

# An Introduction to *Rsamtools*

Martin Morgan

Modified: 18 March, 2010. Compiled: December 16, 2011

```
> library(Rsamtools)
```

## 1 Introduction

The *Rsamtools* package provides an interface to **BAM** files. **BAM** files are produced by **samtools** and other software, and represent a flexible format for storing ‘short’ reads aligned to reference genomes. **BAM** files typically contain sequence and base qualities, and alignment coordinates and quality measures. **BAM** files are appealing for several reasons. The format is flexible enough to represent reads generated and aligned using diverse technologies. The files are binary so that file access is relatively efficient. **BAM** files can be indexed, allowing ready access to localized chromosomal regions. **BAM** files can be accessed remotely, provided the remote hosting site supports such access and a local index is available. This means that specific regions of remote files can be accessed without retrieving the entire (large!) file. A full description is available in the **BAM** format specification (<http://samtools.sourceforge.net/SAM1.pdf>)

The main purpose of the *Rsamtools* package is to import **BAM** files into R. *Rsamtools* also provides some facility for file access such as record counting, index file creation, and filtering to create new files containing subsets of the original. An important use case for *Rsamtools* is as a starting point for creating R objects suitable for a diversity of work flows, e.g., *AlignedRead* objects in the *ShortRead* package (for quality assessment and read manipulation), or *GappedAlignments* objects in the *GenomicRanges* package (for RNA-seq and other applications). Those desiring more functionality are encouraged to explore **samtools** and related software efforts.

## 2 Input

The essential capability provided by *Rsamtools* is **BAM** input. This is accomplished with the **scanBam** function. **scanBam** takes as input the name of the **BAM** file to be parsed. In addition, the **param** argument determines which genomic coordinates of the **BAM** file, and what components of each record, will be input. **param** is an instance of the *ScanBamParam* class. To create a **param** object, call **ScanBamParam**. Here we create a **param** object to extract reads aligned to three

distinct ranges (one on `seq1`, two on `seq2`). From each of read in those ranges, we specify that we would like to extract the reference name (`rname`, e.g., `seq1`), strand, alignment position, query (i.e., read) width, and query sequence:

```
> which <- RangesList(seq1=IRanges(1000, 2000),
+                     seq2=IRanges(c(100, 1000), c(1000, 2000)))
> what <- c("rname", "strand", "pos", "qwidth", "seq")
> param <- ScanBamParam(which=which, what=what)
```

Additional information can be found on the help page for `ScanBamParam`. Reading the relevant records from the BAM file is accomplished with

```
> bamFile <-
+   system.file("extdata", "ex1.bam", package="Rsamtools")
> bam <- scanBam(bamFile, param=param)
```

Like `scan`, `scanBam` returns a list of values. Each element of the list corresponds to a range specified by the `which` argument to `ScanBamParam`.

```
> class(bam)

[1] "list"

> names(bam)

[1] "seq1:1000-2000" "seq2:100-1000"  "seq2:1000-2000"
```

Each element is itself a list, containing the elements specified by the `what` and `tag` arguments to `ScanBamParam`.

```
> class(bam[[1]])

[1] "list"

> names(bam[[1]])

[1] "rname" "strand" "pos"    "qwidth" "seq"
```

The elements are either basic R or *IRanges* data types

```
> sapply(bam[[1]], class)

      rname      strand      pos      qwidth
"factor"  "factor"  "integer" "integer"
      seq
"DNAStrngSet"
```

A paradigm for collapsing the list-of-lists into a single list is

```
> lst <- lapply(names(bam[[1]]), function(elt) {
+   do.call(c, unname(lapply(bam, "[[", elt)))
+ })
> names(lst) <- names(bam[[1]])
```

