

Water Hazard Depth Estimation for Safe Navigation of Intelligent Vehicles

Zoltan Rozsa^{1,2}^a, Marcell Golarits¹^b and Tamas Sziranyi^{1,2}^c

¹*Machine Perception Research Laboratory of Institute for Computer Science and Control (SZTAKI), Eötvös Loránd Research Network (ELKH), H-1111 Budapest, Kende u. 13-17, Hungary*

²*Faculty of Transportation Engineering and Vehicle Engineering, Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME-KJK), H-1111 Budapest, Műegyetem rkp. 3, Hungary*

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Abstract: This paper proposes a method to provide depth information about water hazards for ground vehicles. We can estimate underwater depth even with a moving mono camera. Besides the physical principles of refraction, the method is based on the theory of multiple-view geometry and basic point cloud processing techniques. We use the information gathered from the surroundings of the hazard to simplify underwater shape estimation. We detect water hazards, estimate its surface and calculate real depth of underwater shape based on matched points using refraction principle. Our pipeline was tested on real-life experiments, on-board cameras and a detailed evaluation of the measurements is presented in the paper.

1 INTRODUCTION

There are scenarios where water depth needs to be estimated, but the camera is the only viable sensor option. For example, it is not worth using specific sensors; using active sensors should be avoided (Rankin and Matthies, 2010), or simply because installing different kinds of sensors is not possible (for example, to an UAV - Unmanned Aerial Vehicle). Also, solving the problem with cameras can be a relatively cheap solution or increase the redundancy (and the reliability) of the whole system applying together with other sensors.

We propose to apply the proposed method in autonomous driving (or driver assistance) in an off-road (or on-road with potholes, Figure 1) environment. During or after heavy raining the probability of accidents increases (Song. et al., 2020). Puddles can form, which depth needs to be estimated to decide whether the vehicle can wade through safely the water or search for a bypass route.

Bathymetric (the discipline of determining the depth of the ocean or lake floors) mapping is usu-

ally done with specific active equipment like SoNAR or LIDAR (Costa et al., 2009). Recently, to construct Digital Elevation Models (DEMs), satellite and UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) images are also applied in shallow water bathymetry. These methods (as shown later) apply simplifications of the problem due to the high-altitude imaging. However, in the case of ground vehicles, the incidence ray going the camera is not close to being perpendicular to the water surface in general. (As this would require the vehicle to be above the water surface.) Our correction solution is defined in a general coordinate system for general vehicle (and camera) pose, which has not been done before.



(a) Own photograph (b) Source: www.totalcar.hu
Figure 1: Illustration of roads with potholes after raining.

^a  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3699-6669>

^b  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9652-4148>

^c  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2989-0214>

mono camera above the water. The workflow can be used with a stereo camera pair or a mono camera (in case of correct scaling) as well. We will show examples for both cases. In the stereo case, the absolute scaling is given and we have a stereo reconstruction problem, while in the mono camera case we deal with the Structure from Motion (SfM) problem.

1.1 Contributions

The paper contributes to the following:

- Novel methodology is proposed to estimate water depth with a mono (or stereo) camera.
- Basic refraction theory of optics is combined with geometry-based point cloud processing.
- There are no restrictions to camera (vehicle) pose.

Besides the theory, practical applications are shown, and evaluation is presented about the proposed method's performance.

1.2 Outline of the Paper

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 surveys the literature about the related works. Section 3 describes the proposed pipeline in detail. Section 4 shows our test results and Section 5 discuss them. Finally, Section 6 draws the conclusions.

2 RELATED WORKS

For autonomous navigation or ADAS (Advanced Driver Assistance System) purposes, researches dealing with water hazard detection has a relatively long history, papers related to this topic were first published more than a decade ago (Xie et al., 2007). Since then there were numerous solution proposed to this problem based on handcrafted features from texture and color (Zhao et al., 2014), spatio-temporal features (Mettes et al., 2017), MRF (Haris and Hou, 2020) models, polarization (Nguyen et al., 2017) or active sensors (Chen et al., 2017). The current state of the art employes deep learning techniques for this task (Han et al., 2018), (Qiao et al., 2020). So there is a wide range of solutions for the detection task. We go further, and improve the detection with water depth estimation.

