

2017-08-05 Trip Report -- SciFoo MountainView, CA

SciFoo is an annual conference held at the Google headquarters in Mountain View California, sponsored by Google, Digital Science, and O'Reilly Publishing. About 250 attendees from around the world are invited by the conference organizers. The program is entirely unconference. Beginning on Friday evening there is an overview of the conference format, and its goals. The goals are to share interesting ideas and meet interesting people. Following the orientation there was an opportunity on the patio for extended conversation and an opportunity to meet new people.

On Saturday, the conference began at 8 AM with breakfast in the Google cafeteria, followed by sessions from 10 AM to 9 PM. Each session was approximately an hour long and had anywhere from 10 to 200 participants. Following the sessions, there was extended patio conversation until 1 AM.

On Sunday, conversation resumed 8 AM at breakfast with sessions running until 3 PM.

Attendees were a mix of journalists, publishers, media people, scientists, entrepreneurs, and futurists. Most people were scientists. Conversation surrounded the usual topics – Climate change, Space exploration, Evolutionary biology, The position of science in the culture, Funding of science, Women in science. I might have thought there would be a more eclectic collection of topics, but people tend to talk about what they are currently interested in and what is current.

I skipped one of the sessions to take a tour of the Google campus. Google has an interesting approach to real estate and buildings. They don't seem to care about either. They buy building from other companies, do a minimum amount of fitting for their business. The tour was short. We were not allowed to enter areas where actual work was being conducted.

I met some interesting people, and had some interesting conversations. I think the format of the conference conspired against it's producing any meaningful results. But I liked meeting people, and I like interesting conversations. I might consider returning if invited.