This might be further transformed, e.g., to a *DataFrame*, with

```
> head(do.call("DataFrame", lst))

DataFrame with 6 rows and 5 columns
      rname      strand      pos      qwidth
  <integer> <integer> <integer> <integer>
1         1         1       970         35
2         1         1       971         35
3         1         1       972         35
4         1         1       973         35
5         1         1       974         35
6         1         2       975         35
                                seq
                                <DNASTringSet>
1 TATTAGGAAATGCTTTACTGTCATAACTATGAAGA
2 ATTAGGAAATGCTTTACTGTCATAACTATGAAGAG
3 TTAGGAAATGCTTTACTGTCATAACTATGAAGAGA
4 TAGGAAATGCTTTACTGTCATAACTATGAAGAGAC
5 AGGAAATGCTTTACTGTCATAACTATGAAGAGACT
6 GGAAATGCTTTACTGTCATAACTATGAAGAGACTA
```

The BAM file in the previous example includes an index, represented by a separate file with extension *.bai*:

```
> list.files(dirname(bamFile), pattern="ex1.bam(.bai)?")

[1] "ex1.bam"      "ex1.bam.bai"
```

Indexing provides two significant benefits. First, an index allows a BAM file to be efficiently accessed by range. A corollary is that providing a *which* argument to *ScanBamParam* requires an index. Second, coordinates for extracting information from a BAM file can be derived from the index, so a portion of a remote BAM file can be retrieved with local access only to the index. For instance, provided an index file exists on the local computer, it is possible to retrieve a small portion of a BAM file residing on the 1000 genomes HTTP server. The url [ftp://ftp-trace.ncbi.nih.gov/1000genomes/ftp/pilot\\_data/data/NA19240/alignment/NA19240.chrom6.SLX.maq.SRP000032.2009\\_07.bam](ftp://ftp-trace.ncbi.nih.gov/1000genomes/ftp/pilot_data/data/NA19240/alignment/NA19240.chrom6.SLX.maq.SRP000032.2009_07.bam) points to the BAM file corresponding to individual NA19240 chromosome 6 Solexa (Illumina) sequences aligned using MAQ. The remote file is very large (about 10 GB), but the corresponding index file is small (about 500 KB). With *na19240url* set to the above address, the following retrieves just those reads in the specified range

```
> which <- RangesList("6"=IRanges(100000L, 110000L))
> param <- ScanBamParam(which=which, what=scanBamWhat())
> na19240bam <- scanBam(na19240url, param=param)
```

Invoking `scanBam` without an index file, as above, first retrieves the index file from the remote location, and then queries the remote file using the index; for repeated queries, it is more efficient to retrieve the index file first (e.g., with `download.file`) and then use the local index as an argument to `scanBam`. Many BAM files were created in a way that causes `scanBam` to report that the “EOF marker is absent”; this message can safely be ignored.

BAM files may be read by functions in packages other than *Rsamtools*. In *ShortRead*, `readAligned` invoked with `type="bam"` will read BAM files in to an *AlignedRead* object. This function takes a `param` argument, just as `scanBam`, so the user can control which portions of the file are input. Similar input facilities are available through the `readGappedAlignment` function in *GenomicRanges*.

Additional ways of interacting with BAM files include `scanBamHeader` (to extract header information) and `countBam` (to count records matching `param`). `filterBam` filters reads from the source file according to the criteria of the *ScanBamParam* parameter, writing reads passing the filter to a new file. The function `sortBam` sorts a previously unsorted BAM, while The function `indexBam` creates an index file from a sorted BAM file.

`readPileup` reads a pileup file created by *samtools*, importing SNP, indel, or all variants into a *GRanges* object.

## 2.1 Large bam files

BAM files can be large, containing more information on more genomic regions than are of immediate interest or than can fit in memory. The first strategy for dealing with this is to select, using the `what` and `which` arguments to *ScanBamParam*, just those portions of the BAM file that are essential to the current analysis, e.g., specifying `what=c('rname', 'qname', 'pos')` when wishing to calculate coverage of ungapped reads.

