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**REEL ROLE MODELS
HISTORY OF WOMEN AS ANGLERS SURFACES IN BOOK ABOUT FLY FISHING**

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Rhonda Sapp was fishing a spot on the Platte River 11 years ago when two men walked up behind her.

"I heard one say to the other, 'She's standing where I wanted to be fishing,' as though I wasn't fishing, as though I was just standing there," Sapp said.

The men went upstream and fished. They went downstream and fished.

"They didn't catch anything, and I continued to catch fish," she said.

The next morning the men came into the Colorado Angler, a Lakewood fly fishing shop Sapp owns with her husband. They recognized her and asked what she had been using on the Platte.

She ended up selling them a dozen flies.

Women like Sapp not only have a history of fishing, they have made fishing history.

Lyla Foggia, a former Hollywood publicist, profiles dozens of them in her new book, *Reel Women: The World of Women Who Fish* (PGW, Beyond Words Publishing, 275 pages. \$24.95). She focuses on trailblazers, the women who set records or otherwise changed the face of the sport through their ingenuity and daring.

"They all excelled in a man's world," Foggia said. "They all went beyond society's definition of what was socially acceptable for women. Most managed to turn fishing into a full-time career. They're doing what a lot of male recreational anglers would give their eyeteeth to do - they're making a living from fishing.

"I consider them the role models we really need in the '90s. That's why I did this book. They really created a culture all their own."

Sapp and her partner Donna Teeny are standouts. They wanted fly fishing gear for women - waders and vests built for women, not for small boys. It took three years and responses like "Sure, honey. Yeah. Right," before they created their own vest over two bottles of wine. Their business, *Dirt Roads and Damsels*, offers a line of functional, attractive fishing gear for women.

"You don't have to look like a guy on the river," Sapp said.

A devout angler herself, Foggia, 48, is in Denver to promote *Reel Women*. In every city she visits on her tour, a woman profiled in the book attends the signings. In Denver, Sapp will join Foggia at today's appearance at the Colorado Angler.

It's an appropriate year for the book - 1996 marks the 500th anniversary of the publication of the *Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle*, penned by Dame Juliana Berners, a 15th-century English nun and noblewoman honored in Foggia's prologue. The treatise is recognized as the first book on modern sports fishing.

Women who don't fish also will be interested in *Reel Women*, Foggia said, because it represents a missing link in women's collective cultural heritage, an aspect of women's experience that never existed.

For women who do fish, the book includes the first women's angling resource directory, listing national and state organizations, businesses and services.

Foggia originally set out to write a guidebook to draw women into the sport. When she visited the Portland library to see if anyone had written a similar book, she opened an angling encyclopedia and discovered Dame Juliana.

"I thought, 'How odd, a woman'," Foggia said.

Other women surfaced after further research.

"I was just floored," Foggia said. "It was all these women during the '30s and '40s. It wasn't just one or two. It was this whole group of women who were routinely going out and trolling the high seas and bringing in fish between 600 and 800 pounds.

"They were remarkable particularly, too, because they were socialites and they were these tiny, petite women. They could have been doing anything they wanted to do - traveling around the world, catching Broadway shows. And they were just truly addicted to big game angling."

Their husbands were very prominent in the sport, but these women were highly respected, Foggia said.

"They were no shrinking violets," she said.

In one of many black-and-white pictures offered in *Reel Women*, socialite Helen Lerner is congratulated by Ernest Hemmingway after landing one of her many world-record catches.

As part of her research, Foggia sent press releases to every major daily newspaper in the country, requesting information from female anglers. Eleven angling magazines and 22 newspapers - including the *Rocky Mountain News* - printed it. Response was enormous, especially from Denver.

Foggia said probably two-thirds of the calls for her book came from men.

"A lot of men want their wives or girlfriends to fish with them," she said. "I always intended for the book to help men also. There are so many women in this book who are married whose husbands are also prominent in the sport. It's such a great bond in a marriage."

A woman from Denver who didn't fish called Foggia just to encourage her to do the book.

Just because a woman has never fished doesn't mean she isn't an angler in her heart, both Sapp and Foggia said. Sapp, 46, grew up in Kansas and didn't take up fishing until the early '70s when she moved to Colorado and met her husband. She credits *A River Runs Through It* for bringing fly fishing off its esoteric pedestal.

Whether women are turning out to fish and at what age depends on the type of fishing, Foggia said. The rising stars in *Bass 'n' Gals*, a leading fishing organization for women, are in their late 20s and early 30s.

A preponderance of older women are featured in *Reel Women*.

"That's one of the nice things about fishing - you can do it until the day you die," Foggia said.

Sapp, who teaches all-women fly fishing classes, said ages of women in her classes ranged from the early 20s to the 60s. Backgrounds are as varied. Sapp teaches single moms and women who already have raised their children and finally have time for themselves.

But why fishing?

"It puts you in the outdoors," Foggia said, "not just as an observer but as a participant. It's extremely meditative. If you're going to be a good angler, you're concentrating deeply on what you're doing.

"It really puts you in touch with yourself. As a woman gets more accomplished at it, the more her self-esteem and self-confidence rises, and it really transfers to the rest of her life. She really sees herself as able to do all kinds of things."

Sapp had similar praise.

"Fly fishing is so relaxing," she said. "It's an escape. When you're on the river and you're fishing, you can't think about anything else. It's an artful, graceful form of fishing. Once you hook your first fish, you're hooked. One of the most important things is that it is something you can do by yourself. Fly fishing is non-competitive. The competition is between you and the river, between you and the fish.

"You can have all the worries in the world, but once you put your waders on, you get your fly rod together, you tie that fly on, you step out into the stream and you make that first cast, you feel the water against your legs - it's like you can just breathe. The river in front of you is all that exists.

"You can't even think about all those problems at home. And somehow on the drive home it makes you stronger. You're ready to tackle whatever is waiting for you."

INFOBOX

IF YOU GO:

Lyla Foggia, author of *Reel Women: The World of Women Who Fish*, will sign books and answer questions at the Colorado Angler, 1457 Nelson St. in Lakewood, 1 to 3 p.m. today.