The detection can result in an avoid (if it is possible) or slow down command, but as the depth of the hazard is unknown, the degree of deceleration required (to maintain the vehicle's and passengers' health) is unknown. In an off-road environment, the consequences of traversing through a water hazard (at

a given speed) can be even more extreme, and the decision even more critical. For example, the traversable path of an off-road vehicle can be crossed with a brooklet. The depth of the brooklet (can be much deeper than a pothole filled with water) must be carefully assessed, as finding a pass through the booklet can be very time consuming, but wading through it may cause severe damage to the mechanic and electronic parts of the vehicle. That is why we propose a method to estimate the (real) depth of still water based on vision.

The problems of multi-medium photogrammetry is an interest of computer vision and geodesy community for decades (Fryer, 1983) (Shan, 1994). The 21st century advancement of the topic related to computer vision is mainly based on the theory of (Agrawal et al., 2012) and (Chari and Sturm, 2009). The first ones state that the n -layer flat refraction system corresponds to an axial camera. The second one lays the foundation for determining fundamental matrices in the presence of refraction.

Recent literature primarily related to machine vision in this topic mostly tries to estimate relative camera motion and build the structure from motion model from underwater images (Kang et al., 2012) (Jordt-Sedlazeck and Koch, 2013). Instead of doing that, we will use the reconstruction of the shore environment, which is not affected by the refraction. Besides, (Murai et al., 2019) uses a multi-wavelength camera to reconstruct surface normals, and (Qian et al., 2018) proposed a method to reconstruct the water surface with the underwater scene simultaneously. They used four cameras, which makes the application hard in practice.

Results rather related to bathymetry are closer to the practical application (Terwisscha van Scheltinga et al., 2020) of multi-medium photogrammetry, as in most cases are trying to minimize the effect of refraction in depth estimation. The bathymetry researches below are the most related to our work, but they cannot be compared to ours as they examine completely different water areas in completely different circumstances. As they use high altitude images, often significant simplifications are made (e.g., the underwater depth and camera height ratio is negligible, ray direction is approximately perpendicular to the water surface) (Dietrich, 2017) or parameters generally unknown are used for the calculation (e.g., sea level from GPS data) (Agrafiotis et al., 2020). Refraction can be corrected analytically (Maas, 2015) or iteratively (Skarlatos and Agrafiotis, 2018) with prior knowledge. In recent research, (Agrafiotis et al., 2019) machine learning technique was also applied to correct the refraction.

The advantages of our proposed method compared to the literature:

- We solve the problem in a general coordinate system. This way, simplifications (comes from camera pose and motion) are not necessary.
- Extra or specific sensors are not required.
- The solution can be determined explicitly.

3 THE PROPOSED METHOD

There are a few features of water hazards, which we utilize in the paper:

- The water in them is approximately still, so its surface is considered to be planar in the examined area. (We do not consider wave effects like (Fryer and Kniest, 1985).)
- The hazards are surrounded by road or traversable path; thus, we do not need underwater SfM. Ground parts of the images can be used for relative camera motion estimation. Note: This is only important in the mono camera case, as, in the case of stereo camera rig, the relative pose of the cameras is known.

The proposed pipeline can be divided into the following main steps:

1. Preprocessing (From calibration to detection of water hazards)
2. Estimating water surface (plane fitting in the camera coordinate system) in order to find ray-surface intersection point
3. Calculating underwater depth (Triangulation and correction based on Snell's law)

3.1 Preprocessing

In the following, we will indicate the preprocessing steps for both mono and stereo camera cases. Note: We designed our method to be able to work with using only a single camera (and a stereo camera rig as well). However, in a real-time application, we suggest applying the stereo camera solution (as it simplifies the problem.) Mono camera solution is important in this case too, to increase the reliability of the system.

