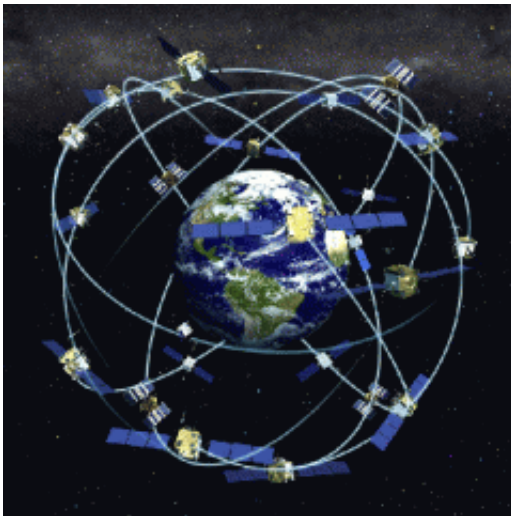


# Expert warns relying on expert navigation systems causing us to lose ability to navigate

March 31 2016, by Bob Yirka

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(Tech Xplore)—Roger McKinlay, former president of the Royal Institute of Navigation in Britain, has published a Comment piece in the journal *Nature* warning people about the dangers of relying on automated navigation systems. He suggests that because of huge infrastructure costs, sat-nav technology will not be able to replace human abilities any time soon which means that people will need to keep their skills honed.

Most anyone who has used a [satellite navigation](#) system has found themselves at a place that was not their destination, at one time or

another and besides feeling irritated, most have also found themselves completely lost. That is because, McKinlay explains, people don't look at landmarks as they drive using a sat-nav device. They are focused on where to turn next. If the sat-nav leads them to the wrong destination, they not only have no idea how they arrived there, they don't know what to do to get back on track.

Navigation, McKinlay asserts, is an innate sense—one we are born with. But, it's also a sense that can become diminished over time if it is not used. It's a "use it or lose it skill," he proclaims, so people need to try to be more aware of where they are going when they use sat-nav—not only will it help keep their [navigation](#) skills sharp, but it will help them if their device leads them astray.

He notes that there have been several instances of sat navs leading people astray, e.g. the tourist in Iceland who wound up hundreds of miles away from his destination, trucks getting stuck in alleyways, or the man who followed sat nav directions that led him straight into a reservoir.

McKinlay offers three main suggestions that the modern world should heed: the first is that the science behind sat nav needs improvement to include not just points on the ground, but some degree of human nature; the second is that those working on such systems need to acknowledge that they are far more complex than has been believed, and third, that children be taught not only navigation skills but map reading. People will need to be able to navigate on into the foreseeable future, he suggests, thus, it is important that they know how to do so.

**More information:** Roger McKinlay. Technology: Use or lose our navigation skills, *Nature* (2016). [DOI: 10.1038/531573a](https://doi.org/10.1038/531573a)

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