



Finding North: How Navigation Makes Us Human

George Michelsen Foy

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Navigation is the key human skill. It's something we do everywhere, whether feeling our way through a bedroom in the dark, or charting a ship's course. But how does navigation affect our brains, our memory, ourselves? Blending scientific research and memoir, and written in beautiful prose, *Finding North* starts with a quest by the author to understand this most basic of human skills---and why it's in mortal peril.

In 1844, Foy's great-great grandfather, captain of a Norwegian cargo ship, perished at sea after getting lost in a snowstorm. Foy decides to unravel the mystery surrounding Halvor Michelsen's death---and the roots of his own obsession with navigation---by re-creating his ancestor's trip using only period instruments.

Beforehand, he meets a colorful cast of characters to learn whether men really have better directional skills than women, how cells, eels, and spaceships navigate; and how tragedy results from GPS glitches. He interviews a cabby who has memorized every street in London, sails on a Haitian cargo sloop, and visits the site of a secret navigational cult in Greece.

At the heart of Foy's story is this fact: navigation and the brain's memory centers are inextricably linked. As Foy unravels the secret behind Halvor's death, he also discovers why forsaking our navigation skills in favor of GPS may lead not only to Alzheimers and other diseases of memory, but to losing a key part of what makes us human.

Finding North: How Navigation Makes Us Human Details

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From Reader Review Finding North: How Navigation Makes Us Human for online ebook

David Broughall says

I really wanted to love this book, but it is, by turns, so filled with technical jargon, flowery descriptions and maudlin sentimentality, that the point is often lost, or at least the point I was expecting was lost. Every once in a while the author breaks through the fog, the real kind of which he so fears, to make his point that our total reliance on navigational technology is doing real damage to our brains. Unfortunately, such nuggets of wisdom are too few and too far between. Disappointing.

Melissa says

I received an advance reading copy as a giveaway. I have a hard time describing this book or the author's main point in a nutshell - I suppose, loss (physical or emotional) is disorienting, and navigation helps us recover from this and find our way again. The author explored this through investigating an ancestor's death at sea, and recreating his voyage using traditional navigational tools to sail a similar distance offshore in the Gulf of Maine, as well as in retracing the actual final voyage of his ancestor in Norway. All of this was interspersed with interviews with various experts in fields related to navigation, seafaring, GPS, cell signalling, etc, and with tales of the author's personal losses - primarily, the recent death of his brother.

If this sounds like a lot of random stuff to jam in a book, it was. It didn't quite flow into a cohesive unit for me. Truthfully, I struggled to stay engaged in this story. I found the author's writing style (he's a creative writing teacher) was ineffective for addressing the "science" sections. I think the author took many of his conclusions way too far, based on the available evidence. I get that the author says a place can bring back a memory...but so can a sound, or a smell, or a taste, or many other things. And I still don't really totally get what that has to do with navigation (other than that it affects our "mind maps", or whatever he called them).

And for a book about navigation...would it have killed them to include a map of the route of Halvor's last journey?! That's what the book was about, right? That would have been helpful!

Oh, and when you live on the Cape, and you own a boat, and you have an apartment in NYC - claiming you leave the lights off on the staircase of your house and stub your toes in the dark to "lower expenses" is freaking irritating and insulting.

I think there are people who will really enjoy this book. I'm a Navy navigator's daughter, a former sailing coach, and have a background in science - I thought this book would be right up my alley. For me, the sailing parts are the only ones that really clicked.

Ben says

Fantastic book by a new author for me. I thought this book would be more about the technical aspects of navigation and was pleasantly surprised to find this book a personal and historical account of navigation. The author intertwines his personal life, challenges, losses, history, and interests into a unique blend that becomes

an informative book on navigation.

I really liked this story and found it interesting and informative. Look forward to more reading from this author.

Isaac Jensen says

Foy is a talented writer. However, he is far too interested in telling his own story to give much space to anything not directly tied to his experiences. In doing so, what could have been an interesting book on navigation and how it makes us human read much more as a memoir which I slogged through because I am fascinated by maps. There's a lot of interesting material in here, but Foy can't find the distance from his own experiences necessary to offer more than a faint outline to his readers. 2.5 stars.