First, the intrinsic **camera parameters** of the cameras has to be determined, and in the case of a stereo camera pair, the rotation and translation of the second camera relative to the first one as well (Heikkila and Silven, 1997) (Zhang, 2000).

Next, the **environment reconstruction** is to be done, and the relative camera poses estimated in case

of a mono camera. COLMAP (Schönberger and Frahm, 2016) (Schönberger et al., 2016) is used in our experiments to robustly reconstruct the surroundings. In the case of stereo cameras, the disparity map of the scene needs to be computed. We used semi-global matching to do that during our tests (Hirschmuller, 2005). Based on that and the stereo parameters, we can reconstruct the scene.

The resulted point cloud is **scaled** to the global scale to measure the depth in the metric system. In our proof of concept mono camera experiments, we scaled the reconstructions manually based on landmarks with measured size (e.g., paving stone, a lane divider line, etc.) to evaluate the method without the scaling error. In a driving application, landmarks with available extension also can be used for the scaling; but we propose to use GPS, IMU, or any other sensors which provide odometry data (Mustaniemi et al., 2017). The point cloud can be scaled using the scale ratio between the camera distances and the odometry data. Naturally, if stereo cameras are used, the scaling step can be ignored as we know the translation between the two cameras in an absolute scale (from the calibration step).

Finally, the puddle and water region must be segmented. This **segmentation** can be done for the state of the art performance, with the method of (Han et al., 2018) where water hazards are searched (the depth of these hazards are not estimated there). We trained a DeepLab v3 network (Chen et al., 2018) for this purpose, using the dataset of (Han et al., 2018) and own measurements (example output of the used segmentation network can be seen in Figure 2). The reason for that is (Chen et al., 2018) utilizes reflection attention units (RFA), but we would like to avoid that as we may enhance our images by polar filtering (most of the reflections), as matching underwater points is important for depth estimation. (Also, looking the comparison in (Chen et al., 2018) earlier Deeplab - v1 performance is not much worse than the method they propose.) Note: The polar filtering is not necessary (only a tiny portion of our test image acquired this way), and also depth estimation and water hazard detection can be executed with different cameras.

It is important to detect water hazards in appropriate distance, so the vehicle can slow down as it approaches. For that reason, we can apply separate cameras (with different poses) for detection and depth estimation purposes. This setup can also be useful in that respect, that θ_1 value should be maximized around (45-60 degree) to see the underwater surface properly (Figure 3). In that case, the problem of simultaneously seeing far (for detection of hazards in time) and seeing near (to estimate underwater depth)

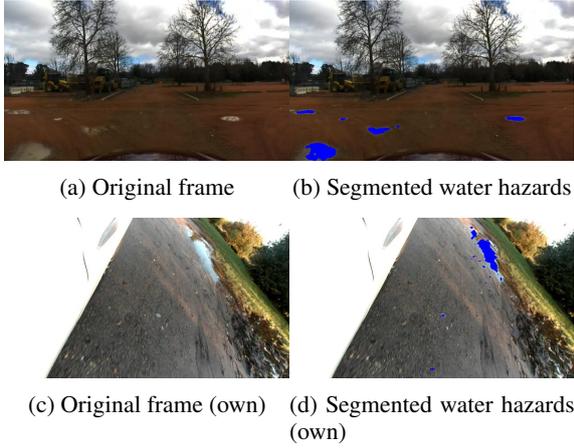


Figure 2: Illustration of the DeepLab v3 (Chen et al., 2018) network trained for water hazard segmentation on the dataset of (Han et al., 2018) and own stereo camera data. The segmented hazards are illustrated with blue color.

