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BibTeX:

```
@Article{Baselga2017,  
author="Baselga, Sergio  
and Mart{\i}nez-Llario, Jos{e} Carlos",  
title="Intersection and point-to-line solutions for geodesics on the ellipsoid",  
journal="Studia Geophysica et Geodaetica",  
year="2017",  
issn="1573-1626",  
doi="10.1007/s11200-017-1020-z",  
}
```

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Intersection and point-to-line solutions for geodesics on the ellipsoid

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Abstract

The paper presents two algorithms for the computation of intersection of geodesics and minimum distance from a point to a geodesic on the ellipsoid, respectively. They are based on the iterative use of direct and inverse problems of geodesy by means of their implementations with machine-precision accuracy in GeographicLib. The algorithms yield the same results as those obtained by Karney's approach based on the use of auxiliary ellipsoidal gnomonic projections with the advantage on our side that the algorithms are not limited to distances below 10000 km. This results in our algorithm being the only general solution for the problem of minimum distance from a point to a geodesic on the ellipsoid.

Keywords

Geodesic line; Intersection; Ellipsoid; GeographicLib

1 Introduction

A geodesic on the ellipsoid is a curve with null geodetic curvature (i.e. null curvature on the tangent space). Given two points A and B on the surface on the ellipsoid, the geodesic AB provides the line of minimum length that connects A and B . Over the last centuries, geodesists have devised algorithms of increasing accuracy for solving the so-called direct and inverse problems of geodesy, that is, obtaining the coordinates of

a point B located on a geodesic starting at point A with a given azimuth α_A and distance s (direct problem) and obtaining the distance s and azimuths at both ends α_A and α_B given the coordinates of two points A and B on the ellipsoid (inverse problem). Among the most widespread methods today we find the algorithms by Vincenty (1975), suitable for small programmable calculators, Sjöberg (2006, 2009) and Karney (2011a, 2013). The latter are implemented in the GeographicLib suite (Karney 2017), a library of geodetic functions developed in several programming languages that permits to take advantage of the high precision of standard computers today. State-of-the-art open source software for spatial analysis use an implementation of GeographicLib (e.g. PostGIS Development Group 2017).

The question of intersection of geodesics has received not so much attention as the direct and inverse problems of geodesy. Sjöberg (2002, 2008, 2009) deals with the problem directly on the ellipsoid by using numerical integration and Karney (2011a, 2011b, 2013) ingeniously solves the question by using a particular map projection (ellipsoidal gnomonic projection) in which geodesics are very nearly straight and angles are preserved at the origin. Even less attention has received the problem of minimum distance from a point to a geodesic on the ellipsoid, for which the only available procedure we find is the one based on Karney's approach using the ellipsoidal gnomonic projection (Karney 2011a, 2013), which is implemented in Karney (2011b) and JaVaWa (2017). In this paper we present new algorithms for solving these two problems. Without delving into the difficulties in dealing with the underlying systems of ordinary differential equations, their solution methods and the corresponding analyses of numerical stabilities, we resort to prior accurate implementations of the direct and inverse problems of geodesy (we recommend and will use their two implementations in GeographicLib) in order to build two easy-to-implement robust algorithms. As we will show, they yield the same results as Karney and Sjöberg's methods for intersection of geodesics and Karney's auxiliary projection method for minimum point-to-line distance except for the case of very long distances where only our methods succeed.

2 Intersection of geodesics on the ellipsoid

We want to derive an algorithm for computing the intersection of geodesics on the ellipsoid that is based on existing implementations of the direct and inverse problems of geodesy. We have in mind, in particular, the corresponding functions in GeographicLib, which are optimized to deliver accuracy close to machine precision. Beyond ensuring no loss of precision, we want our algorithm to be fast enough to be used not only for a single intersection but also as a possible tool in the future for more complex problems requiring multiple intersections. We describe next an iterative algorithm for the intersection of geodesics with fast convergence based on prior accurate implementations of direct and inverse problems of geodesy.

Given points A , B , C and D on the ellipsoid we will compute the intersection of geodesics AB and CD . The problem is depicted in Fig. 1, where the intersection point is denoted by X .

