Carpe diem.
Horace

Preface

Why should anybody still use celestial navigation in the era of electronics and GPS? You might as well ask why some people still develop black and white photos in their darkroom instead of using a high-color digital camera and image processing software. The answer would be the same: because it is a noble art, and because it is fun. Reading a GPS display is easy and not very exciting as soon as you have got used to it. Celestial navigation, however, will always be a challenge because each scenario is different. Finding your geographic position by means of astronomical observations requires knowledge, judgement, and the ability to handle delicate instruments. In other words, you play an active part during the whole process, and you have to use your brains. Everyone who ever reduced a sight knows the thrill I am talking about. The way is the goal.
It took centuries and generations of navigators, astronomers, geographers, mathematicians, and instrument makers to develop the art and science of celestial navigation to its present state, and the knowledge thus accumulated is too precious to be forgotten. After all, celestial navigation will always be a valuable alternative if a GPS receiver happens to fail.
Years ago, when I read my first book on navigation, the chapter on celestial navigation with its fascinating diagrams and formulas immediately caught my particular interest although I was a little deterred by its complexity at first. As I became more advanced, I realized that celestial navigation is not as difficult as it seems to be at first glance. Further, I found that many publications on this subject, although packed with information, are more confusing than enlightening, probably because most of them have been written by experts and for experts.
I decided to write something like a compact guide-book for my personal use which had to include operating instructions as well as all important formulas and diagrams. The idea to publish it came in 1997 when I became interested in the internet and found that it is the ideal medium to share one's knowledge with others. I took my manuscript, rewrote it in the form of a structured manual, and redesigned the layout to make it more attractive to the public. After converting everything to the HTML format, I published it on my web site. Since then, I have revised text and graphic images several times and added a couple of new chapters. People seem to like it, at least I get approving e-mails now and then.

Following the recent trend, I decided to convert the manual to the PDF format, which has become an established standard for internet publishing. In contrast to HTML documents, the page-oriented PDF documents retain their layout when printed. The HTML version is no longer available since keeping two versions in different formats synchronized was too much work. In my opinion, a printed manual is more useful anyway.

Since people keep asking me how I wrote the documents and how I created the graphic images, a short description of the procedure and software used is given below:

Drawings and diagrams were made with good old CorelDraw! 3.0 and exported as GIF files.

The manual was designed and written with Star Office. The Star Office (.sdw) documents were then converted to Postscript (.ps) files with the AdobePS printer driver (available at www.adobe.com). Finally, the Postscript files were converted to PDF files with GsView and Ghostscript (www.ghostscript.com).

I apologize for misspellings, grammar errors, and wrong punctuation. I did my best, but after all, English is not my native language.
I hope the new version will find as many readers as the old one. Hints and suggestions are always welcome. Since I am very busy, I may not always be able to answer incoming e-mails immediately. Be patient.
Last but not least, I owe my wife an apology for spending countless hours in front of the PC, staying up late, neglecting household chores, etc. I'll try to mend my ways. Some day ...

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Henning Umland

Correspondence address:

Dr. Henning Umland
Rabenhorst 6
21244 Buchholz i. d. N.
Germany

Fax +49 89 2443 66455
E-mail h.umland@online.de