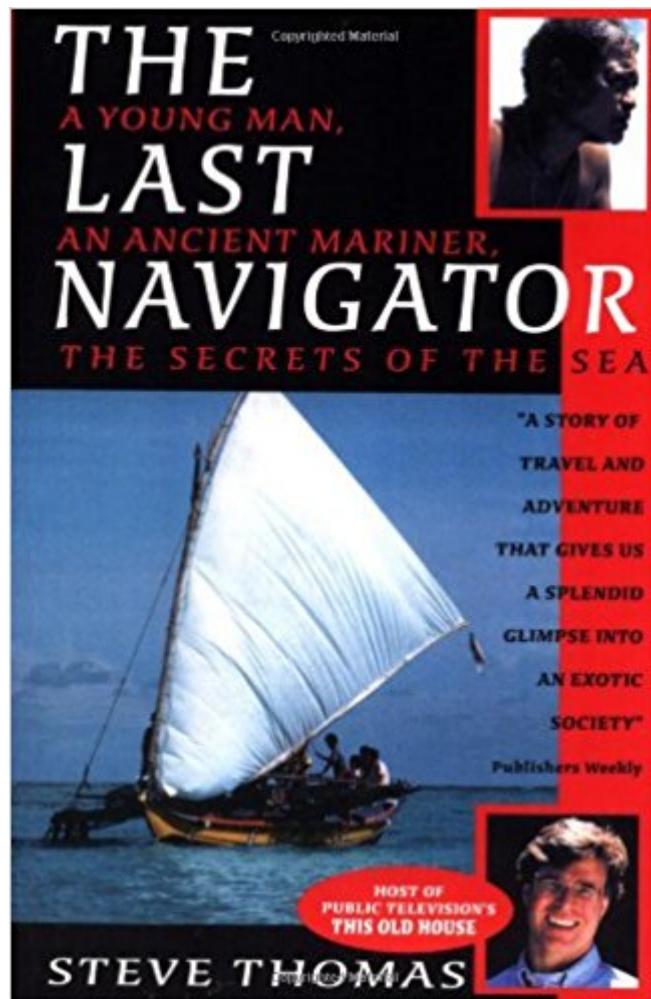


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# The Last Navigator



## **Synopsis**

Nonfiction account of a young American man's sojourn in the South Pacific, on the Micronesian island of Satawal in the Caroline archipelago, studying traditional navigation with Mau Piailug, the last of the palus. It was Piailug who navigated a Polynesian vessel from Hawaii to Tahiti without compass or charts, as documented by a PBS film of the voyage. Thomas learns how to navigate by stars, wind, swell, birds, and memory. It is a story of seafaring, a dying culture, and self-discovery.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 307 pages

Publisher: International Marine/Ragged Mountain Press (October 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0070645744

ISBN-13: 978-0070645745

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.9 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 32 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,102,955 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #32 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Outdoor Recreation > Sailing > Navigation #117 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Outdoor Recreation > Sailing > Narratives #209 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Miscellaneous > Air Sports & Recreation

## **Customer Reviews**

Thomas, an experienced deep-water sailor, had long been fascinated by Micronesian navigators who, without maps, compasses, or sextants, sailed hundreds of miles between the islands of Oceania. To discover how these men traveled with only natural signs for guidance, he apprenticed himself to one of the few remaining navigators and lived with him on Satawal for many months. This autobiographical account describes his learning of navigation and the world view of a dying art. The sons of Piailug were not interested in traditional navigation in the face of modern Western alternatives. An anthropological account for the layperson (but with scholarly appendixes), this is also a story of personal relationships, of contrasting cultures, and of skills mostly unrecorded before now. For academic and large public collections, especially those on Oceania. Roland Person, Southern Illinois Univ. Lib. , CarbondaleCopyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As a young man piloting a small sailboat across the Pacific, Steve Thomas developed a fascination with ancient methods of navigation. He learned of a seafaring culture which 6,000 years ago, used arcane navigation arts to guide initiates unerringly across the Pacific with no compasses, no charts. By the time of Christ, these navigators were pushing on through all of Oceania, populating nearly a quarter of the Earth's surface. Thomas ventured to the tiny coral atolls of Micronesia in search of these mysteries, this ancient language of the sea. There he found the last navigator. Mau Piailug, one of the last surviving palu, belongs to a dying breed of navigators who used only natural signs--stars, waves, birds--to guide their sailing canoes across thousands of miles of open ocean. Thomas and Piailug voyage together on the frail ship of human memory in an attempt to preserve for future generations an ancient, mysterious, and beautiful kinship with the sea before it is lost forever. Theirs is an unforgettable journey. "An unusually self-revealing, honest and moving book." --Scientific American. "Finely crafted and compellingly written. . . . A deeply saddening book about the fast approaching death of an ancient and beautiful way of life." --Aloha Magazine Steve Thomas by thirty-one years of age had already logged more than 30,000 blue-water miles as a professional navigator and skipper before setting out to study Micronesian navigation. He is currently the host of the PBS television series "This Old House."