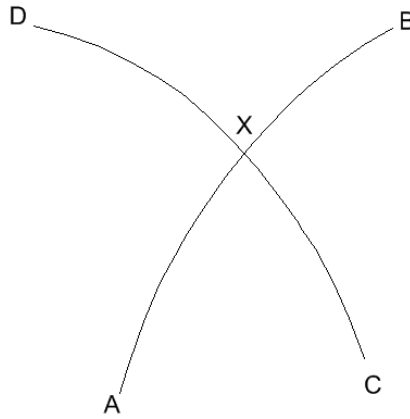


Fig. 1 Intersection of geodesics AB and CD

A geodesic is mathematically described by a set of differential equations which are embedded in the corresponding implementations of the direct and inverse problems of geodesy. By using the implementation of the direct problem, for instance, we are able to move along the geodesic AB and obtain one point at a given distance from A . The idea of the current method is to find an expression for the distance from A to X , s_{AX} , that is correct for small figures and approximate enough for larger ones to yield a new point on the geodesic that is closer to the intersection. This new point will subsequently be used as base for a new iteration.

For the computation of the approximate expression of the distance between a point, say A , and the intersection X of geodesics on the ellipsoid let us assume that A , C and X form a spherical triangle (where we will use a suitable value for the radius of the

sphere R as e.g. the semimajor axis of the ellipsoid). Now we resort to a rarely used formula of spherical trigonometry known as cotangent four-part formula, whose derivation can be found in Todhunter (1886), Sects. 43-44, that sets the following relation for a spherical triangle of angles A, X, C (as it is common we will denote both the vertex and the angle at the vertex by the same uppercase letter) and corresponding opposite sides a, x, c

$$\cos x \cos A = \cot c \sin x - \cot C \sin A \quad (1)$$

By transposition we can write

$$\tan c = \frac{\sin x}{\cos x \cos A + \cot C \sin A} \quad (2)$$

and obtain the approximate expression for s_{AX} that we are looking for

$$s_{AX} = R \arctan \left(\frac{\sin(s_{AC} / R)}{\cos(s_{AC} / R) \cos A + \cot C \sin A} \right) \quad (3)$$

Similarly we obtain

$$s_{CX} = R \arctan \left(\frac{\sin(s_{AC} / R)}{\cos(s_{AC} / R) \cos C + \cot A \sin C} \right) \quad (4)$$

These expressions have no significant singularities apart from the trivial case when both A and C are zero, i.e. both geodesics are coincident, and the entire geodesics are then the intersection. We also assume that the implementing software is able to deal with arctangents of arbitrarily large values yielding $\pm\pi/2$.

Now Eqs. (3) and (4) do not solve the problem unless distances are sufficiently small. They provide, however, approximate values for the correct distances so that an iterative process can be started as follows.

After initial determination of azimuths α_{AB} and α_{CD} by means of the inverse geodetic problem with points A, B and points C, D (and considering that $\alpha_{AX} = \alpha_{AB}$ and $\alpha_{CX} = \alpha_{CD}$) we apply the direct geodetic problem at C with azimuth α_{CX} and the distance s_{CX} obtained from Eq. (4), as well as the direct geodetic problem at A with azimuth α_{AX}

and the distance s_{AX} obtained from Eq. (3). As shown in Fig. 2a) we obtain in the geodesic AB a point A_2 which is much closer to the intersection than A . Similarly we obtain a point C_2 in the geodesic CD which is much closer to the intersection than C . These points will act as new base points for the next iteration (i.e. A is replaced by A_2 and C by C_2). The new distances bring the new points, A_2 and C_2 , closer to the intersection (Fig. 2b). Note that azimuths change in every iteration since the azimuth of a geodesic changes along its different base points, i.e. the values α_{AB} and α_{CD} are different in Fig. 2b) than in Fig. 2a). Iterations can be stopped when the coordinate differences between A_2 and C_2 are below the required level of accuracy. In general the method converges fast and ensures that the intersection point X belongs to both geodesics (the successive application of inverse and direct problems ensures not to divert from the original geodesics).