risers. However, with an appropriate camera installation, we can do both tasks with one camera. As 3D environment reconstruction of the scene is continuously made, it is enough to segment the water hazard area only in one image to label the 3D scene for the hazardous areas (alternatively water hazards can be tracked through the scenes (Nguyen et al., 2017)),

3.2 Estimating Water Surface

To get a deterministic solution for the underwater depth in the scale of the reconstruction of the surroundings, we use the previously reconstructed point cloud. We assume that the shore around the puddle lies in the same plane as the water surface, or at least it has the same normal, and the offset to the water surface can be estimated from the reconstruction (tests with artificial containers). Thus, in general, we estimate the ground plane's parameters with MSAC (Torr and Zisserman, 2000), and we use the same parameters to describe the water surface. Alternatively, a gyroscope can be used to determine the z direction - the surface normal of the water - and knowing the camera's installation position can be enough to estimate this plane's offset. However, we propose to use our proposed pipeline, as it is a more general solution that can work in off-road scenarios with elevation and angle differences in the path.

Our previous estimation of water hazard regions can be made more precise with the ground model. As triangulated points (without refraction correction) below, this plane will correspond to the underwater surface.

3.3 Calculating Underwater Depth

Our goal is to determine the underwater surface's true depth (using corresponding point pairs on the images). Now, the camera positions and the water surface are known. We can explicitly calculate the X , Y , and Z coordinates of the previously matched underwater points based on the following equations (lens distortion effects have been already corrected). Snell's law is usually given in the scalar form :

$$n_1 \cdot \sin \theta_1 = n_2 \cdot \sin \theta_2 \quad (1)$$

where n_1 and n_2 are the refraction indices of the medium and θ_1 and θ_2 are the incidence and refraction angles.

Rewriting in vector form and rearranging it gives for v_2 (the refraction vector) (Skarlatos and Agrafiotis, 2018):

$$v_2 = \frac{n_1}{n_2} [N \times (-N \times v_1)] - N \sqrt{1 - \left(\frac{n_1}{n_2}\right)^2 (N \times v_1)(N \times v_1)} \quad (2)$$

where v_1 is the incidence vector, and N is the water's surface normal. The illustration can be seen in Figure 3.

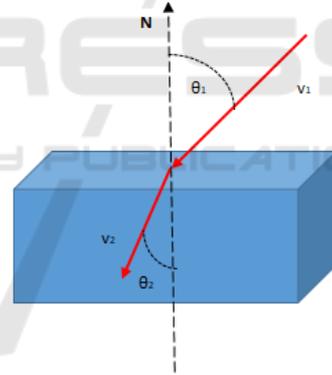


Figure 3: Illustration of Snell's law.

Knowing the given camera's intrinsic and extrinsic parameters, the projection matrix in a general coordinate system can be written as:

$$C = I \cdot T \quad (3)$$

where I is the intrinsic matrix, and T is the 3×4 homogeneous transformation matrix transforming from the global coordinate system to the camera coordinates. The projection equation of a 3D point given by homogeneous global coordinates $A = [X \ Y \ Z \ 1]$ to an image point given by homogeneous image coordinates $a = [u \ v \ 1]$ can be rearranged to the form:

$$M \cdot [X \ Y \ Z \ 1]^T = 0 \quad (4)$$

where the M matrix is:

$$\begin{pmatrix} C_{1,1} - uC_{3,1} & C_{1,2} - uC_{3,2} & C_{1,3} - uC_{3,3} & C_{1,4} - uC_{3,4} \\ C_{2,1} - vC_{3,1} & C_{2,2} - vC_{3,2} & C_{2,3} - vC_{3,3} & C_{2,4} - vC_{3,4} \end{pmatrix} \quad (5)$$

here $C_{i,j}$ are the elements of projection matrix in the i^{th} row and j^{th} column.