I think the book is worth reading to learn about the culture in Micronesia and the navigation methods that indigenous peoples of the Pacific used in their migrations and inter island trade and warfare. I read the book on the Kindle Fire and the preface did not appear when I started reading (or at least it was not obvious). This is a little bit important since it lays the ground work for the book, and explains how the author came to write the book and came to be the replacement for Bob Villa on PBS This Old House. I was about 1/3 through the book when I figured out that this Steve Thomas was the same Steve Thomas, who I always felt seemed like a nerdy "fish out of water" around the construction experts, I always assumed he appealed to the PBS women's audience, kind of boyish charm like John Denver. That being said Thomas also comes off as the nerdy "fish out of water" in his laborious day to day description of his interactions with his mentor, the village chiefs and others. There is too much self introspection and search for a father figure in his mentor. All of this dribble should have been sliced by a good editor. I found much of it painful. The book excels when it sticks to description of the day to day life of the people of the islands, especially when they take to the sea and nearby islands for fishing and gathering turtles, and the description of life and customs. The description of navigation methods fails to achieve any kind of rigor that would allow the work to be published in a scientific journal. One gets the feeling that Thomas, had to drop back and punt after

he wrote up his work. Some of Thomas's descriptive writing is very good; but the book reminds me of students in creative writing classes who are told there must be a big conflict and character development and resolution of the conflict. I thought it was worth reading for his observation of the culture and his attempt to preserve an ancient art of navigation. I also have a lot more respect for Thomas, I did not know about his early history sailing solo in serious ocean navigation. Although I did want to slap him a couple of times for his precious self introspection. I don't know if the original book comes with pictures, but there are none on the kindle. The diagrams dealing with star navigation are impossible to read on the kindle.

Another piece in the puzzle to help establish where and how the art of Navigation was lost to Aotearoa and how riding the crest of the Hokule'a we have been able to revive a lost art.

excellent book if you are into the traditions of the south pacific and ancient (non instrument) navigation. in fact, you will see my reviews of a number of other similar books. but the best overall book for an overview is vaka moana. the others i'm reviewing are targeted at the reader who wants more detailed information or specific histories. this book is a good anthropological review as well.

Phenomenal resource about Satawalese navigation as well as wonderful insight into the Master navigator Pius "Mau" Piailug, known as "Papa Mau" among Hawaiians. Now that Papa Mau has passed away, this book can give the reader the vicarious experience through the author's eyes of how Papa Mau was as a person and cultural leader. On a personal note, I have corresponded with the author Steve Thomas and found that he is very personal and friendly. He actually helped me with some of my research for my own book, "The Forgotten Children of Maui." Thank you Steve Thomas for sharing this part of your life with the rest of us!

This book seems to be left out whenever there is a recommended reading list for Polynesian navigation, proas, or outrigger canoes. It is about Steve Thomas' apprenticeship with Mau Piailug, a traditional Polynesian navigator who has passed away. Thomas later became host of the "This Old House" television show. Not many people realize he earlier did this anthropologic work. He includes a very comprehensive description of Mau's navigation training. Also the traditional outrigger canoe is detailed.

This is a wonderful exploration of a fascinating culture and with it, a world view very different from

ours. The author offers an honest, insightful and personal portrait of his time in Micronesia. It can appeal on many different levels to those with an interest in sailing, science and anthropology/culture. It is a very good read.

A great read.

I am not an avid reader. But I love this book.

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