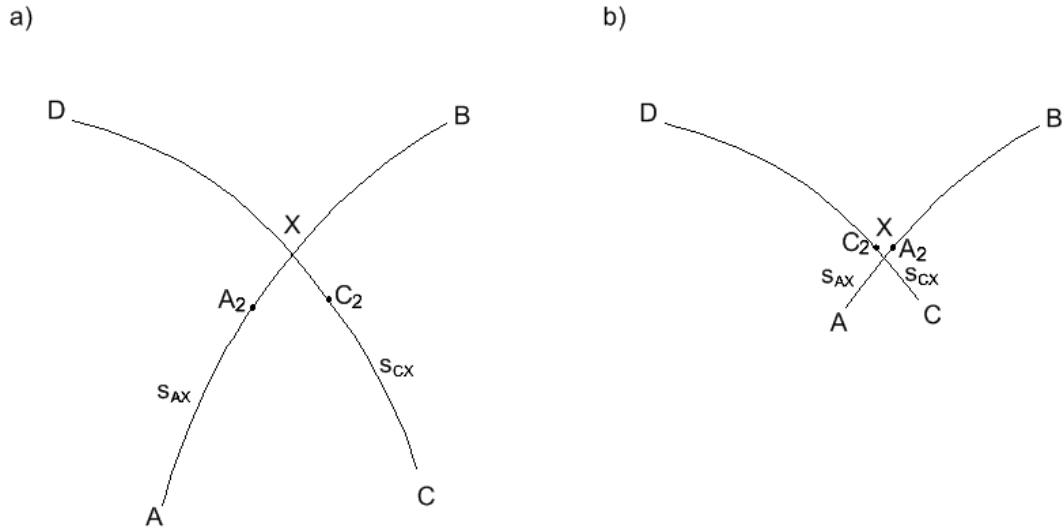


Fig. 2 Iterative procedure for the computation of the intersection point

Several notes of caution are worth mentioning here. First, the distances resulting from Eq. (3) and Eq. (4) can be negative (as it would be the case of the next iteration in Fig. 2b). Direction reversal with a positive distance shall be understood then, either by the particular implementation of the direct geodetic problem (as the corresponding function of GeographicLib does) or by inspection and modification before application of the corresponding function. This provides support also to the case where one or both lines need to be prolonged to meet the intersection. Second, apart from the intersection point X shown in Fig. 1 the two geodesics intersect also in an almost-antipodal point. Our method naturally yields the intersection point that is closer to A

and C (assuming the arctangent function implemented returns values in the interval $-\pi/2, \pi/2$), but it is easy to obtain the nearly-antipodal point provided we take only for the initial iteration the formulas

$$s_{AX} = R \left[\arctan \left(\frac{\sin(s_{AC}/R)}{\cos(s_{AC}/R)\cos A + \cot C \sin A} \right) + \pi \right] \quad (5)$$

$$s_{CX} = R \left[\arctan \left(\frac{\sin(s_{AC}/R)}{\cos(s_{AC}/R)\cos C + \cot A \sin C} \right) + \pi \right] \quad (6)$$

and then we continue the course of iterations with Eqs. (3) and (4).

2.1 Practical examples

We start with an example where the maximum distance to the intersection point (here s_{XB}) is relatively small, 74 km. The geodetic coordinates of the points defining geodesics AB and CD are $\varphi_A = 52^\circ$, $\lambda_A = 5^\circ$, $\varphi_B = 51.4^\circ$, $\lambda_B = 6^\circ$, $\varphi_C = 51.5^\circ$, $\lambda_C = 4.5^\circ$, $\varphi_D = 52^\circ$ and $\lambda_D = 5.5^\circ$. The course of iterations is shown in Table 1. As it can be seen our method quickly converges to coordinates for A_2 and C_2 that differ less than 0.00001 arc seconds, which constitutes our finishing criterion.

Table 1 Intersection of geodesics, example 1. Successive distances for the application of the direct problem of geodesy and corresponding coordinates of points on geodesics from A (point A_2) and C (point C_2).