Equation 4 can be considered as equation of two planes intersecting in a line which will be the ray of projection through $[u \ v]$ pixel coordinates. We can determine the v_1 direction as the direction perpendicular to the normal vectors of these planes (Figure 3).

$$v_1 = M_1 \times M_2 \quad (6)$$

where M_i $i = 1 : 2$ indicates the first three elements of i^{th} row of matrix M .

In the following, to triangulate the underwater depth in case of a given point correspondence, two camera poses are assumed. (The equations can be easily extended to more than two camera poses, and the point coordinates can be determined by optimization instead of triangulation.)

In case of two camera positions C_1 and C_2 the intersection points of the water surface A_1 and A_2 (given by coordinates X_{S_1} , Y_{S_1} , Z_{S_1} , X_{S_2} , Y_{S_2} and Z_{S_2}) with two rays in direction of v_{11} (first camera) and v_{12} (second camera) can be determined by solving the equation system (Figure 4):

$$N_x \cdot X_{S_i} + N_y \cdot Y_{S_i} + N_z \cdot Z_{S_i} = D \quad (7)$$

$$A_i = C_i + t_{1i} \cdot v_{1i} \quad (8)$$

where N_x , N_y , and N_z are the coordinates of the normal vector of the water surface and D is the scalar in the plane equation of the surface, t_{1i} is the parameter of the line equation, and i is the index of the given camera pose.

After solving for A_1 and A_2 the underwater depth can be triangulated by solving the following equation system in a least-square sense for the point coordinates P (Skarlatos and Agrafiotis, 2018) (Figure 4):

$$A_1 + t_{21} \cdot v_{21} = A_2 + t_{22} \cdot v_{22} = P \quad (9)$$

Note: We referred to (Skarlatos and Agrafiotis, 2018) in case of two equations related to refraction theory as they formalized these before us. However, they do not use this in practice, as they utilized an empirical formula to calculate a corrected focal length for the water and do the correction on images (instead of 3D coordinates). Their work is hardly comparable to ours as they propose to use commercial software and orthophotos for an entirely different purpose, creating digital surface models (DSM).

4 REAL-LIFE EXPERIMENTS

We have executed several experiments in different environments. We differentiate three types of tests we have made, quantitative measurements with artificial and natural water reservoirs with a mono camera, and qualitative measurements with a stereo camera rig installed on a car.

In the following, the quantitative mono camera (more complex computation) tests are presented. In artificial reservoirs (e.g., pool), the underwater geometry is known or manually measured. Natural reservoirs like puddles, water hazards on roads, and brooklets were reconstructed (Figure 5). To generate ground truth data in a natural reservoir, we created the SfM model of the environment without the water in it, manually registered the two point clouds, and the error is measured as the distance from each estimated underwater points to the meshed surface. We generated ground truth data in this way for three scenes. They were used in our quantitative evaluation.

Quantitative results of the proposed depth correction are illustrated in Figure 7, where we approximated with a linear regression of the error of the SfM depth estimation and our one. The approximation is based on about 3000 points from different scenes; on average, about 7 frames were used for reconstruction. If a point was visible from more than one view, we averaged the triangulations and filtered the obviously wrongly triangulated points above the water level. As shown in the figure, in our evaluation there were numerous points in the underwater depth range between 10 and 40 cm, but most of the points are below 10 cm (puddles). We neglected the number of measured points deeper than 40 cm in the figure for better illustration, as there were very few of them (they are approximately on the regression line) and also it is not realistic to meet such deep potholes. As it is visible in the figure, with our proposed correction, the error can be approximated almost as a constant. The error of SfM approximation is increasing with the depth. This phenomenon is explained by Eq. 11 (in Section 5.2) as it shows in the case of one viewpoint and a given incidence angle, the apparent depth is linearly dependent on the real one (with our correction, only other errors of the process remain).

