

# North Country Notebook



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In the very way that Jerry Minnich finds harbingers of spring in his seed catalogs, many of us—driven from The Garden at birth because of our brown thumbs—find the same promise of warmth and open waters in the arrival of our fishing catalogs.

This year especially, with a winter cold enough to frost you, your pocketbook and your plumbing in one shot, it's a sight for snowblind eyes to find the Orvis catalog in your mailbox. It's finding a trillium there. Or a trout lily. Or a trout.

The 1982 catalog arrived the other morning, eternal and constant as the snows of winter and the streams of spring, *ORVIS, 126 Years of Sporting Tradition* emblazoned on the cover along with the emblems of that tradition, the trout rod and the trout net among them.

For those of us who haunt the Catfish Flats and are apt to do more fishing with flywheels than flyrods, the Orvis catalog is not just a thing of beauty. It is exotic beyond our wildest dreams. Coral reefs give you this kind of high. And Canadian rivers. Marco Polo must have had a similar inventory:

—The Wes Jordan bamboo flyrods made of select Tonkin cane from Kwangsi Province in China.

—The exquisite fly reels—for every fishing under this earth's sun—from ultralight Battenkills to heavy-duty Fin-Nors.

—Pages and pages of color plates—dry flies, wet flies, nymphs, streamers, bugs—enough pages for the Brenton boys up on

the Big Stone to repaper the whole little cabin, right over the Vilas County News-Review.

It was all kind of familiar until I turned a page, and there—suddenly, surprisingly—was something I had never encountered in the Orvis catalog. Rounding the bend, the rapids you heard isn't a rapids at all. It's a waterfall.

This waterfall was a two-page spread titled "The Orvis Fisherman is not always a man." Below that, the management had written: "In response to our distaff anglers' request for fishing gear made especially for women, we present a selection of equipment and appropriate attire chosen with function, comfort and appearance in mind."

There followed a list of fishing items designed for women—from Orvis Gum-bottoms to Orvis Tac-L-Pac vests.

There were also female models shown, standing at the brink of gin-clear trout water wearing specially cut Ladies' Deluxe Waders and Ladies' Felt Sole Hip Boots.

Permit me to observe that Orvis is performing a great service to everyone by noting, at long last, that fishing is not an exclusively masculine pursuit.

One day, perhaps, it will also be noted that long before men were writing about fishing—men like Nick Lyons, Ernest Schwiebert, Ernest Hemingway, Joe Brooks, Lee Wulff—fishermen from A. J. McLane to Zane Grey, including Ike Walton—a singular woman wrote about

fishing first. And what she wrote remains a classic to this day.

If Izaak Walton is the Big Daddy of fishing because he wrote *The Compleat Angler*, then Dame Juliana Berners is the Big Mama, because she wrote *The Treatise Of Fysshynge Wyth An Angle*. The writing looks funny because Dame Juliana was writing way back in 1496.

She is to angling literature, Arnold Gingrich states in his book *The Fishing In Print: A Guided Tour Through Five Centuries Of Angling Literature*, as Chaucer is to English literature. Each represents, to all intents and purposes, the very beginning.

No one knows for certain whether Dame Juliana was indeed the abbess of a convent, or why she wrote *The Treatise*, or even if she wrote it for certain. Her trail disappears into the misty past like the headwaters of some fabled stream.

I believe. The Dame is real. Before she gets down to the fishing, she writes the following as a little preface: "...If a man lacks physicians or doctors, he shall make three things his doctors or physicians, and he will never have need of more.

"The first of them is merry thought.

"The second is work in moderation.

"The third is a good diet of pure foods and suitable drinks."

Steady Eddy agrees you follow advice like that to hell and back.

When she gets into the fishing, it could be Sig Olson's Grandma, or yours, talking:

"You must not use this artful sport for covetousness, merely for the increasing or saving of your money, but mainly for your enjoyment and to procure the health of your body and, more especially, of your soul. For when you intend to go to your amusements in fishing, you will not want very many

persons with you, who might hinder you in your pastime."

You talk about relating and communicating despite a generation gap. Dame Juliana was writing this stuff almost 500 years ago, and it reads like February Outdoor Life.

"Also," she warns, "you must not be too greedy in catching your said game, as in taking too much at one time, a thing which can easily happen if you do in every point as this present treatise shows you. That could easily be the occasion of destroying your own sport and other men's also. When you have a sufficient mess, you should covet no more at that time.... And all those that do according to this rule will have the blessing of God...."

Dame Juliana did fishermen a great, great service. It's only fitting and meet that fishermen are starting to return the favor. •