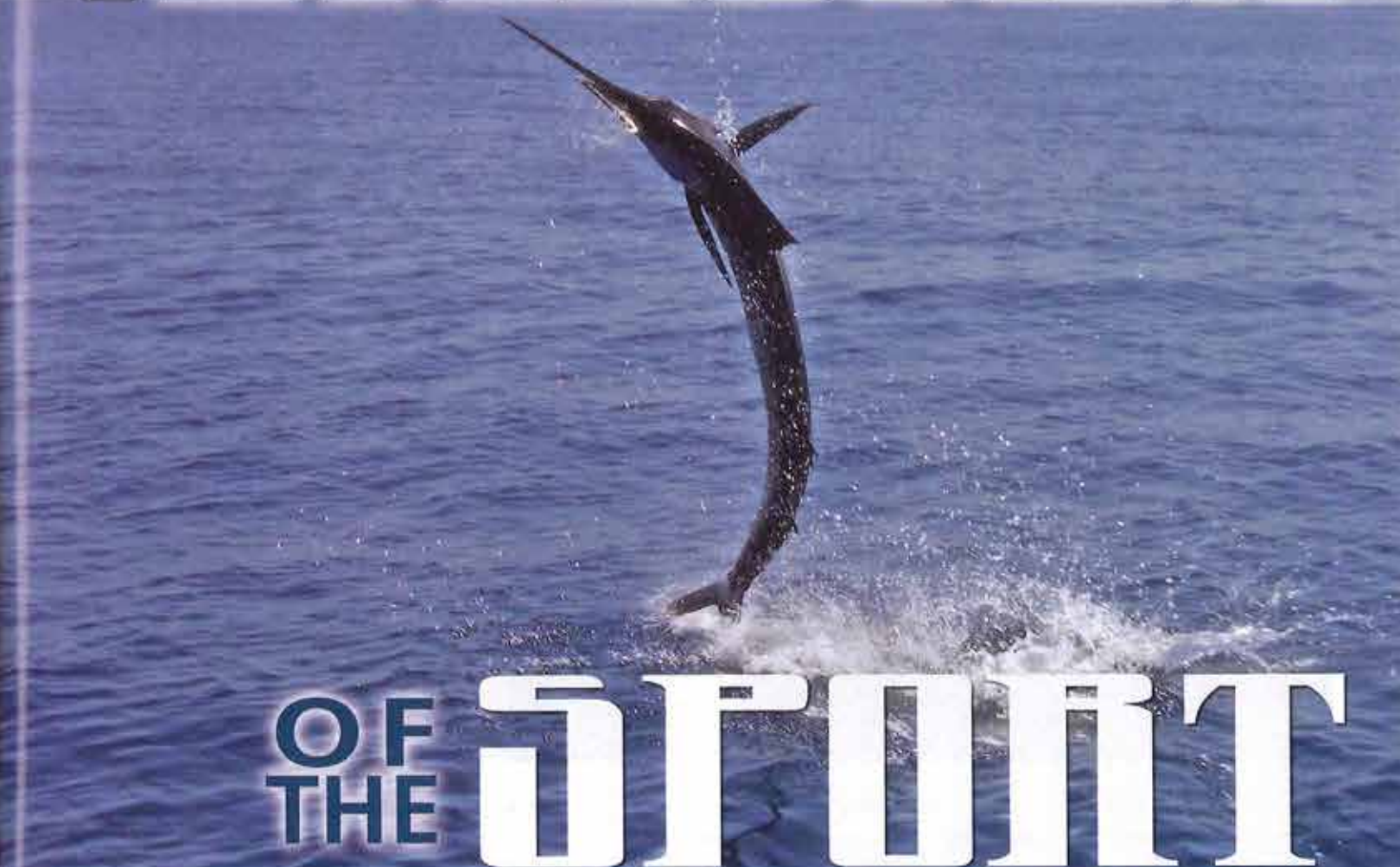




THE EVOLUTION



OF THE SPORT

by Riley Love

There's an old adage: "Can one understand what it means to be a leaf without knowing that it's part of a tree?" In the early morning netherlight at Guatemala's Puerto Quetzal Marina, a small tropical tree grows near where my son is combing the water's edge. On its branch a leaf dances in the breeze, which courses out to sea from the night-cooled terrain behind us. These land and sea winds have existed for as long as there have been continents and oceans, since before there was life, even in the deep. And for how many centuries have fathers come away with their sons to fish upon the sea? The throaty roar of diesel engines breaks the morning stillness, beckoning us aboard the **TEASER**, a modern marvel of fiber glass, power and electronics.