The mean absolute error in our tests with the proposed correction was **2.15** cm, which is affected by the triangulation error and by the accuracy of the ground truth model (in the case of natural reservoirs). That is why we did a separate evaluation for the cases of artificial and natural reservoirs. Table 1 shows that using our proposed correction pipeline gives a significant improvement compared to the SfM baseline. Our

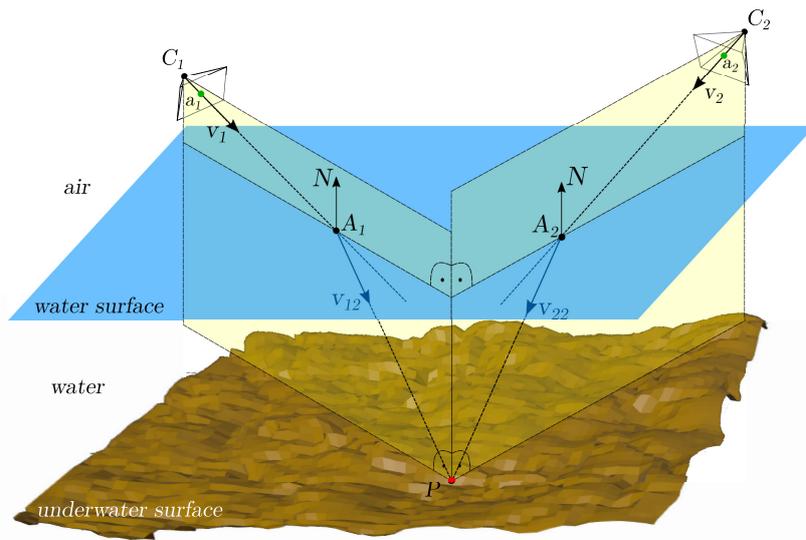


Figure 4: Illustration of underwater depth calculation of a P point seen by two cameras.



(a) Pool



(b) Water hazard



(c) Brooklet

Figure 5: Example images used in reconstruction of different test scenes.

goal is to estimate the depth of natural ones. However, error estimation is more straightforward in the case of geometric surfaces (artificial reservoirs). Besides, examining the artificial reservoirs allowed us to investigate the proposed correction in deeper water.

The errors of the proposed pipeline are comparable to the one reported in (Dietrich, 2017). The author of it also tested in artificial (pool with 0.32 cm mean

absolute error) and natural water reservoirs (5.6 cm and 3.9 cm mean absolute error - in different time periods). It should be noted that the authors used georeferenced orthophotography (getting a more precise initial point cloud) and less a general solution to achieve those results.

Figure 6 shows a qualitative illustration of the proposed method. Using only SfM to reconstruct under-

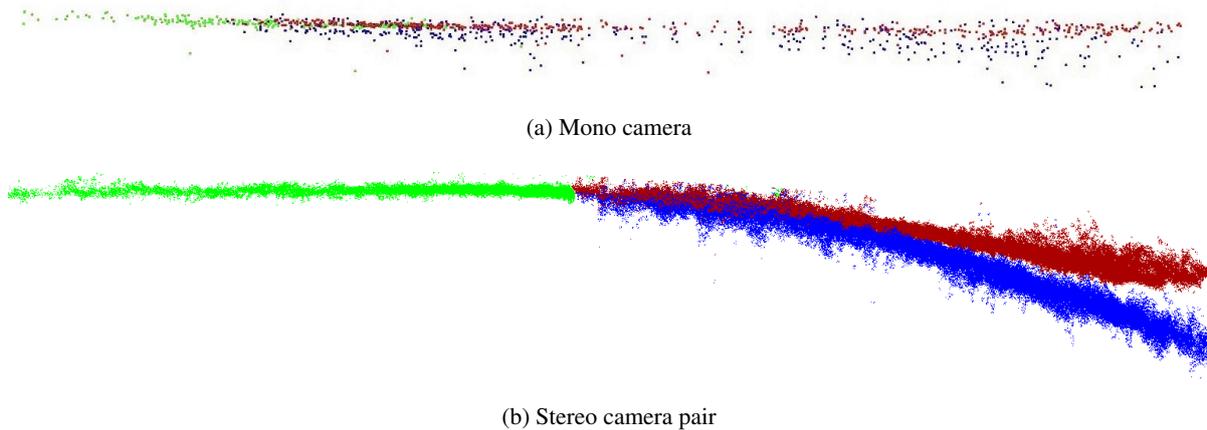


Figure 6: Example point clouds (from different scenes) generated about underwater surface with and without correction. Green points indicates the ground surface, red ones are the points without the proposed correction and blue ones are the ones with the correction.