When selective input of BAM files is still too memory-intensive, the file can be processed in chunks, with each chunk distilled to the derived information of interest. Chromosomes will often be the natural chunk to process. For instance, here we write a summary function that takes a single sequence name (chromosome) as input, reads in specific information from the BAM file, and calculates coverage over that sequence.

```
> summaryFunction <-
+   function(seqname, bamFile, ...)
+ {
+   param <- ScanBamParam(what=c('pos', 'qwidth'),
+                           which=GRanges(seqname, IRanges(1, 1e7)),
+                           flag=scanBamFlag(isUnmappedQuery=FALSE))
+   x <- scanBam(bamFile, ..., param=param)[[1]]
+   coverage(IRanges(x[["pos"]], width=x[["qwidth"]]))
+ }
```

This might be used as follows; it is an ideal candidate for evaluation in parallel, e.g., using the *multicore* package and `sapply` function in *ShortRead*.

```

> seqnames <- paste("seq", 1:2, sep="")
> cvg <- lapply(seqnames, summaryFunction, bamFile)
> names(cvg) <- seqnames
> cvg

$seq1
'integer' Rle of length 1569 with 1054 runs
  Lengths:  2  2  1  3  4  2  3  4 ...  1  1  1  1  1  1  1
  Values  :  1  2  3  4  5  7  8  9 ...  9  7  6  5  3  2  1

$seq2
'integer' Rle of length 1567 with 1092 runs
  Lengths:  1  3  1  1  1  3  1  4 ...  1  1  2  1  4  4  1
  Values  :  3  4  5  8 12 14 15 16 ... 10  8  7  6  3  2  1

```

The result of the function (a coverage vector, in this case) will often be much smaller than the input.

### 3 Views

The functions described in the previous section import data in to R. However, sequence data can be very large, and it does not always make sense to read the data in immediately. Instead, it can be useful to marshal *references* to the data into a container and then act on components of the container. The *BamViews* class provides a mechanism for creating ‘views’ into a set of BAM files. The view itself is light-weight, containing references to the relevant BAM files and metadata about the view (e.g., the phenotypic samples corresponding to each BAM file).

One way of understanding a *BamViews* instance is as a rectangular data structure. The columns represent BAM files (e.g., distinct samples). The rows represent ranges (i.e., genomic coordinates). For instance, a ChIP-seq experiment might identify a number of peaks of high read counts.

#### 3.1 Assembling a *BamViews* instance

To illustrate, suppose we have an interest in caffeine metabolism in humans. The ‘rows’ contain coordinates of genomic regions associated with genes in a KEGG caffeine metabolism pathway. The ‘columns’ represent individuals in the 1000 genomes project. The details of creating a *BamViews* object are described in the appendix. Here we retrieve archived versions of the genomic ranges we are interested in (`bamRanges`) and a vector of BAM file URLs (`slxMaq09`).

```

> library(GenomicFeatures)
> bamRanges <- local({
+   fl <- system.file("extdata", "CaffeineTxdb.sqlite",
+                     package="Rsamtools")
+   transcripts(loadFeatures(fl))

```

```
+ })
> slxMq09 <- local({
+   fl <- system.file("extdata", "slxMq09_urls.txt",
+                     package="Rsamtools")
+   readLines(fl)
+ })
```

We now assemble the *BamViews* instance from these objects; we also provide information to annotated the BAM files (with the `bamSamples` function argument, which is a *DataFrame* instance with each row corresponding to a BAM file) and the instance as a whole (with `bamExperiment`, a simple named *list* containing information structured as the user sees fit).

```
> bamExperiment <-
+   list(description="Caffeine metabolism views on 1000 genomes samples",
+         created=date())
> bv <- BamViews(slxMq09, bamRanges=bamRanges,
+               bamExperiment=bamExperiment)
> metadata(bamSamples(bv)) <-
+   list(description="Solexa/MAQ samples, August 2009",
+         created="Thu Mar 25 14:08:42 2010")
```

### 3.2 Using *BamViews* instances

The *BamViews* object can be queried for its component parts, e.g.,

```
> bamExperiment(bv)

$description
[1] "Caffeine metabolism views on 1000 genomes samples"

$created
[1] "Fri Dec 16 00:06:47 2011"
```

More usefully, Methods in *Rsamtools* are designed to work with *BamViews* objects, retrieving data from all files in the view. These operations can take substantial time and require reliable network access.