Iteration No.	s_{AX} (m)	s_{CX} (m)	φ_{A2}	λ_{A2}	φ_{C2}	λ_{C2}
1	21637.0270	64700.0631	51°51'56.3972"	5°13'38.8427"	51°51'56.3311"	5°13'38.7157"
2	0.0762	3.1832	51°51'56.3954"	5°13'38.8456"	51°51'56.3954"	5°13'38.8456"
3	0.0000	0.0000	51°51'56.3954"	5°13'38.8456"	51°51'56.3954"	5°13'38.8456"

We can check the correctness of the final value ($\varphi_X = 51^\circ 51' 56.3954''$, $\lambda_X = 5^\circ 13' 38.8456''$) by inspection of azimuth equalities: $\alpha_{AX} = \alpha_{AB}$ (in this case $133^\circ 36' 13.4578''$) and $\alpha_{BX} = \alpha_{BA}$ (in this case $314^\circ 23' 18.7197''$) needed since the intersection point X belongs to the first geodesic, and $\alpha_{CX} = \alpha_{CD}$ (in this case $50^\circ 45' 17.6875''$) and $\alpha_{DX} = \alpha_{DC}$ (in this case $231^\circ 32' 24.8830''$) since the intersection point X belongs to the second geodesic. All of them are dutifully fulfilled. We can also see that, as expected, in every geodetic line the azimuths from the intersection point to both ends are equal (if the line had to be prolonged) or differ exactly in 180° . In this example $\alpha_{XA} = 133^\circ$

46' 58.1263" and $\alpha_{XB} = 313^\circ 46' 58.1263''$, as well as $\alpha_{XC} = 51^\circ 19' 32.4304''$ and $\alpha_{XD} = 231^\circ 19' 32.4304''$.

We obtain exactly the same coordinates for the intersection by Karney's method whereas we find some discrepancies (1" in latitude, 2" in longitude) after the application of Sjöberg's (they are probably due to the numerical evaluation of the integral involved and not to the method itself).

Now we compute another example which appears in Karney (2011b) involving much longer distances (the distances to the intersection point will result in values from 1100 to 5600 km). We take $\varphi_A = 42^\circ$, $\lambda_A = 29^\circ$, $\varphi_B = 39^\circ$, $\lambda_B = -77^\circ$, $\varphi_C = 6^\circ$, $\lambda_C = 0^\circ$, $\varphi_D = 64^\circ$ and $\lambda_D = -22^\circ$ as coordinates defining the geodesics AB and CD and we have the course of iterations displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 Intersection of geodesics, example 2. Successive distances for the application of the direct problem of geodesy and corresponding coordinates of points on geodesics from A (point A_2) and C (point C_2).

Iteration No.	s_{AX} (m)	s_{CX} (m)	φ_{A2}	λ_{A2}	φ_{C2}	λ_{C2}
1	3402464.8393	4589822.8334	54°40'00.1134"	-13°45'42.2728"	46°24'36.9467"	-10°27'32.0442"
2	52037.0641	957583.2555	54°43'01.3449"	-14°33'50.5265"	54°37'33.5290"	-14°30'34.4773"
3	-11.6217	10723.2692	54°43'01.3066"	-14°33'49.8807"	54°43'01.3061"	-14°33'49.8804"
4	0.0000	0.0152	54°43'01.3066"	-14°33'49.8807"	54°43'01.3066"	-14°33'49.8807"
5	0.0000	0.0000	54°43'01.3066"	-14°33'49.8807"	54°43'01.3066"	-14°33'49.8807"

We can check that the final value ($\varphi_X = 54^\circ 43' 1.3066''$, $\lambda_X = -14^\circ 33' 49.8807''$) is correct by inspection of azimuth equalities $\alpha_{AX} = \alpha_{AB} = 309^\circ 18' 22.4891''$, $\alpha_{BX} = \alpha_{BA} = 47^\circ 44' 07.2214''$, $\alpha_{CX} = \alpha_{CD} = 349^\circ 1' 47.4802''$, $\alpha_{DX} = \alpha_{DC} = 154^\circ 29' 46.5383''$. We can also see that, as expected, $\alpha_{XA} = 275^\circ 51' 17.7681''$ and $\alpha_{XB} = 95^\circ 51' 17.7681''$ differ in 180° , as well as $\alpha_{XC} = 340^\circ 55' 2.9801''$ and $\alpha_{XD} = 160^\circ 55' 2.9801''$. Although the computation by Karney's method assumes that geodesics are straight lines in the ellipsoidal gnomonic projection centered in X while in fact they are only "very nearly straight" (Karney 2013) we do not find any differences between our final results and those by Karney's method. By contrast, this problem does not find a reasonable result by means of Sjöberg's method. It is due to the known inability of the method to follow the geodesic beyond its vertices (Sjöberg and Shirazian 2012), since in the present example the geodesic arc AB crosses the point of maximum latitude ($\varphi = 54^\circ 55' 43''$), which is in fact quite close to the intersection point.

