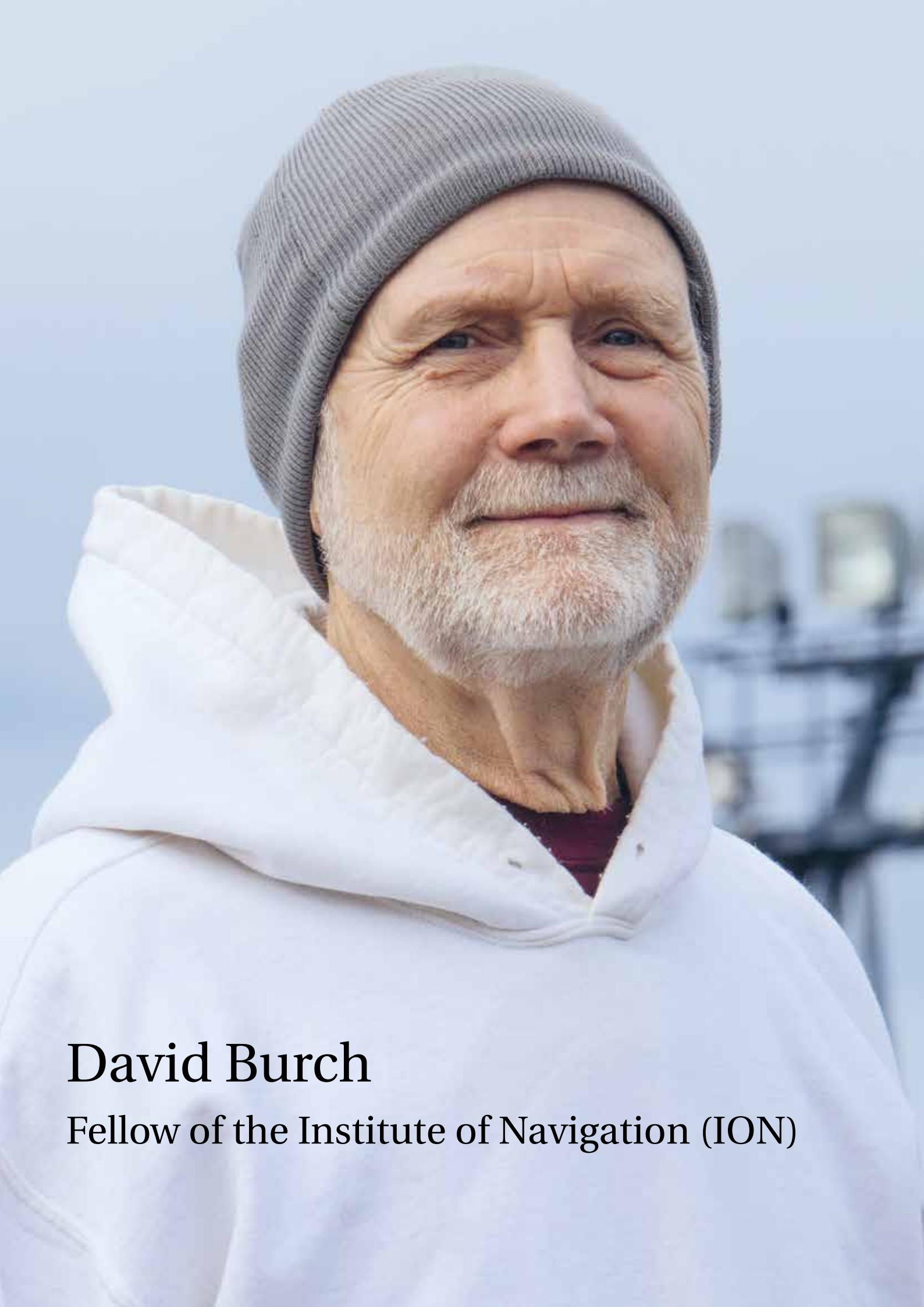
Fischer

MANUFACTORY OF FINE MECHANICAL MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS



David Burch

Fellow of the Institute of Navigation (ION)

David Burch has already sailed twelve transoceanic yacht races, with several first place victories.
As the founding Director of Starpath School of Navigation in Seattle, he has been teaching marine weather for more than 30 years now.
In his blog davidburchnavigation.blogspot.com he writes about navigation and weather on a regular basis.
For his outstanding performance as a practicing navigator he has received the Institute of Navigation Superior Achievement Award.
David Burch has been in touch with FISCHER for many years. At a recent meeting with Peter Fischer an interesting conversation developed which you may read in excerpts here.

David, you have more than 70,000 miles of ocean experience. That's pretty amazing. Do you ever spend some time onshore?

Well, actually it's been eight years since my last ocean sailing. But, I remain actively involved in real navigation and route planning with our daily interaction with racers and adventurers underway around the world. We work with sailors and rowers that are on the water and we are doing their navigation and weather routing for them via email over sat phones. In short, we are daily very active in practical hands-on navigation.

Why are you so fascinated by the sea?

My original interest developed after serving on a NOAA ship to arctic around 1977 as an electronic technician with the goal of seeing if I wanted to switch from physics to oceanography. I didn't, but the sea life was interesting, so I proposed to a local school that I would teach celestial navigation courses for them in exchange for lessons in sailing.

We all know the weather on the sea can be pretty rough. What was the most extreme or dangerous situation in which you've ever been?

Actually there have been many situations in which I felt that that was the last of it. One of them was in 1984. We were sailing in a race from Victoria Canada

to Hawaii. I was driving the boat when suddenly a huge wave turned over the boat. It was lying on its side and the main sail was in the water. It was absolutely pinned so that the boat couldn't come back up. We threw of the main sheet. But, it had a jam, so then it really locked. Someone cut the sheet and the boat slowly come up and crossjibed to the other side. Now the main was totally free and it wobbled back up. We got the sails under control and took off again like nothing had happened.

Wow, that must have been scary! But there is something else I wanted to ask you: Your name is closely connected to "Starpath School of Navigation". What does Starpath do exactly?

We teach marine navigation. First in the classroom but since 2003 everything is online. So actually we were one of the first who started online training.

In 2011, David Burch became a Fellow of the Institute of Navigation. Previously, he had been honoured with the Institute of Navigation Superior Achievement Award.

We make our own software for training and we developed the first PC simulation of marine radar. Also we required copy protected ebooks which led us to develop one of the first ever DRM ebook systems.

Speaking of books … You have written more than 20 books on marine navigation. What was your impetus to start writing books in the first place?

When I started teaching celestial navigation I realized there were no good books although there were hundreds of books on the subject. So I started writing my first book in 1977. And when it became known many others followed. Now my book on celestial navigation is the bestselling one on Amazon. And the same applies to some of my other books.

Why is it so important to measure the atmospheric pressure accurately?

It is not enough to know if the pressure is high or low or if it is rising or falling. You need to know the accurate pressure. It is the most important measurement. We have developed the "4-5-6 rule" which means when the pressure drops more than 4 to 5 millibars in 6 hours you have to pay attention. In the Tropics for example if your measured pressure is 1 or 1.5 off the standard deviation this is an early warning for a tropical storm.

You've told us that you really appreciate our Precision Aneroid Barometer. What makes it so special in your eyes?

I've been calibrating lots of barometers for the Navy over many years. And the Fischer Precision Aneroid Barometer stands out because it holds its accuracy not only over mid-range but over the complete range. This is important because we are interested in the extreme ends of the pressure range. It is also special because of its longevity. There are few marine instruments that have been providing quality service for so many years. An investment in a Precision Aneroid Barometer is like an investment in a good sextant. It will provide generations of excellent service that provides independence from electronics and battery power.