To illustrate, the following code (not evaluated when this vignette was created) downloads the index files associated with the `bv` object

```
> bamIndexDir <- tempfile()
> indexFiles <- paste(bamPaths(bv), "bai", sep=".")
> dir.create(bamIndexDir)
> idxFiles <- mapply(download.file, indexFiles,
+                   file.path(bamIndexDir, basename(indexFiles)) ,
+                   MoreArgs=list(method="curl"))
```

and then queries the 1000 genomes project for reads overlapping our transcripts; by loading the *multicore* package, we tell *Rsamtools* to use as many cores as are available on our machine (the *multicore* package is not currently – as of 25 March, 2010 – reliable on Windows computers)

```
> library(multicore)
> olaps <- readBamGappedAlignments(bv)
```

The resulting object is about 6 MB in size. To avoid having to download this data each time the vignette is run, we instead load it from disk

```
> load(system.file("extdata", "olaps.Rda", package="Rsamtools"))
> olaps
```

SimpleList of length 24

names(24): NA06986.SLX.maq.SRP000031.2009\_08.bam ...

```
> head(olaps[[1]])
```

GappedAlignments with 6 alignments and 0 elementMetadata values:

	seqnames	strand	cigar	qwidth	start
	<Rle>	<Rle>	<character>	<integer>	<integer>
[1]	19	+	51M	51	41594322
[2]	19	-	51M	51	41594351
[3]	19	-	51M	51	41594370
[4]	19	+	51M	51	41594371
[5]	19	-	51M	51	41594402
[6]	19	+	51M	51	41594413

  

	end	width	ngap
	<integer>	<integer>	<integer>
[1]	41594372	51	0
[2]	41594401	51	0
[3]	41594420	51	0
[4]	41594421	51	0
[5]	41594452	51	0
[6]	41594463	51	0

---

seqlengths:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	...	17	18	19	20	21	22	X	Y	MT
	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	...	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

There are 12904 reads in NA06986.SLX.maq.SRP000031.2009\_08.bam overlapping at least one of our transcripts. It is easy to explore this object, for instance discovering the range of read widths in each individual.

```
> head(t(sapply(olaps, function(elt) range(qwidth(elt)))))
```

	[,1]	[,2]
NA06986.SLX.maq.SRP000031.2009_08.bam	51	51

```

NA06994.SLX.maq.SRP000031.2009_08.bam 36 51
NA07051.SLX.maq.SRP000031.2009_08.bam 51 51
NA07346.SLX.maq.SRP000031.2009_08.bam 48 76
NA07347.SLX.maq.SRP000031.2009_08.bam 51 51
NA10847.SLX.maq.SRP000031.2009_08.bam 36 51

```

Suppose we were particularly interested in the first transcript, which has a transcript id ENST00000343932. Here we extract reads overlapping this transcript from each of our samples. As a consequence of the protocol used, reads aligning to either strand could be derived from this transcript. For this reason, we set the strand of our range of interest to \*. We use the `endoapply` function, which is like `lapply` but returns an object of the same class (in this case, `SimpleList`) as its first argument.

```

> rng <- bamRanges(bv)[1]
> strand(rng) <- "*"
> olap1 <- endoapply(olaps, subsetByOverlaps, rng)
> olap1

```

`SimpleList` of length 24

names(24): NA06986.SLX.maq.SRP000031.2009\_08.bam ...

```

> head(olap1[[24]])

```

GappedAlignments with 6 alignments and 0 elementMetadata values:

	seqnames	strand	cigar	qwidth	start
	<Rle>	<Rle>	<character>	<integer>	<integer>
[1]	15	+	36M	36	75041174
[2]	15	-	36M	36	75041180
[3]	15	+	36M	36	75041186
[4]	15	-	36M	36	75041206
[5]	15	+	36M	36	75041208
[6]	15	+	36M	36	75041211

  

	end	width	ngap
	<integer>	<integer>	<integer>
[1]	75041209	36	0
[2]	75041215	36	0
[3]	75041221	36	0
[4]	75041241	36	0
[5]	75041243	36	0
[6]	75041246	36	0

---

seqlengths:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	...	17	18	19	20	21	22	X	Y	MT
NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	...	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

To carry the example a little further, we calculate coverage of each sample:



```

> minw <- min(sapply(olap1, function(elt) min(start(elt))))
> maxw <- max(sapply(olap1, function(elt) max(end(elt))))
> cvg <- endoapply(olap1, coverage,
+                 shift=-start(ranges(bamRanges[1])),
+                 width=width(ranges(bamRanges[1])))
> cvg

```

```

SimpleList of length 24
names(24): NA06986.SLX.maq.SRP000031.2009_08.bam ...