Finally, we compute a third example that is also intractable by Karney's method based on the gnomonic projection. Since this projection cannot represent more than one hemisphere and it has to be centered in the intersection point, the intersection problems for which at least one of the distances from the intersection point to the initial points A , B , C , or D are longer than some 10000 km are impossible to solve by Karney's method. We take for instance $\varphi_A = 35^\circ$, $\lambda_A = -92^\circ$, $\varphi_B = 40^\circ$, $\lambda_B = 52^\circ$, $\varphi_C = -8^\circ$, $\lambda_C = 20^\circ$, $\varphi_D = 49^\circ$ and $\lambda_D = -95^\circ$, for which the distances to the intersection point will eventually result in values from 1100 to 11300 km). Table 3 shows the course of iterations.

Table 3 Intersection of geodesics, example 3. Successive distances for the application of the direct problem of geodesy and corresponding coordinates of points on geodesics from A (point A_2) and C (point C_2).

Iteration No.	s_{AX} (m)	s_{CX} (m)	φ_{A2}	λ_{A2}	φ_{C2}	λ_{C2}
1	1604865.7945	4348568.2893	47°31'26.0523"	-82°22'38.4586"	21°52'41.8516"	-5°53'11.1551"
2	389269.4887	4565612.7810	50°24'28.6348"	-79°21'46.4166"	46°28'27.8630"	-46°38'35.2232"
3	9744.5640	2273004.8317	50°28'44.6977"	-79°16'58.1459"	50°30'44.8473"	-77°01'21.0483"
4	2.0208	160366.4992	50°28'44.7508"	-79°16'58.0861"	50°28'44.8137"	-79°16'55.5158"
5	0.0000	50.7146	50°28'44.7508"	-79°16'58.0861"	50°28'44.7508"	-79°16'58.0861"
6	0.0000	0.0000	50°28'44.7508"	-79°16'58.0861"	50°28'44.7508"	-79°16'58.0861"

We obtain the result $\varphi_X = 50^\circ 28' 44.7508''$, $\lambda_X = -79^\circ 16' 58.0861''$ and azimuth equalities $\alpha_{AX} = \alpha_{AB} = 27^\circ 0' 50.0492''$, $\alpha_{BX} = \alpha_{BA} = 330^\circ 57' 3.3917''$, $\alpha_{CX} = \alpha_{CD} = 319^\circ 57' 19.8704''$, $\alpha_{DX} = \alpha_{DC} = 75^\circ 46' 33.9244''$. We can also see that, as expected, $\alpha_{XA} = 35^\circ 44' 35.7125''$ and $\alpha_{XB} = 215^\circ 44' 35.7125''$ differ in 180° , as well as $\alpha_{XC} = 267^\circ 48' 9.5053''$ and $\alpha_{XD} = 87^\circ 48' 9.5053''$. In this case, Sjöberg's method is unable to find the correct solution since the intersection is beyond the vertex of geodesic CD when computed from C . We can however use Sjöberg's method and attain a result with rather small discrepancies with respect to ours (0.1" both in latitude and longitude) and 0.5" of maximum discrepancy in the azimuth check if we interchange points C and D , or, in other words, if we compute the intersection point from D not C (so that the vertex of the geodesic is not reached before the intersection). At any rate, Sjöberg's method demonstrates to be not always applicable, in contrast to ours.

3 Minimum point-to-line distance on the ellipsoid

The problem now is to find the minimum distance from a point P to a geodesic AB on the ellipsoid (Fig. 3). We can devise an algorithm based on the iterative use of the implementations of the direct and inverse problems of geodesy plus the necessary condition of intersection at right angles (Patrikalakis *et al.* 2009).

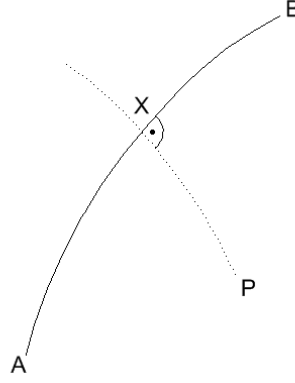


Fig. 3 Minimum point-to-line distance

Again the idea is to use approximate expressions for the distances from A to X , s_{AX} , and P to X , s_{PX} , that are correct for small figures and approximate enough for larger ones to yield a new point on the geodesic AB that is closer to the intersection. This new point will subsequently be used as base for a new iteration.