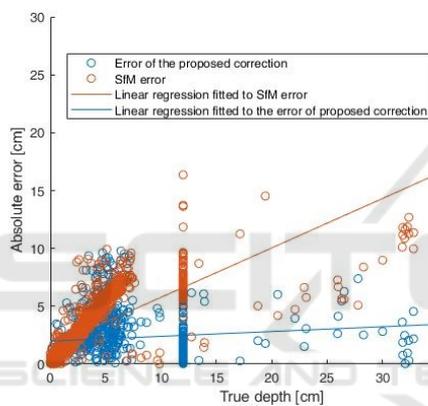


Figure 7: Linear regression to the errors of different approximation of underwater depth. Note: Vertical line corresponds to artificial reservoir with flat underwater surface.

Table 1: Absolute error in different test scenarios [cm]. SfM refers to standard Structure from Motion with COLMAP (Schönberger and Frahm, 2016) (Schönberger et al., 2016), [1] refers to (Dietrich, 2017) (on their own scenes) and 'Correction' refers to our proposed correction method.

Depth calculation	SfM	[1]	Correction
Artificial reservoirs	6.55	0.32	1.55
Natural reservoirs	2.60	3.9	2.26

water points (red points) resulted in an approximately flat surface at approximately ground (black points) level. However, with the proposed correction (blue points), the real underwater surface can be seen. (Increasing depth is visible.) A similar phenomenon can be observed in a point cloud acquired by a stereo camera rig.

In the stereo camera case, as the traversing of the exact routes was nearly impossible, ground truth data were not recorded. Instead of that, we will use these



Figure 8: Example image for off-road depth estimation from our stereo camera dataset.

data to prove our method can be applied in a real-time driving application. We gathered about half an hour recording, where about 14 % of the frames contained water hazards. Processing the image pairs of resolution 1520x1080 requires about 290 ms from which our depth estimation takes 60 ms in a computer of Intel Core i7-4790K @4.00GHz processor, 32 GB RAM and nVidia GTX 1080 graphic card with Windows 10 operating system in Matlab environment. This means that the process can run in this configuration about 4 frame per second. We illustrate (qualitatively) our method on the recorded stereo data (Figure 2, 7 and 8) as well.

5 DISCUSSION

In this section we provide some discussion about the proposed method.

5.1 Implementation Issues

The 4 FPS process speed is already satisfying as depth estimation is not necessary for every frames (only detection so that the vehicle can start deceleration from a sufficient distance).

Assuming a 1.5 m height and 30 degrees tilted camera installation (flat ground) at the optical centre of the camera we will get a 60 degree incidence angle. This means about 2.6 m distance on the ground to the water hazard. Considering the process speed (and constant velocity) the vehicle must slow down to 9 m/s (32 km/h) before reaching this distance. As the hazards can be detected a lot more farther this is not extraordinary in an off-road or (pothole filled) on-road environment for safe navigation.

Optimized implementation e.g. in C++ environment can speed up even more the estimation, also decreasing the image resolution or number of points to which underwater depth is estimated also reduces the execution time to a large extent. (In our experience SfM provides fewer points by two order of magnitude than stereo, but they also provide meaningful depth result.)