HISTORY

Haven't we always been fishermen? This seems true both in the mind and the gut. We can feel the tree's roots growing profoundly through the generations to the ancient fishermen. But there's only a small window left to the past.

Anthropologists date human culture's earliest remains from South Africa's Blombos Cave at about 140,000 years ago. Humankind would have just achieved our modern form. Skeletal fragments of only few selected fish species there suggest production by intent fishing, not scavenging. Fishing continued there for 70,000 annum's. Scientists construe the fish were chummed close to shore, then speared or netted. In southern Europe cave paintings of creatures which most inspired

Paleolithic man depict fish from nearly 30,000 years past.

The water level of the Sea of Galilee has recently dropped over 20 feet, revealing the ruins of the most ancient dwellings built by man. Dating back 20,000 years, these ruins are thought to have sheltered fishermen.

The lack of records limits our view of antiquity. The earliest scrolls made on papyrus and lambskins suffered deterioration caused by humidity. Exceptions are scraps, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in the most arid environments. Attempts to preserve images on wall paintings by early civilizations such as the Greeks have not endured the rigors of time very well.

Ancient Egyptians tended to engrave depictions of daily activities

into their buildings' stone walls. From such an engraving we get the first look at a figure of a man fishing with rod and line from about 4,000 years ago. Departing from other images of net and spear, it is here that the modern record begins.

A fisherman's life wasn't particularly easy in Egypt's early culture. Writings reveal the life of the average fisherman to be more miserable than most other professions. Hippos and crocodiles could easily overturn their low-lying boats and then kill the fishermen. Although not the kind of sport we're interested in, our forebears, for pleasure and relaxation, declined the use of other productive methods available and with rod and line ventured to fish at the water's edge.

Although not the earliest written

language, origins of the Greek alphabet date to 800-900 BC. With this the tradition of oral transfer of story would change in the western world and the chronicles of sport fishing would commence. The life of Homer, arguably author of the Odyssey and the Iliad, begins in this era. Homer mentions fishing not only with net, but also rod and weighted line. These sparse lines shed little light on the fishermen of this epoch with little addition until Theocritus, in the third century BC wrote among his Idylls, "The Fisherman's Dream."

An artistic masterpiece for any age, this beautifully written poetry is the most significant document concerning fishing of the time.

"...I saw myself busy on a rock, and there I sat and watched the fishes, and kept spinning the bait with the rods. And one of the fish nibbled, a fat one, for in sleep dream dogs of bread,

and of fish dream I. Well, he was tightly hooked and the blood was running, and the rod I grasped was bent with his struggle."

So, from across the span of centuries, a kindred spirit is revealed. Not of a net tugging laborer, but one who dreams at night of his sport and who's blood quickens with the excitement of the game. It cannot be said the Greeks were given over to the sport entirely. Later, Plato would write in The Laws:

"Fishing is not an occupation worthy of a man well born or well brought up, because it demands more of address and ruse than force.."

India and China, other major cultural centers, made similar progress with rod and line. This Chinese writing from 400 BC evidenced the spirit of fishermen's optimism:

"By making a line of cocoon silk, a hook of a sharp needle, a rod of dwarf bamboo, and using a grain of

cooked rice as bait, one can catch a whole cartload of fish."

Flyfishermen can trace the written history of their particular sport to 200 AD. In his voluminous De Natura Animalium, Claudius Aelianus, later known as Aelian mentions the Macedonian river Astraeus, fishes of "a speckled hue" and fish rising to engulf flies on the surface.

