we will not find it. Indeed, it was suggested to us by J. Silverman that for large ranks r the smallest conductor curve might not have r independent integral points. However, for the ranks we consider there are sufficiently many independent integral points; the same is true for Mestre's rank 15 curve [21], but apparently not for later rank records.

Note also that our search operates by increasing b_4 and b_6 corresponding to some height parameter, which is not exactly the same as simply increasing the absolute value $|\Delta|$ of the discriminant, which again is not quite the same as just increasing N. Finally, the probabilistic nature of our algorithm and the necessity of restricting to "likely" congruence classes also cast doubt on the exhaustiveness of our search procedure. However, we are still fairly certain that the curves we found for ranks 5–8 are indeed the actual smallest conductor curves for those ranks. Note that our methods were almost exhaustive in the region of interest (h up to about 30), and were verified with the first algorithm in much of this range. For rank 9 we could be missing some curves with large $|\Delta|/N$ and h around 50 or so; perhaps this range should be rechecked with a smaller U-parameter. Indeed, for a long time the second curve on the $r = 10$ list, which we found with an $h = 60$ search, was our rank 10 record, but then a run with $h = 80$ found the first and third curves which have h-values of about 64 and 68 respectively. We have yet to find many rank 11 curves with large $|\Delta|/N$; note that our current record curve in fact has prime conductor. This suggests that there still could be significant gains here. However, Table 3, which lists values of $\log N$ for the old records and our new ones, indicates that our method has already shown its usefulness. There does not seem to have been any public compilation of such records before Womack [37] did so on his website in the year 2000, soon after he had found the records for ranks 6–8 via a sieve-search.[5] The records for ranks 9–10 were again due to Womack but from a Mestre-style construction [20], with Mestre listing the rank 11 record in [19] (presumably found by the methods of [18]). There was no particular reason to expect the old records for ranks 9–11 to be anywhere near the true minima, as they were constructed without a concentrated attempt to make the conductor or any related quantity as small as possible.

[5] Prior to Womack, there were records listed in the Edinburgh dissertation of Nigel Suess (2000); it appears that Womack and Suess enumerated these lists in part to help dispense Cremona from answering emails about the records. Indeed, the rank 4 record of Connell [6] mentioned above was relatively unknown for quite a while.

4 Counting Integral Points

Since we have curves that have many integral points of small height, it is natural to ask how many integral points these curves have overall, with no size restriction. For our curves of rank higher than 8, current methods, as described in [30], do not yet make it routine to list all the integral points and to prove that the list is complete. Indeed, even verification that the rank is actually what it seems to be is not necessarily routine.

However, we have at least two ways to search for integral points and thus obtain at least a lower bound for the number of integral points. One method is a simple sieve-assisted search, which can reach x-values up to 10^{12} in just over an hour on an Athlon MP 1600. The other method is to write down a linearly independent set from the points we have, and then take small linear combinations of these.[6] For this, we took the linearly independent set that maximized the minimal eigenvalue of the height-pairing matrix (as in the "c_1-optimal basis" of [30]), subject to the condition that the set must generate (as a subgroup of $E(\mathbf{Q})$) all the integral points in our list. We then tried all $((2m+1)^r - 1)/2$ relevant linear combinations with coefficients bounded in absolute value by m.[7] With $r = 11$ and $m = 3$ this takes about an hour.

The maximal number of integral points we found on a curve was 281×2 for $[1, -1, 0, -38099014, 115877816224]$. This can be compared with the rank 14 curve $[0, 0, 1, -2248232106757, 1329472091379662406]$ that is listed by Mestre [19], which we find has 311×2 integral points with $|x| \leq 10^{12}$, plus at least 7×2 more that were found with linear combinations as above. Note that amongst the curves of a given rank there is not much correspondence between number of integral points and smallness of conductor. For instance, we have no idea which curve of rank 7 has the maximal number of integral points;[8] trying a few curves found in our search turned up $[1, -1, 0, -22221159, 40791791609]$ which has at least 165×2 integral points, but conductor 13077343449126, more than 34 times larger than our record. Note that $|\Delta|/N = 2 \cdot 3^4 11^4 23^2$ for this curve; in general, large values of $|\Delta|/N$ seem to correlate with large counts of integral points (see Table 2).

[6] The possible size of coefficients in such linear combinations can be bounded via elliptic logarithms (possibly p-adic) as in [30] and later works. Also, as indicated by Zagier [38], one can combine elliptic logarithms with lattice reduction to search for large integral points, but we did not do this.

[7] We do not compute sums of points on elliptic curves directly over the rationals, but instead work modulo a few small primes and use the Chinese Remainder Theorem.

[8] The maximal count of integral points may well be attained by a curve with nontrivial torsion, whose discriminant would then be too large to be found by our search.

