

Gilbert Park compares two different celestial navigation books and Ali Wood tries 'snap-on' shades and a Lomo tow float

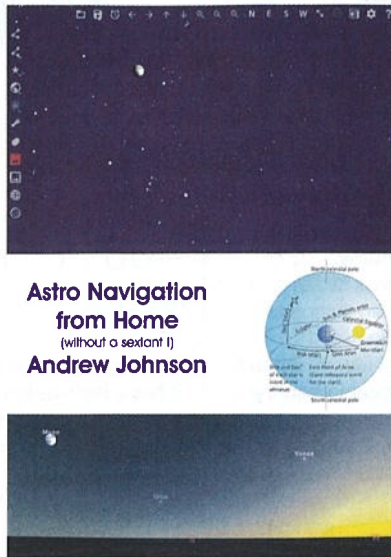
Guides to navigation by the sun and stars

I have always considered the 'noon sight' to be something romantic and intellectually interesting. Having learned from books how to get a fix by measuring the altitude of the sun, I decided to do more. I did the RYA Ocean Yachtmaster course to learn celestial navigation but then Covid arrived and put a stop to any further practice.

So to better understand the calculations and maintain my interest I did what I normally do... bought some more books. At the last count I had 13 of them! They range from pre-GPS days to now. At one stage I had three sextants of different types. So would these two new books fit into my learning?

Phil Somerville's *The Practical Guide to Celestial Navigation* tells you how to use just the sun to navigate. It's 160 pages long and is beautifully written. All the theory and practice is explained clearly with well illustrated diagrams. I spent an enjoyable afternoon reading it.

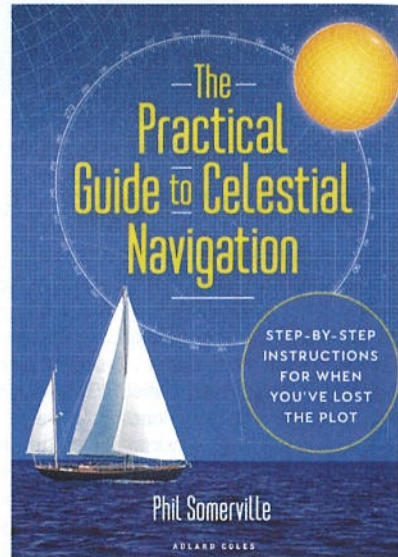
Andrew Johnson's *Astro Navigation from Home (without a sextant)* is completely different, except it too is clearly written. It is very information-dense and needs a lot of careful thought and study. In 104 pages, it explains how to use most of the celestial bodies. What is really novel is you don't actually need a sextant! Instead, you use a planetarium app (Winstars or Stellarium) that will show you all the



ABOVE Two very different books on the same subject, but both valuable for learning

heavenly bodies and allow you to make your 'sextant' readings. From there you complete your calculations and use a plotting sheet or another app, TeacupNav, to get your position. Both methods are explained and illustrated.

You can buy this as an ebook in PDF form from the author's website, or as a conventional



book from Brown Dog Books. At first I was slightly reluctant to try the ebook, but found it worked well as it has live links which take you through to the author's website with worked examples. Links are included in both print books but you have to type them into your device, of course.

Which book would I buy if I was at the beginning? Probably *The Practical Guide to Celestial Navigation* as it would give me the confidence to buy the second one to build on my knowledge.

In terms of cost, the first is more expensive and may be unnecessary if you want to learn how to use stars and planets as well as the sun. With *Astro Navigation from Home (without a sextant)* you may want to buy one of the low cost apps to enhance the experience but these are not a requirement. **GP**

■ *The Practical Guide to Celestial Navigation*, Phil Somerville, Adlard Coles 2021, £30 (or ebook £27 from bloomsbury.com)

■ *Astro Navigation from Home (without a sextant)*, Andrew Johnson. Brown Dog Books 2021, £14.50 (or ebook £10 from astronavigation.co.uk)



Gilbert Park

ABOVE LEFT Gilbert Park using his sextant. ABOVE RIGHT Worked examples of astro navigation are available via links from Andrew Johnson's ebook