```

```

> cvg[[1]]

```

```

SimpleRleList of length 25
$`1`
'integer' Rle of length 7758 with 1 run
  Lengths: 7758
  Values :    0

```

```

$`2`
'integer' Rle of length 7758 with 1 run
  Lengths: 7758
  Values :    0

```

```

$`3`
'integer' Rle of length 7758 with 1 run
  Lengths: 7758
  Values :    0

```

```

$`4`
'integer' Rle of length 7758 with 1 run
  Lengths: 7758
  Values :    0

```

```

$`5`
'integer' Rle of length 7758 with 1 run
  Lengths: 7758
  Values :    0

```

```

...
<20 more elements>

```

Since the example includes a single region of uniform width across all samples, we can easily create a coverage matrix with rows representing nucleotide and columns sample and, e.g., document variability between samples and nucleotides

```

> m <- matrix(unlist(lapply(cvg, lapply, as.vector)),
+             ncol=length(cvg))
> summary(rowSums(m))

```

Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max.
0.000	0.000	0.000	3.254	0.000	127.000

```
> summary(colSums(m))
```

Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max.
13220	15260	23400	26300	35590	56840

## 4 Directions

This vignette has summarized facilities in the *Rsamtools* package. Important additional packages include *GenomeRanges* (for representing and manipulating gapped alignments), *ShortRead* for I/O and quality assessment of ungapped short read alignments, *Biostrings* and *BSgenome* for DNA sequence and whole-genome manipulation, *IRanges* for range-based manipulation, and *rtracklayer* for I/O related to the UCSC genome browser. Users might also find the interface to the integrative genome browser (IGV) in *SRADB* useful for visualizing BAM files.

```
> packageDescription("Rsamtools")
```

Package: Rsamtools  
Type: Package  
Title: Binary alignment (BAM), variant call (BCF), or  
      tabix file import  
Version: 1.6.3  
Author: Martin Morgan, Hervé Pagès  
Maintainer: Bioconductor Package Maintainer  
      <maintainer@bioconductor.org>  
Description: This package provides an interface to  
      the 'samtools', 'bcftools', and 'tabix'  
      utilities (see 'LICENCE') for manipulating SAM  
      (Sequence Alignment / Map), binary variant call  
      (BCF) and compressed indexed tab-delimited  
      (tabix) files.  
URL:  
      <http://bioconductor.org/packages/release/bioc/html/Rsamtools.html>  
License: Artistic-2.0 + file LICENSE  
LazyLoad: yes  
Depends: methods, IRanges (>= 1.11.34), GenomicRanges  
      (>= 1.5.49), Biostrings (>= 2.21.12)  
Imports: methods, utils, IRanges, GenomicRanges,  
      Biostrings, zlibbioc, rtracklayer, bitops  
Suggests: ShortRead (>= 1.11.30), GenomicFeatures,  
      RUnit, KEGG.db  
LinkingTo: Biostrings, IRanges

```

biocViews: DataImport, Sequencing,
          HighThroughputSequencing
Built: R 2.14.0; i386-pc-mingw32; 2011-12-16 08:05:33
        UTC; windows

-- File: D:/biocbld/bbs-2.9-bioc/tmpdir/RtmpaoEShd/Rinst6c3b6546/Rsamtools/Meta/package.rds

> sessionInfo()

R version 2.14.0 (2011-10-31)
Platform: i386-pc-mingw32/i386 (32-bit)

locale:
[1] LC_COLLATE=C
[2] LC_CTYPE=English_United States.1252
[3] LC_MONETARY=English_United States.1252
[4] LC_NUMERIC=C
[5] LC_TIME=English_United States.1252

attached base packages:
[1] stats      graphics  grDevices  utils      datasets
[6] methods    base

other attached packages:
[1] GenomicFeatures_1.6.5 AnnotationDbi_1.16.10
[3] Biobase_2.14.0       Rsamtools_1.6.3
[5] Biostrings_2.22.0    GenomicRanges_1.6.4
[7] IRanges_1.12.5

loaded via a namespace (and not attached):
[1] BSgenome_1.22.0    DBI_0.2-5
[3] RCurl_1.8-0.1      RSQLite_0.11.1
[5] XML_3.6-2.1        biomaRt_2.10.0
[7] bitops_1.0-4.1     rtracklayer_1.14.4
[9] tools_2.14.0       zlibbioc_1.0.0