5 Growth of Maximal Rank as a Function of Conductor

We review two different heuristics and conjectures for the growth of the maximal rank of an elliptic curve as a function of its conductor, and then indicate which is more likely according to our data. The first conjecture is due to Murty and appears in the appendix to [25]. He first notes that, similar to a heuristic of Montgomery [22, pp. 512–513] regarding the ζ-function, it is plausible that $\arg L_E(1+it) \ll \sqrt{\log(Nt)/\log\log(Nt)}$ as $t \to \infty$. Murty speculatively applies this bound in a small circle of radius $1/\log\log N$ about $s = 1$. He then claims that Jensen's Theorem implies that the order of vanishing of $L_E(s)$ at $s = 1$ is bounded by $C\sqrt{\log N/\log\log N}$, though we cannot follow the argument. Assuming the Birch–Swinnerton-Dyer conjecture [2], the same upper bound holds for the rank of the elliptic curve. However, the Montgomery heuristic comes from taking the approximation $\log\zeta(s) = \sum_{p\le t} p^{-\sigma-it} + O_\sigma(1)$ for $\sigma > 1/2$ and assuming that the p^{-it} act like random variables; upon taking a limit as $\sigma \to 1/2$, this implies the asserted bound of $\sqrt{\log t/\log\log t}$, but only for large t. Indeed, in our elliptic curve case with small t, we should have an approximation (see [13]) more like $\log L_E(s) \sim \sum_{p\le X} a_p/p^{-s}$; it is unclear whether the variation of the a_p or that of p^{-s} should have the greater impact. Finally, Conrey and Gonek [9] contest that Montgomery's heuristic could be misleading; they suggest that $\log|\zeta(1/2+it)|$ (and maybe analogously the argument) can be as big as $C\log t/\log\log t$ instead of the square root of this. One idea is that the above limit as $\sigma \to 1/2$ disregards a possibly larger error term coming from zeros of $\zeta(s)$; the asymmetry of upper and lower bounds for $\log|\zeta(1/2+it)|$ makes the analysis delicate.

A classic paper of Shafarevich and Tate [26] shows that in function fields the rank grows at least as fast as the analogue of $\frac{\log N}{2\log\log N}$. However, the curves used in this construction were isotrivial, and thus fairly suspect for evidence toward a conjecture over number fields. Ulmer recently gave non-isotrivial function field examples with this growth rate, and conjectured [33, Conjecture 10.5] that this should be the proper rate of growth even in the number field case, albeit possibly with a different constant. In a different paper [34, p. 19], Ulmer notes that certain random matrix models suggest that the growth rate is as in the function field case; presumably this is an elliptic curve analogue of the work of [9].

Figure 1 plots the rank r versus $\log N/\log\log N$, where N is the smallest known conductor for an elliptic curve of rank r. A log-regression gives us that the best-fit exponent is 0.975, much closer to the exponent of 1.0 of Ulmer than to the 0.5 of Murty. Note that an improvement in the records for ranks 9–11 would most likely increase the best-fit exponent.

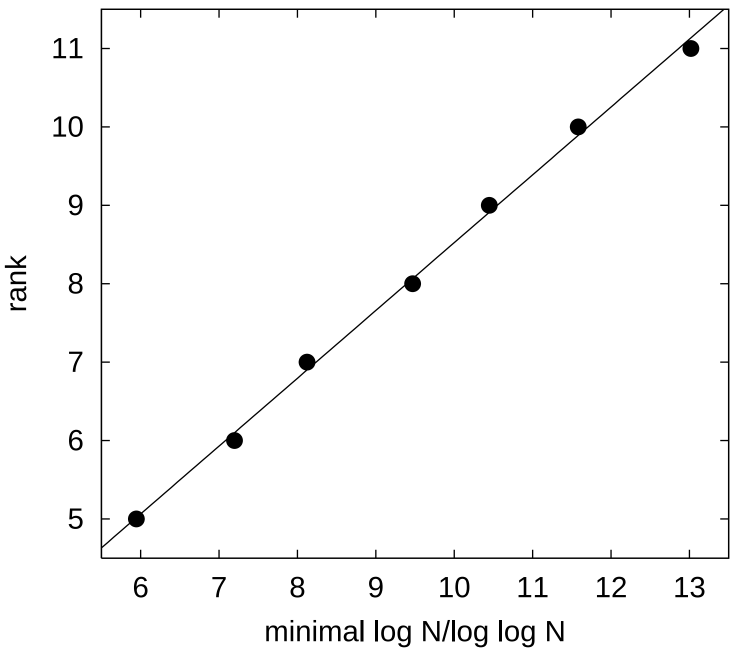

Fig. 1. Plot of rank versus $\log N/\log\log N$

Assuming the growth is linear, the line of best fit is approximately $r = 0.865\frac{\log N}{\log\log N} - 0.126$. But this could mislead; GRH plus BSD implies

$$r \le \frac{1}{2}\frac{\log N}{\log\log N}\left(1 + \frac{\log 8e}{\log\log N} + O\left(\frac{1}{(\log\log N)^2}\right)\right).$$

The main term in the above already appears in Corollary 2.11 of [4] (see also Proposition 6.11), and we have simply calculated the next term in the expansion. To get more reliable data, we would need to consider curves with $\log\log N$ rather large, which is of course quite difficult.

Finally we mention a possible heuristic refinement of the above upper bound. The bound comes from a use of the Weil explicit formula (see [4, 2.11]) to obtain the relation $\sum_\gamma h(\gamma \log\log N) \sim \frac{\log N}{2\log\log N}$, where $h(t) = (\frac{\sin t}{t})^2$ and the sum is over imaginary parts of nontrivial zeros of $L_E(s)$, counted with multiplicity. When only the high-order zero at $\gamma = 0$ contributes, we get the stated upper bound. In the function field case, the other zeros contribute little because they are all near the minima of h. This is unlikely to occur in the number field case. Also unlikely is the idea that the other zeros have negligible contribution due to the $1/t^2$ decay of h. Thus the other zeros are likely to have some impact; however, it is not clear how large this impact will be.

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