

Ode to Celestial Navigation

*A tragic tale I do confess
I put my faith in GPS
Then one day screen went black
I had no way of coming back*

*Recalling then in my despair
I heard the tale of St Hilaire
Who when he knew where he was not
Could figure quickly where he'd got*

*That's it I cried I am not done
I'll use the Moon & Stars & Sun
Like men of old I'll find my way
It's history will save the day!*

*Remember back in '92
Columbus sailed the ocean blue
He missed the east, but don't be mad
The latitude is all he had*

*Old Harrison was a crafty dude
He helped us find our longitude
If Shovell had that H₄ clock
He might have missed the Scilly rock*

*Of course we can't forget Neville,
The almanac we're using still
So sailors then could find their path
He made the scholars check their math*

*Newton, Lecky, Meyer, Moore
Nobles in Celestial Lore
The universe in endless motion
Guiding us upon the ocean*

*Inspired thus to find my way....
I've Bowditch here to save the day...
Ok...he borrowed much from Moore
But all is fair in love and war*

*Here within this volume bound
The key to find your way around
If of course you can unwind
The workings of Nathaniel's mind*

*Read too much this epic tome
You're ready for a happy home
But if you somehow find it clear
You might find a course to steer*

*Our sextant mirrors do reflect,
A little error we correct
On or off the arc we get
Our index error then is set*

*With sextant clutched within our grip....
With height of eye we find the dip...
Next of course there is refraction
Bending light and its reaction*

*Then with altitude we're done
At least with planets star or sun
But for the moon we can't relax
There's horizontal parallax*

*Now of course we must relate
Our sight to what we calculate
The solution here you see in full
Is calculation spherical?*

*With almanac and tables too
And cosine laws to see it through.
If we split to angles that are right.
Short tables solve our sextant sight.*

*With two oh eight or two four nine
I can create a Sumner line
Poor Captain found the English coast...
Then CNAV turned his brain to toast?*

*With GP of the body found
(Transfer the zenith to the ground)
Then I can pick an AP spot
We may be there or maybe not.*

*Finish up with pole to guide
The local hour angle wide
Of course to find this you must know
If Greenwich Time is fast or slow*

*Three great circles now combined
A triangle is thus refined
A smaller circle is defined
Which of course we call a line*

*No real problem here you see
Preserving pure geometry
Approximation is ok...
The tiny segment saves the day*

*It shows an azimuth from me
And altitude above the sea
From sextant sight we find our way
That is toward or away*

*Thus ends here my tale of woe
Of how to figure where to go...
A study of the sky in motion
Charting me upon the ocean.*

*With sextant pointed to the sky
And scholars that could make me cry
With mathematics in profusion
At last I reach my sad conclusion*

*I figured out I can't be lost
Alone upon the ocean tossed
It's home that's lost, I now do fear
But I'm certain that I am right here.....*

© copyright 2017 Mark Coady