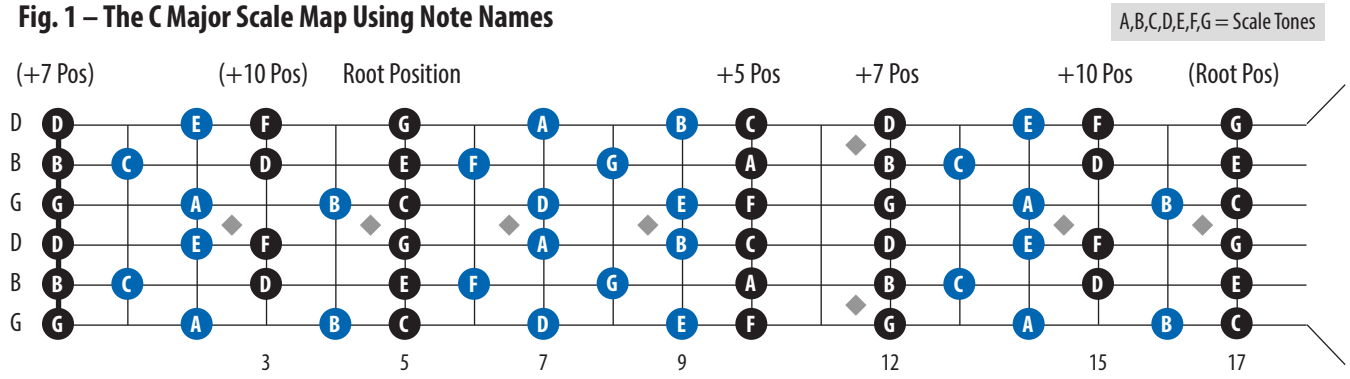
Steel Guitar Fretboard Map—Major Keys

(Dobro G high-bass tuning)

Material by John Ely

Fig. 1 – The C Major Scale Map Using Note Names



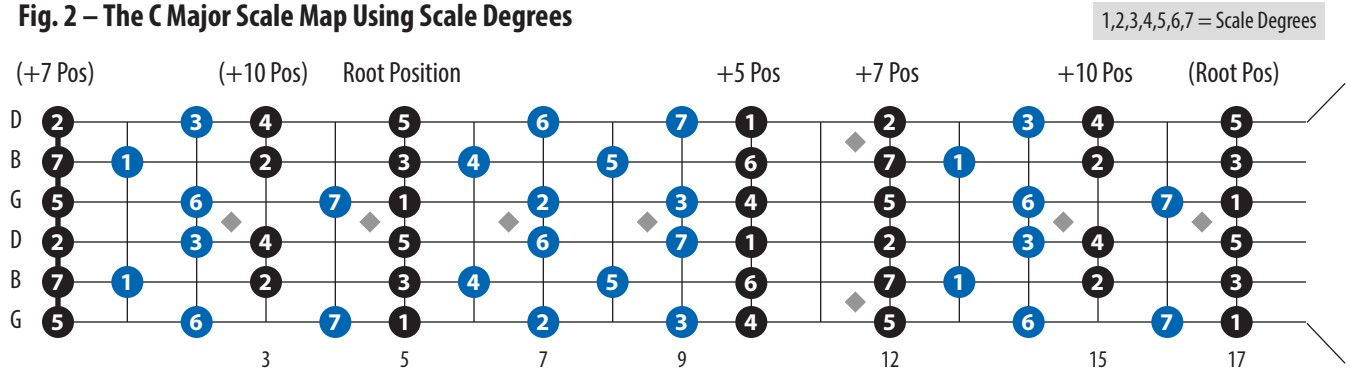
Most of what you play on steel guitar is based on one (or more) of the 12 unique major keys. Each major key has a major scale that defines it. A song in the key of C, for example, is built primarily on the C major scale. Figure 1 above shows the layout of the notes of the C major scale on the G major dobro tuning. The notes of the scale, in order, are: C (the scale root), D, E, F, G, A and B—the same notes as the white keys on a piano. It is useful to refer to the major scale notes in general terms, independent of the key you're in; an example is the *solfège* note naming convention: 'Do', 'Re', 'Mi', 'Fa', 'Sol', 'La' and 'Ti'. For practical reasons, it's a lot easier to use numbers, called **Scale Degrees**. You get scale degrees by simply numbering the notes of the scale starting at the scale root. For the C major scale, you get: C=1, D=2, E=3, F=4, G=5, A=6, and B=7. Figure 2 below shows the C major scale map using scale degrees.

Notice that there are three prime fret positions where every string at that fret is a valid note of the C major scale. They are:

- **Root Position**—located at the 5th and 17th fret
- **+5 Position**—located at 10th fret, 5 frets up (or 7 frets down) from root position
- **+7 Position**—located in the open position and at the 12th fret, 7 frets up (or 5 frets down) from root position

There is also a semi-prime fret postion at the **+10 Position** that contains important harmony notes. In the diagrams shown, notes at prime or semi-prime frets are colored black. *These are the most important positions and are where a high percentage of steel guitar harmony is located.* A good way to visualize these fret positions is: root position, two frets below root position, and five frets above and below root position. These are the four most important frets for the major key you are playing in.

Fig. 2 – The C Major Scale Map Using Scale Degrees



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