5.2 Significance of Depth Correction

In the stereo camera case, as the cameras are very close to each other (we used Omnivision OV4689 CMOS sensor with about 5.8 cm baseline in our case) and the water surface is relatively far (at least 1 m, based on camera installation on the vehicle), the incidence angle is approximately the same. So, the one viewpoint model is a good approximation (in general SfM case, there can be very different incidence angles and camera positions).

We can write the equality with the the apparent depth (D_a) and the real (D_r) one:

$$D_a \cdot \tan \theta_1 = D_r \cdot \tan \theta_2 \quad (10)$$

From that, we get:

$$D_a = D_r \cdot \frac{\tan(\arcsin(\frac{n_1}{n_2} \sin \theta_1))}{\tan \theta_1} \quad (11)$$

The resulted $\frac{D_a}{D_r}$ ratio is plotted in Figure 9 between 0 and 90 degrees for $\frac{n_1}{n_2} = 0.75$ (water $n_2 = 1.33$ and air $n_1 = 1.0$ refraction indices, considered as constant in this paper). As one can see, at least about 25 % error is produced without any correction (coming from the value of the initial depth ratio is $\frac{n_1}{n_2}$). However, 0 degree incidence angle (perpendicular to the water surface) is not practical in a driving application (as mentioned before). As the incidence angle goes to 90 degrees, the refraction angle goes to the critical angle, and the ratio of apparent and real depth goes to 0, meaning that we can estimate 0 depth (ground level) no matter how deep in reality the hazard is (in theory, in practice the maximum of θ_1 is about 60 degrees, as we said earlier). That is why the correction of the paper is very important.

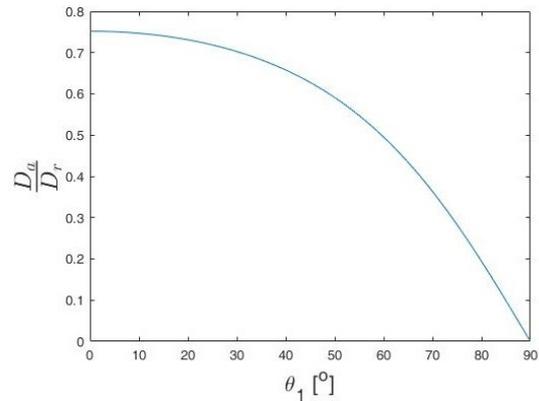


Figure 9: Ratio of apparent and real depth.

5.3 Comparison

There are papers referred in our work (Section 2 §5) which deal with underwater depth correction for completely different purpose and circumstances. We compared our method to one of them in Table 1. However, it is very important to note:

The depth correction problem of our scenes (images from general viewpoints) cannot be solved by the methods referred in this paper in Section 2 (or any other previous depth correction method to the best of our knowledge).

Also, as our depth correction problem is the general solution of those papers simplifications' (we estimate parameters assumed to be known by others). That is why, there is no point in further comparison to the scene of earlier works. As knowing the parameters they need for their calculation, we would get the same simplified equations they use (instead of the ones we apply), and so the same results as they.

5.4 Other Application Areas

We designed our method to apply it in case of automation of ground vehicles in an off-road or on-road (with potholes) environment. However, other vehicles, intelligent systems can profit from the proposed method as well. For example, UAV exploration of the terrain also can utilize our underwater surface estimation. For bathymetric mapping purposes or search and rescue missions in case of a flood. (In the latter case, the water level should be known to assess the degree of risk and choose the right vehicle for the rescue.) (Gomez and Purdie, 2016)

6 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we presented a novel approach to reconstruct an underwater surface with a mono camera. The method does not require any restriction of the camera motion or specific sensors, and the 3D coordinates of underwater surface points can be determined in a least-square sense. The method is useful to increase vehicles' intelligence with water hazard depth estimation both in on-road and off-road cases. This phenomenon was illustrated in real-life scenarios with onboard stereo cameras.

The method will be more elaborated for practical solutions, as we would like to investigate how other vehicles, transportation system can benefit from our proposed method, and what is the optimal optical structure for the different vehicles.

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