Teach Yourself the Slide Rule, Burns Snodgrass, 1956

This engaging and very British-sounding book is aimed at a general audience which could include students in science and engineering, and students or practitioners in commerce, finance, and the trades & crafts. The book is designed to be read 'as-needed', i.e., one reads the chapters one needs and skips the ones that hold less interest. Little mathematical background on the part of the reader is assumed; the author says in his Foreword that '… normal boys and girls of the age of 13 or 14 are able to attain proficiency...” in slide rule use. The text is one of a series of “Teach Yourself” books offered by the English Universities Press and although it was intended as a self-study book, its organization and content would allow its use in a classroom setting.

The author includes a clear and well-presented discussion of logarithms and how they apply to the slide rule, but as he says in his Foreword, “The section on logarithms may be disregarded entirely, and indeed we ask that it should be, on the first reading of the book, but when the rudiments of the slide rule have been mastered... it may be that some readers will find interest and advantage in learning something of the first principles...”. Examples and exercises within chapters are a good mix of purely numerical and applied 'word' problems. Chapter 16 provides, a number of illustrative worked-out applied problems in the areas of commerce, civil and mechanical engineering, mechanics, electricity, and navigation.

Although the author says in the Foreword that the book “...is not published primarily to boost any particular make of slide rule.”, one must observe that all the examples and illustrations in the text are of Unique slide rules. There are separate chapters devoted to the strengths and use of Unique's Commercial, Monetary, Ten-Twenty Precision, Electrical, Dualistic, and Brighton slide rules. Unique's Navigational rule is discussed in the chapter on trigonometric scales. Chapter 14 briefly discusses cylindrical, circular, and watch-type calculators but no manufacturers are referenced. The scale set presented in the book is that commonly encountered on Mannheim/Polyphase rules, plus log-log scales and those specialized scales provided on the Unique rules mentioned.

The book contains a 4-place log table as part of the chapter on logarithms. There are no appendices or addenda, nor is there an index. This latter is an impairment to an otherwise excellent book and damages its use as a reference text.

Steve K. Seale. 2013