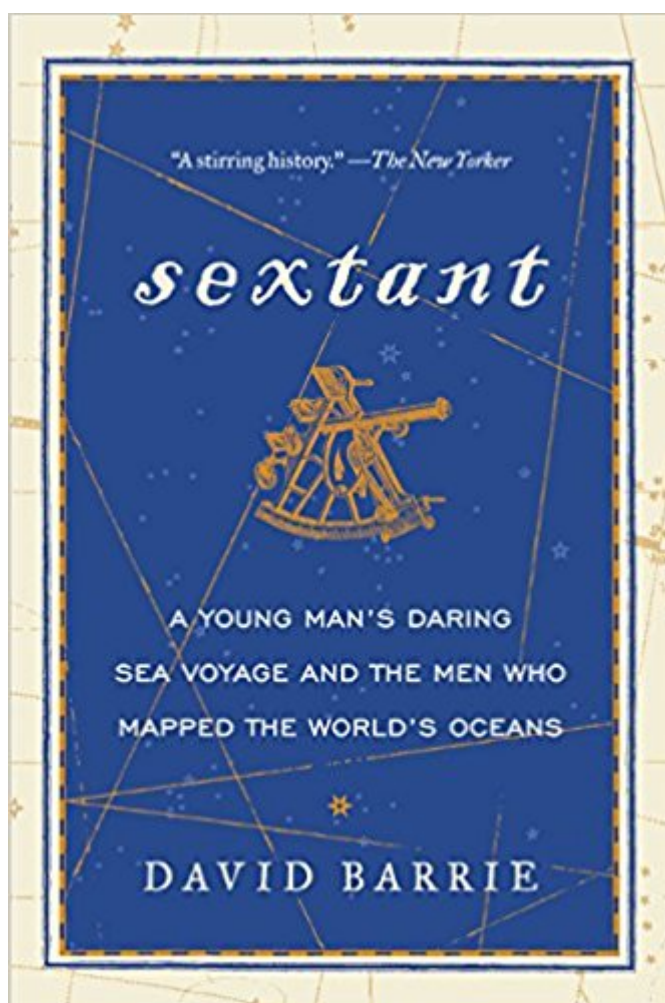


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# Sextant: A Young Man's Daring Sea Voyage And The Men Who Mapped The World's Oceans



## Synopsis

In the tradition of Dava Sobel's *Longitude* comes this dramatic tale of invention and discovery—*Sextant*—an eloquent elegy to one of the most important navigational instruments ever created, and to the daring mariners who used it to explore, conquer, and map the world. Barrie takes readers straight to the helm of some of history's most important expeditions, interweaving these heroic tales with the account of his own transatlantic passage as a young man. A heady mix of adventure, science, mathematics, and derring-do, *Sextant* is infused with a sense of wonder and discovery. At once a dramatic history of maritime endeavor and a love letter to the sea and sky, it is timeless storytelling at its best.

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## Customer Reviews

“As lovingly and painstakingly constructed as the navigators’ one irreplaceable talisman, David Barrie’s exquisite book is a hymn to a now-vanishing feature of maritime life, a finely-chased reminder of just how much we all owe to that one small piece of apparatus” (SIMON WINCHESTER, author of the New York Times bestselling *The Men Who United the States* and *The Professor and the Madman*) “Beneath the book’s calm surface churns a melancholic message about how the comfort of technology—symbolized by the sextant’s almighty antagonist, GPS—has turned our gaze away from the stars.” (Entertainment Weekly) “Even for armchair adventurers with no sea legs to speak of, Barrie’s *Sextant* is a compelling read.” (Shelf Awareness)