For the computation of the approximate expressions for distances let us assume that points A , P and X form a spherical triangle, one that has a right angle X , where we will use a suitable value for the radius of the sphere R (e.g. the semimajor axis of the ellipsoid).

The sine rule for angles A , X (90°) and corresponding opposite sides a , x reads

$$\sin a = \sin x \sin A \quad (7)$$

$$s_{PX} = R \arcsin[\sin(s_{AP} / R) \sin A] \quad (8)$$

The use of one of Napier's analogies for the spherical triangle of angles A , P , X (90°) and corresponding opposite sides a , p , x permits us to write

$$\tan \frac{p}{2} = \frac{\sin \frac{90^\circ + A}{2}}{\sin \frac{90^\circ - A}{2}} \tan \frac{x - a}{2} \quad (9)$$

$$s_{AX} = 2R \arctan \left(\frac{\sin \frac{90^\circ + A}{2}}{\sin \frac{90^\circ - A}{2}} \tan \frac{s_{AP} - s_{PX}}{2R} \right) \quad (10)$$

Eqs. (8) and (10) are not approximate enough unless the distances are sufficiently small, so an iterative process must be started as follows.

Using the implementation of the inverse problem of geodesy we determine the distance s_{AP} as well as azimuths α_{AP} and α_{AB} . Angle A is the difference of these azimuths. By means of Eq. (8) we obtain an approximate value for the distance s_{PX} only to be introduced in Eq. (10) so that an approximate value for s_{AX} can be obtained. Now we use the implementation of the direct problem of geodesy to compute a point A_2 along the geodesic AB located at distance s_{AX} from A , which will act as base point for the next iteration (i.e. A is replaced by A_2), just the same as we did in the first method (Fig. 2). The difference now is that we do not know the azimuth of the geodesic XP so we cannot iterate P . After several iterations the differences between successive coordinates of A_2 are below the required level of accuracy (or, equivalently, the distance s_{AX} can be regarded zero for our level of accuracy) and the iterations can be finished.

The method converges fast to the solution of minimum distance from point P to geodesic AB – note that we were not interested in the other possible larger value of the arcsin function in Eq. (8) – supports line prolonging and has no significant singularities (it yields the correct solution even if the point P is in the geodesic AB).

Next we apply the algorithm to some examples and compare the results with those that can be obtained by Karney (2011b) by means of use of the auxiliary gnomonic projection.

3.1 Practical examples

Let us start with an example where the point-to-line distance is relatively small, some 24 km. The geodetic coordinates of the points defining the geodesic AB and point P are $\varphi_A = 52^\circ$, $\lambda_A = 5^\circ$, $\varphi_B = 51.4^\circ$, $\lambda_B = 6^\circ$, $\varphi_P = 52^\circ$ and $\lambda_P = 5.5^\circ$. The course of iterations is shown in Table 4. As it can be seen, our method converges to the final

value in just three iterations (our finishing condition is that successive coordinates for A_2 differ less than 0.00001 arc seconds).

Table 4 Point to geodesic, example 1. Successive coordinates of point A_2 and corresponding distances

s_{AX}			
Iteration			
No.	φ_{A2}	λ_{A2}	s_{AX} (m)
1	51°50'45.9212"	5°15'37.5426"	24784.2886
2	51°50'45.9212"	5°15'37.5426"	-0.0002
3	51°50'45.9212"	5°15'37.5426"	0.0000

We ensure that the solution $\varphi_X = 51^\circ 50' 45.9212''$, $\lambda_X = 5^\circ 15' 37.5426''$ is correct by checking right-angle conditions (in this case $\alpha_{XA} = 313^\circ 48' 31.4766''$, $\alpha_{XP} = 43^\circ 48' 31.4766''$ and $\alpha_{XB} = 133^\circ 48' 31.4766''$) along with the condition that X is on both geodesics (which was indeed part of our implementation of intersection of geodesics: $\alpha_{AX} = 133^\circ 36' 13.4578''$ and $\alpha_{AB} = 133^\circ 36' 13.4578''$, as well as $\alpha_{BX} = 314^\circ 23' 18.7191''$ and $\alpha_{BA} = 314^\circ 23' 18.7191''$). The results are the same following Karney's approach.

