

Navigating without Electronics?

Boating Tips

Biff Matthews

Pamlico Sail & Power Squadron



America's Boating Club™

We've all come to rely heavily on electronics, possibly too much. We rely on our boat's GPS/chart plotter and auto's GPS/mapping (chart plotter). The art of reading a map is dying.

As a boater on a long voyage what do you do when the GPS/chart plotter fails, GPS loses signal or worse batteries die? You're a couple hundred miles off shore on a 500 mile run when nothing electronic works. Where are you? Which direction were you going? How can you continue to your destination or return home?

For a reasonably educated and experienced boater the answers are fairly straight forward.

To begin with, an experienced boater has a paper chart with the course and waypoints plotted on the chart. They also take regular readings from their GPS of their position, compass heading and time noting them along the course line on their chart. A sailor will also note wind speed and direction along with wave conditions/direction on the chart. This gauges progress toward the destination plus indicates position and direction should electronics fail or lose signal. Frankly, on a long run it's also something to do.

In addition to the paper chart the smart boater will have a marine sextant along with knowledge and experience in its use. Supporting the marine, sextant they have working knowledge of the moon, sun and stars for celestial navigation.

Believe it or not celestial navigation is often helpful on our rivers and sounds during dense fog. Fog usually lies close to the water leaving the sky visible allowing for a degree of celestial navigation. Some useful information is better than none.

How long does it take to learn navigating with a sextant? That depends on the class and the student's diligence. Once a week junior navigation class takes about 12-14 weeks. You learn to how to determine position, exact time, running fix (course) so that you are never "lost".

As with new knowledge, repeated use implants that knowledge in the brain. It's said you never forget how to roller skate or ride a bike. Once you learn navigating with a sextant and sky, periodically test yourself comparing your results against your GPS/Chart Plotter. This exercise hones skills plus builds confidence.

This article is given courtesy of the Pamlico Sail & Power Squadron, America's Boating Club™. To learn more about boating courses and boating safety, email Linda, our Education Officer at psps@gmail.com or contact her at 252-964-3009 for the upcoming public seminars and courses. Beginning January 16th is a Junior Navigation Course and others will be announced for 2019. We also invite you to visit our Website at <https://pamlicosailandpowersquadron.org>