Dawn says

I received an advance reading copy as a giveaway. The writing in this book is very good, but I found myself struggling to be engaged in the topic of navigation. The author makes many interesting observations about navigation, but overstretches in his attempt to identify a navigation gene and to link the use of GPS technology to rising rates of Alzheimer's. This book may be of interest to those who are innately interested in navigation, but this is likely a niche group of readers.

Anne says

Interesting Story of Family

I picked it up because of an interest in celestial navigation. Tangentially, that was its topic. But it was more about family history and searching to understand enough of the techniques of navigating over a century ago to discern the causes of a shipwreck that defined his family.

Doug Gordon says

Not what I expected/hoped for and I only made it through about 1/3 of the way. There's probably enough interesting information to make up a good magazine article, but the rest is way too much about the author himself. I also didn't care for the writing style. The author teaches creative writing and got a bit carried away with flowery writing, stretched metaphors, etc.

Gry says

This book was really uneven. It was not immediately a page-turner for me, but it was still pretty good so I kept going. There is a lot going on here: A shipwreck of the author's ancestor, scientific questions about the

effects of GPS technology on our brains, debating the pros and cons of old navigational methods versus new ones, and "navigating" the loss of loved ones and familiar features in our lives. This is a huge scope for the book, and some sections were notably more engaging than others. I found the last quarter of the book to be by far the most interesting.

June says

Entertaining and mellow reflection on navigation, the human faculty of finding our way around in our world. The heart of the story, is seeking to explain the death of an ancestor whose ship went down off the coast of Norway – the author not only visits the place, but re-enacts a similar voyage, attempting to use the same methods of navigation as were used in the past. I received a copy in the Goodreads Giveaways program.

He also models a different kind of exploration, by seeking knowledge not in a library or the Internet, but by seeking out people who possess the knowledge. His search for information takes him places like Haiti, to meet some sailors who (at least reputedly) use more traditional means of navigation; Colorado to look at the GPS control center; London, to talk with a cab driver who not only possesses, but teaches “The Knowledge” of London streets. He doesn’t look on the web for how to use a sextant, but finds someone that can give him lessons. He interviews neuroscientists that study how our brains help us find our way around, and early theories of how off-loading that work to GPS may alter how we think.

This is an enjoyable read and would be especially good read around the campfire, preferably after getting slightly lost in the woods and finding your way out again.

Paul says

Author's narcissism gets a bit tiresome.

Dewayne Stark says

There were some interesting information here but his sailing skills left me at a loss.

Tory says

I received this book as a 'giveaway'. I kept picking it up and then putting it down, I just didn't want to stick with it. I admire the author's intent, connecting navigation to memory, and as someone who still uses maps instead of GPS, I really wanted to like this book more.

Lisa Cobb Sabatini says

I won Finding North: How Navigation Makes Us Human by George Michelsen Foy from Goodreads.

Part fascinating research, part memoir, part rollicking adventure, George Michelsen Foy's book, *Finding North: How Navigation Makes Us Human*, is a must read for anyone who enjoys seafaring adventure and human studies.

Foy takes readers into the labs of scientists, doctors, and other researchers who share their vast knowledge in understandable ways, helping readers to feel comfortable with complex theories, research, and discoveries. His own experiences, as well as family stories handed down through generations, are a welcome addition to Foy's serious research.

Readers hold their breaths as they virtually accompany Foy on risky voyages at sea, and then catch their breaths as the author's moving accounts of his own realizations bring home the importance of not only human navigation, but also human connections to one another.

Heart pounding, heart wrenching, and heart touching, George Michelsen Foy's research into his family history and the significance of navigation to us all, *Finding North*, is a powerful tale that leaves the reader pondering all of life.

John says

Review to come.

Doug Wiseman says

Interesting book, but he does not really make a strong case for the argument that navigation makes us human. If you like sailing books and history you will find this enjoyable.