Our second example is taken from Karney (2011b) and involves a point-to-line distance much longer (around 1000 km). With $\varphi_A = 42^\circ$, $\lambda_A = 29^\circ$, $\varphi_B = 39^\circ$, $\lambda_B = -77^\circ$, $\varphi_P = 64^\circ$ and $\lambda_P = -22^\circ$ we have the course of iterations shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Point to geodesic, example 2. Successive coordinates of point A_2 and corresponding distances

s_{AX}			
Iteration			
No.	φ_{A2}	λ_{A2}	s_{AX} (m)
1	54°55'42.7066"	-21°56'18.1328"	3928857.7554
2	54°55'42.7134"	-21°56'14.2477"	-69.1851
3	54°55'42.7134"	-21°56'14.2477"	0.0000

Again it is checked that the solution $\varphi_X = 54^\circ 55' 42.7134''$, $\lambda_X = -21^\circ 56' 14.2477''$ fulfills right-angle conditions ($\alpha_{XA} = 89^\circ 49' 31.0947''$, $\alpha_{XP} = 359^\circ 49' 31.0943''$ and $\alpha_{XB} = 89^\circ 49' 31.0947''$), belongs to geodesic AB ($\alpha_{AX} = 309^\circ 18' 22.4891''$ and $\alpha_{AB} = 309^\circ 18' 22.4891''$, as well as $\alpha_{BX} = 47^\circ 44' 7.2214''$ and $\alpha_{BA} = 47^\circ 44' 7.2214''$) and is exactly coincident with the one in Karney (2011b).

Finally, we compute an example that is intractable by Karney's method based on the gnomonic projection due to its limitation to one hemisphere (i.e. requires that all distances from the projection center, point X , be below 10000 km). With $\varphi_A = 42^\circ$, λ_A

$= 29^\circ$, $\varphi_B = -35^\circ$, $\lambda_B = -70^\circ$, $\varphi_P = 64^\circ$ and $\lambda_P = -22^\circ$ we have the course of iterations shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Point to geodesic, example 3. Successive coordinates of point A_2 and corresponding distances

s_{AX}			
Iteration			
No.	φ_{A2}	λ_{A2}	s_{AX} (m)
1	37°58'39.9186"	18°20'53.7147"	1012443.9063
2	37°58'41.2237"	18°20'56.6280"	-81.6969
3	37°58'41.2237"	18°20'56.6280"	0.0000

The solution $\varphi_X = 37^\circ 58' 41.2236''$, $\lambda_X = 18^\circ 20' 56.6279''$ verifies right-angle conditions ($\alpha_{XA} = 60^\circ 29' 33.8570''$, $\alpha_{XP} = 330^\circ 29' 33.8570''$ and $\alpha_{XB} = 240^\circ 29' 33.8570''$) and belongs to geodesic AB ($\alpha_{AX} = 247^\circ 21' 11.9791''$ and $\alpha_{AB} = 247^\circ 21' 11.9791''$, as well as $\alpha_{BX} = 56^\circ 53' 14.0821''$ and $\alpha_{BA} = 56^\circ 53' 14.0821''$). As mentioned before, the resulting distance $s_{XB} \approx 12200$ km is longer than 10000 km, what makes the problem intractable by Karney's method and, as far as we know, by any other method that has been published so far.

4 Conclusions

We have presented two algorithms for solving the problems of intersection of geodesics and minimum distance from a point to a geodesic on the ellipsoid, respectively. They can be applied to all range of distances: from local-scale problems (a few km) to global-scale ones (even more than 10000 km). Being iterative in nature, and the second algorithm also resorting to the implementation of the first, their computational cost is dependent on the distances involved. They represent a competitive implementation with the currently standard approach by Karney based on the use of an auxiliary ellipsoidal gnomonic projection, with the advantage on our side that Karney's method is inapplicable for distances longer than 10000 km. This results in our algorithm being the only possibility for accurately solving the general problem of minimum distance from a point to a geodesic on the ellipsoid.

Acknowledgments

The authors are sincerely thankful to the editor and two anonymous reviewers for their detailed comments and suggestions that helped to considerably improve the methods developed in the manuscript as well as its readability.

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