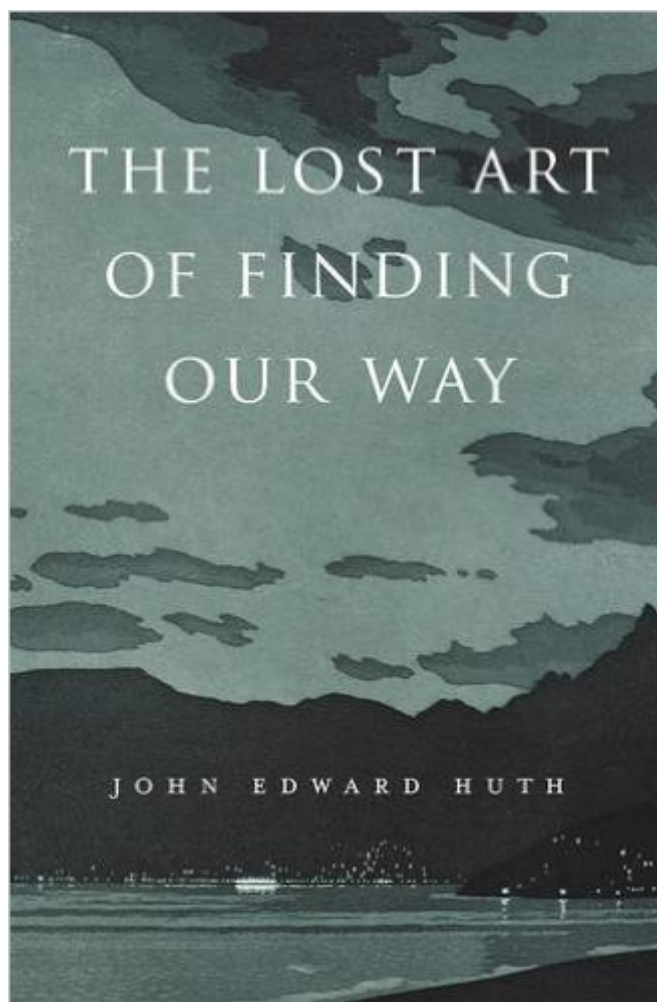


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The Lost Art Of Finding Our Way



Synopsis

Long before GPS and Google Earth, humans traveled vast distances using environmental clues and simple instruments. What is lost when technology substitutes for our innate capacity to find our way? Illustrated with 200 drawings, this narrative is part treatise, part travelogue, and part navigational history that brings our own world into sharper view.

Book Information

Paperback: 544 pages

Publisher: Belknap Press; Reprint edition (November 16, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674088077

ISBN-13: 978-0674088078

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.3 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars See all reviews (29 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #76,947 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #27 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Oceans & Seas > Oceanography #47 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Rivers #66 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Climatology

Customer Reviews

I agree with the other reviews that this is a terrific book. That said, you should know that its conversion to Kindle is pretty sloppy. It looks like the print edition was scanned and run through a character recognition process but then not checked for accuracy. For example, in the formula on pages 58 and 59 of the print edition for estimating the distance to an object there's a "division sign" character -- the one that looks like a dash with a dot above and below it. In the Kindle edition this is rendered as a "+". This is worse than wrong since it makes the author look like he doesn't know what he's talking about. Sadly, in my experience this sort of careless conversion is more typical than not for Kindle editions. I wonder why Amazon cares so little about the quality of its Kindle editions. And I wonder why authors and readers silently put up with it.

'Nicely presented book but the idea behind it is very similar to one that came out a couple of years ago, 'The Natural Navigator: The Rediscovered Art of Letting Nature Be Your Guide', by Tristan Gooley, so there is quite a bit of overlap. I enjoyed Gooley's book more as it is written by someone who also has experience of applying these techniques outdoors so the subject really comes

alive. Huth's book may be better for people who are more interested in the history of navigation at sea than the 'how to's' of navigating at sea and on land. Overall I found Gooley's book more rounded and engaging. Not a bad effort though.'