```

## A Assembling a *BamViews* instance

### A.1 Genomic ranges of interest

We identify possible genes that KEGG associates with caffeine metabolism:

```

> library(KEGG.db)
> kid <- revmap(KEGGPATHID2NAME)[["Caffeine metabolism"]]
> egid <- KEGGPATHID2EXTID[[sprintf("hsa%s", kid)]]

```

Then we use the *biomaRt* package to translate Entrez identifiers to Ensembl transcript ids, and use these to create a small data base (using the *GenomicFeatures* packages) of features we are interested in

```
> library(biomaRt)
> mart <- useMart("ensembl", "hsapiens_gene_ensembl")
> ensid <- getBM(c("ensembl_transcript_id"), filters="entrezgene",
+               values=egid, mart=mart)[[1]]
> library(GenomicFeatures)
> txdb <- makeTranscriptDbFromBiomart(transcript_ids=ensid)
```

Transcript genomic locations are contained in *txdb*; we will use those as the ranges for the *BamViews*

```
> bamRanges <- transcripts(txdb)
```

## A.2 BAM files

*Note:* The following operations were performed at the time the vignette was written; location of on-line resources, in particular the organization of the 1000 genomes BAM files, may have changed.

We are interested in collecting the URLs of a number of BAM files from the 1000 genomes project. Our first goal is to identify files that might make for an interesting comparison. First, let's visit the 1000 genomes FTP site and discover available files. We'll use the *RCurl* package to retrieve the names of all files in an appropriate directory

```
> library(RCurl)
> ftpBase <-
+   "ftp://ftp-trace.ncbi.nih.gov/1000genomes/ftp/pilot_data/data/"
> indivDirs <-
+   strsplit(getURL(ftpBase, ftplistonly=TRUE), "\n")[[1]]
> alnDirs <-
+   paste(ftpBase, indivDirs, "/alignment/", sep="")
> urls0 <-
+   strsplit(getURL(alnDirs, dirlistonly=TRUE), "\n")
```

From these, we exclude directories without any files in them, select only the BAM index (extension *.bai*) files, and choose those files that exactly six '.' characters in their name.

```
> urls <- urls[sapply(urls0, length) != 0]
> fls0 <- unlist(unname(urls0))
> fls1 <- fls0[grepl("bai$", fls0)]
> fls <- fls1[sapply(strsplit(fls1, "\\."), length)==7]
```

After a little exploration, we focus on those files obtained from Solexa sequencing, aligned using MAQ, and archived in August, 2009; we remove the *.bai* extension, so that the URL refers to the underlying file rather than index. There are 24 files.

```

> urls1 <-
+   Filter(function(x) length(x) != 0,
+         lapply(urls,
+               function(x) x[grepl("SLX.maq.*2009_08.*bai$", x)]))
> slxMaq09.bai <-
+   mapply(paste, names(urls1), urls1, sep="", USE.NAMES=FALSE)
> slxMaq09 <- sub(".bai$", "", slxMaq09.bai) # $

```

As a final step to prepare for using a *BamViews* file, we create local copies of the *index* files. The index files are relatively small (about 190 Mb total).

```

> bamIndexDir <- tempfile()
> dir.create(bamIndexDir)
> idxFiles <- mapply(download.file, slxMaq09.bai,
+                   file.path(bamIndexDir, basename(slxMaq09.bai)) ,
+                   MoreArgs=list(method="curl"))

```