In the tradition of Dava Sobel's *Longitude* comes sailing expert David Barrie's compelling and dramatic tale of invention and discovery—•an eloquent elegy to one of the most important navigational instruments ever created, and to the daring mariners who used it to explore, conquer, and map the world. Barrie takes readers straight to the helm of some of history's most important expeditions, interweaving these heroic tales with the account of his own transatlantic passage as a young man. Among the many inspiring stories are those of the legendary Captain Cook and the great French navigator Jean-François de Galaup, comte de La Pérouse, whose disappearance has long remained a mystery. Other intrepid navigators include George Vancouver, the indefatigable surveyor of the American northwest; Matthew Flinders, the first to circumnavigate Australia; and Captain Robert FitzRoy of the *Beagle*. And, along with Joshua Slocum's single-handed yacht voyage around the world, we are told of two almost unbelievable open-boat voyages, undertaken in desperate circumstances by Captain William Bligh and Sir Ernest Shackleton. A heady mix of adventure, science, mathematics, and derring-do, *Sextant* is infused with a sense of wonder and discovery. At once a dramatic history of maritime endeavor and a love letter to the sea and sky, it is timeless storytelling at its best. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This book, "Sextant" was a highly enjoyable read. I have a few years of sailing experience, but never learned to use a sextant and did not appreciate how it originated and how to navigate by the stars, sun and moon using a sextant. Most sailors today use their GPS or other electronic equipment. This book takes the reader on a cross the Atlantic voyage with the author and his expert navigator-mentor in a small sailboat. As we travel on his cross-Atlantic voyage, the author takes us back to the days of the early ocean explorers and their navigational challenges in the years before the invention of the sextant. We learn about the evolution of navigational aids. We also are given very good history lessons on the accomplishments and lives of the early explorers like Vancouver, Cook, Magellan, Shackleton, and many more. There are very helpful maps and instrument design layouts in the book along with photographs of explorers and their vessels. Encounters with huge seas, vicious storms, capsizing, mutiny, shipwreck, and first encounters with indigent people on islands and remote coastlines all contribute to a book full of exciting stories. On top of that, we are introduced to some of the inner workings of maritime insurance firms, shipping investors, book publishers, and the intrigues that accompany the lives of ship captains and ship owners. I did not find a single thing in this book not to like. Weigh anchor me mateys and read on.

I love stuff about ancient astronomy and navigation, so I ate this up. The details on the use of the sextant were only vaguely known to me. Also in Sobel's wonderful LONGITUDE she makes the advocates of the lunar angle navigation method look like dummies, but Barrie makes it clear that this method was usable and widespread. The "Young man's daring sea voyage" used as the glue to hold all this material together could well have been edited out. It is irrelevant and bogs down the narrative; that cost him a star.

An excellently written narrative that combines the author's sea adventures with historical events of maritime accomplishments of truly outstanding heroics! Along the way, the sextant is a focal point described as it was used in the past and still used today. Well worth reading for those who love the sea or just vicariously travel it!

As a civil engineer in today's world, I have, of necessity, used the amazing advance of technology in my career, mostly at the loss of the "old ways of performing my work". I have often wondered about the use of older equipment and methods of calculation, and have been curious about the use of tools such as the sextant, therefore this book has been extremely interesting to me. I have enjoyed the description of the author's voyages, and the tale of former, and hazardous sea adventures of famous explorers. Very well written book.

David Barrie's "Sextant" is a nice answer to Sobel's "Longitude" from a nearly a generation ago. The "young man's daring sea voyage" refers to a trans-Atlantic crossing that Barrie made when he was about twenty. It's not all that interesting, hardly daring, and in any case it's second fiddle here to a very nice history of the great explorers and navigators of early modern British history, best exemplified by James Cook. The focus is on their navigational tools, not merely the sextant but also the mathematical methods that made it all possible, including the subject of lunars. This is a rather traditional history, and all of these stories have been told elsewhere in more detail, but Barrie's synthesis focusing on the science of navigation is unique. "Sextant" is loaded with excellent information, but there's no depth to the analysis here, and Barrie sometimes has a credulous faith in other people's research or their own spin on things. The writing style is easy-going and intelligent. Read Sobel's "Longitude" and read Barrie's "Sextant". Then average!

I am a retired US Navy optical instrument repair man, I have overhauled and refurbished I don't know how many sextants. The age of sail and navigation are my special area of interest. I

thoroughly enjoyed this book. While I am not quite sure this is for everyone, it might be a bit too specialised for a general reading audience. If you like tales of adventure from the age of sail you should give this a read.

I really loved this book. The author did a fantastic job of weaving his own story in and out of the broader history that he was telling. It was very well written and insightful. A must read for fans of Longitude and similar books.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It provides a mixture of earthly wonder, adventure, celestial science and history. The author makes it personal by including thoughts from a personal voyage, historical perspective including efforts to determine longitude in open waters, and technology derived from science related to the path of heavenly bodies through the night's sky. I read "Longitude" some time ago and still learned more from "Sextant" about the competition, builders of nautical timekeeping instruments, and other competing techniques.

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