

# Correspondence

To the Editor of the *Journal*,

## OBSERVED POSITION

In his Presidential Address on the occasion of the Institute's twenty-first birthday (this *Journal*, 21, 2), Rear Admiral Sir Edmund Irving mentions the story of the Master of the Channel Fleet who 'was able to obtain an accurate observed position in thick fog in the Irish Sea by his knowledge of the sailing times of the Stranraer-Larne ferry which he encountered in the St. George's Channel'. According to my calculations, the ferry in question was about 160 nautical miles off course. If in fact the Fleet was in the St. George's Channel, it is possible that the officer sighted the Fishguard-Rosslare steamer, but this runs at different times from the one crossing the North Channel!

The legend reminds me of an occasion when I was approaching the Moray Firth from the north-east. It was not as far back as 1901, but it was before the days of radar. The Sutherland coast was shrouded in mist and soundings were of little assistance. Through binoculars, however, it was just possible to watch the progress of two steam locomotives hauling trains in opposite directions along the line between Inverness and Wick. The Midshipman on watch was sent below to fetch my copy of *Bradshaw's Railway Guide*. Local knowledge often comes in useful, and it was known that considerable lengths of this route are of single track so that trains can only pass at certain stations. Soon the two columns of smoke rising from the mist came into transit, strictly in accordance with the time-table. Whilst a bearing was being taken, the Captain arrived on the bridge and asked his Navigating Officer what on earth he thought he was doing. It is sad to think that with the end of steam for motive power on British Railways, such a simple method of obtaining a position line will no longer be possible.

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