

Celestial Navigation

I have used them both, the sextant and the GPS unit. Both are wonderful tools that aid in the process of navigation. The former demands a degree of skill that comes only with time and usage, while the latter, in the hands of an informed operator, is a push button affair that through the advances of micro processing and satellite technology displays an instantaneous position.

As an operator becomes familiar with both instruments it becomes clear that each device has its own idiosyncrasies that a user needs to adjust and compensate for. Nevertheless, in the hands of a skilled practitioner, the sextant or GPS unit can and does perform admirably, enabling the user to pinpoint their location on the planet.

Each instrument depends on a host of conditions to gain the desired accuracy; human error, technology, weather, antenna reception, cooperative celestial bodies, available satellites and a myriad of other factors that combine to affect their reliability. Yet both technologies are flawless in the right hands and have offered salvation on more than one occasion.

Born in two different eras of scientific and mathematical discovery, both instruments have enabled the lost to be found. Reminiscent of theology, where views of one era seem to make redundant those from another, each instrument provides a degree of accuracy and truth that is as valid today as that of yesteryear. The difference lies in the method of extraction and the manipulation of the data presented to the operator. Though seemingly divergent and at times antagonistic toward the other, each takes us through a journey while providing the signposts to ensure the arrival at the desired destination.

Throughout history, Celestial bodies have offered the potential of enabling the lost to be found. Instruments of varying accuracy help us navigate the sea of life. Neither better nor worse, each provides an understanding that is equally valid to the defining question of “Where are we?” Perhaps it is better to move beyond the shallowness of debating the merits of one over the other and concentrate instead on developing the skills of use so as to proclaim our position to the world.

From being lost to find our way home – now that’s good news!