We did not always have GPS, and we did not always have smartphones, and we did not always know where we were. It still happens that people get lost. At the beginning of *The Lost Art of Finding Our Way* (Harvard University Press), physicist John Edward Huth tells how there is still danger out there. He once found himself beset in fog, kayaking off Cape Cod. It had happened before, and this time, before setting out, he had noted the waves, wind, and more. He was able to use these clues to get home even in the fog, but two other kayakers were in the same fog and were not so lucky, and he subsequently read about their disappearance in the newspaper. They didn't have his ability to read the signs, and when the fog descended, they probably were completely lost and paddled seawards. His book is dedicated to them, and if Huth has his way, there will be far fewer lost hikers and sailors. There are many primitive and refined methods of land and marine navigation described here. This entertaining book is not just a summary of such techniques, but an appreciation of the pre-smartphone cultures (Arab traders, Vikings, Pacific Islanders, and those scientific types from Europe, too) that used and developed them, and a call for us to lift our eyes from our screens. Huth encourages us to leave "the bubble" of electronic positioning and take a good look around. He has lead courses to train students in primitive navigation and it works. "I have found that students can become adept at reading star patterns, following the arc of the Sun across the sky, and predicting the weather. But to acquire these skills you absolutely must leave the bubble and look at the stars, the clouds, and the Sun." What do people do when they are lost? Lost people wander out in loopy, ineffective paths that cross back on themselves. If they are observant enough to realize that they are back where they started, panic can increase. Sometimes they use folk advice to rescue themselves, like walking downhill until they find a creek that will lead downstream to civilization; if the stream goes into a swamp, they are worse off. There's a whole list of other ineffective behaviors which lost people perform besides random walks, like following any game trail or track they come across or obsessively attempting to head off in one absolute direction. Some tactics can be effective, like getting to a high point to get an overview of the territory. Huth allows technology to intrude here: a high point is better for cell phone coverage, too. Basic land navigation starts with "dead reckoning," which was good enough for Lewis and Clark. Huth says you can gain skills in dead reckoning, but that even with a compass an experienced pathfinder can expect a precision within five or ten degrees at best. Estimates of distance covered, based on speed,

similarly are subject to distortion due to terrain or fatigue. Especially interesting are corrections navigators have known for centuries they had to make. Light from a star bends as it goes through the atmosphere, for instance, and is especially bent from stars that are close to the horizon; these are just the stars a navigator will be looking for, since the job in sighting with the sextant is to measure the angle between a star and the horizon below it. Navigators are not restricted to looking at the Sun, Moon, stars, and planets. If you know something about prevailing waves, tides, currents, and winds, you might be able to pick up clues to location; the Pacific Islanders were adept at this sort of wayfinding. If you are stuck at sea and don't know where you are, you might look to the sky to see land-based birds that are fishing but will soon return to land, and they can point the way. Take care not to confuse them with pelagic birds that spend all their time at sea except for nesting. In the old days, when ships and life were slower, a sailor might take a jaunt at sea with no provision for navigation except to ask passing ships about location. Readers of *Moby Dick* will remember that it was fairly common for ships stop and have a social "gam." Even now, a navigator can get clues from spotting ships in their traffic routes, and Huth explains how even seeing airplanes in the sky can give navigational information. Huth's book is sizeable, with good diagrams and maps. He is an inspired teacher, and obviously loves his subject, one that includes cosmology, physics, meteorology, history, legends, and psychology. You may not have a chance of using any of the techniques here. Huth warns, "All of these techniques are matters of habit. Reading about them can be a curiosity, but they need to be practiced." I'm not in mind to practice them, and chances are I am never going to need them, but Huth's guide to guides is fun to read, and is a little monument to human cleverness.

Interesting ideas; made me think about what I would do in some survival situations. I am interested in the neurology of navigation, so I enjoyed it a lot. I would recommend the book to anyone who is interested in topics like landmarking, dead reckoning, nautical vs linear miles, changes in star patterns, etc.

Professor Huth really outdoes himself with this book -- rivals for layfolk his work on the Higgs hoo-hah at the Large Hadron Collider. It's a fascinating collage of historical, theoretical and practical material. Anybody with an interest in one or more of those areas of navigation will find lots of things they can use and many nuggets to interest them in the other areas. For example, "the tidal bulge is, effectively, a very long wave" -- who woulda thought! And from there to "You can think of a partly trapped body of water as a bell that rings with a distinct pitch of frequency if you hit it... water will

slosh back and forth with a unique frequency...", and "The two areas with the highest tides on the planet are in Ungava Bay in Northern Quebec and the Bay of Fundy...".Who could resist!

This book is very well written for any type of reader. It is very interesting to learn how other cultures back in time were able to navigate their way around. The book is written in a way that you can read it for a while and then come back later to read more.it would certainly make a great gift for most anyone.

Extremely well researched and presented material. This in-depth book will change the way you observe your surroundings. It is an easy read at a scientific treatise level of the ancient art of natural navigation. As a sailor and alpine hiker this book is sharpening my observation skills and awareness of the environment I am operating in.This stimulating book is clearly the definitive volume on he subject of natural navigation.

A sailor friend recommended this. I found it consistently surprising and enjoyable. My wife got tired of me telling her all the tidbits.

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