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(EXCERPTED)

Manual of Offshore Surveying for Geoscientists and Engineers

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CHAPMAN & HALL
London · Weinheim · New York · Tokyo · Melbourne · Madras

Published by Chapman & Hall, 2–6 Boundary Row, London SE1 8HN, UK

Chapman & Hall, 2–6 Boundary Row, London SE1 8HN, UK

Chapman & Hall GmbH, Pappelallee 3, 69469 Weinheim, Germany

Chapman & Hall USA, 115 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003, USA

Chapman & Hall Japan, ITP-Japan, Kyowa Building, 3F, 2-2-1 Hirakawacho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102, Japan

Chapman & Hall Australia, 102 Dodds Street, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205, Australia

Chapman & Hall India, R. Seshadri, 32 Second Main Road, CIT East, Madras 600 035, India

First edition 1997

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

ISBN 0 412 80550 2

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 96 – 72156

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper, manufactured in accordance with ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 and ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1984 (Permanence of Paper).

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the basic concepts of positioning at sea; we start with an introduction to least squares, on which all modern positioning computations are based, and then develop the various formulae used in the computations.

We are going to put into a single chapter the information that is disseminated to undergraduate surveyors in about a year of study, so some of the detailed explanations and proofs will necessarily be shortened.

Before going straight into least squares, we will briefly revise the coordinate systems available to us in the context of computations.

4.2 Coordinate systems

4.2.1 The ellipsoid

The ellipsoid is the mathematical figure which approximates most closely the true shape of the earth. Unfortunately, many people have tried to establish the best-fit ellipsoid for the earth, and many of the ellipsoids they calculated are in use. Life would be very much easier if there were only one ellipsoid (or spheroid).

In Australia we generally use the Australian Geodetic Datum as a datum for our offshore surveys. Even this is somewhat complicated by the following facts:

- There are two Australian datums in use — AGD66 and AGD84.
- Neither of the two datums is geocentric.
- Australia intends to move to a geocentric datum in 2000.

The AGD66 datum has the following definition:

Semi-axis major: 6378160.0m

Flattening: 1/298.25 exactly.

The minor axis of the spheroid was defined in 1966 to be parallel to the earth's mean axis of rotation in 1962 (this was later changed in 1970), and the meridian of zero longitude was defined as being parallel to the Bureau International de l'Heure (BIH) meridian plane near Greenwich. The centre of the spheroid was defined by the coordinates of Johnston Geodetic Station, a station in the centre of Australia. At that time it was assumed that the spheroid — geoid separation was zero at Johnston, and also zero at all the other geodetic stations listed in the 1966 adjustment.

Since 1966 a huge amount of information on the shape of the geoid has become available, particularly through satellite observations, and it was realized that the 1966 adjustment was no longer accurate. In 1982 all the information then available was put into a new least squares network

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