"And so with the skill of anglers the men circumvent the fish by the following artful contrivance. They wrap the hook in scarlet wool, and to the wool they attach two feathers that grow beneath a cock's wattles and are the colour of wax. The fishing-rod is 6- feet long, and so is the line. So they let down this lure, and the fish attracted and excited by the colour, comes to meet it, and fancying from the beauty of the sight that he is going to have a wonderful banquet, opens wide his mouth, is entangled with the hook, and gains

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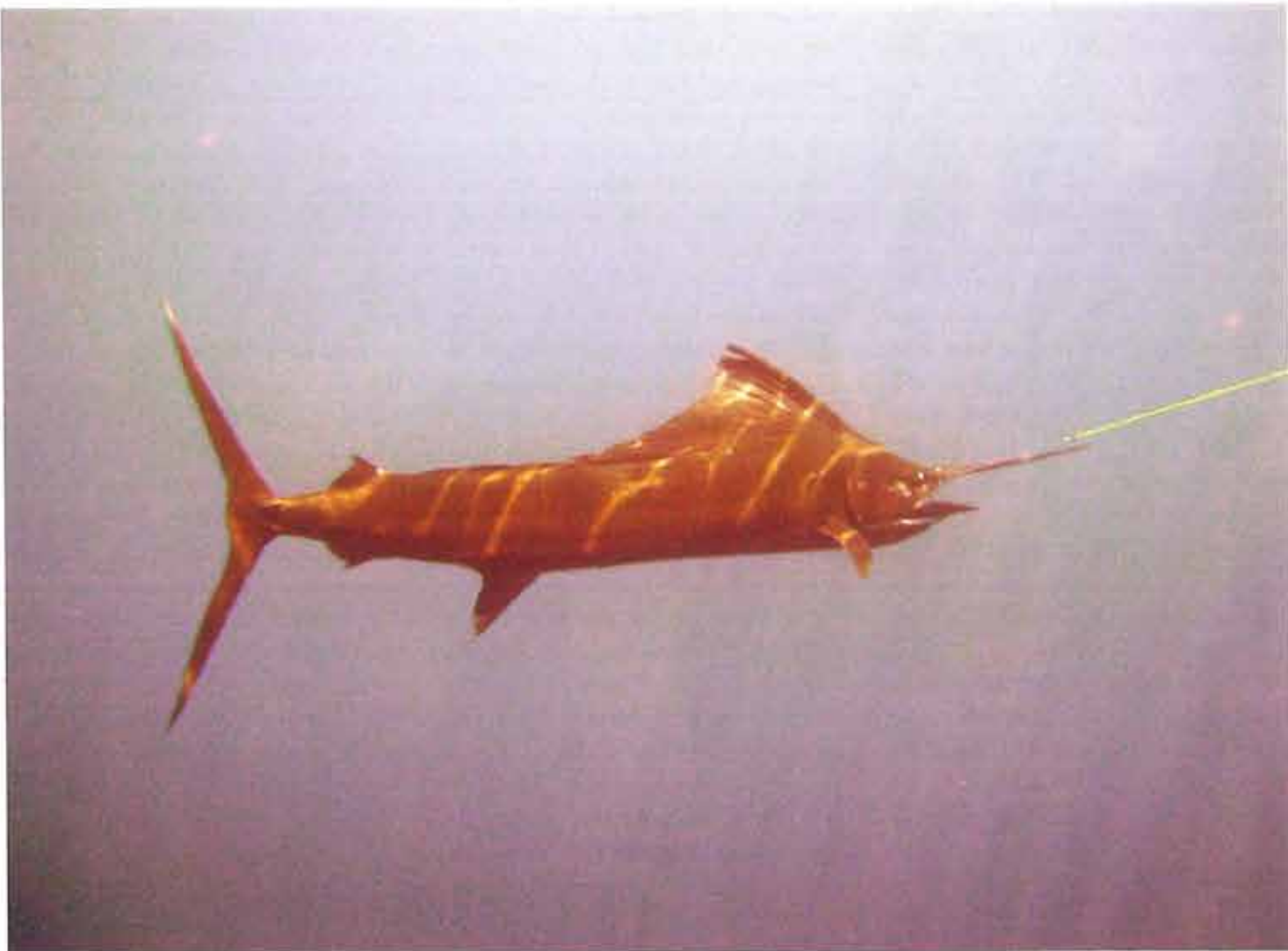
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a bitter feast, for he is caught."

Artificial lures, instead of natural bait were another development toward our modern sporting world 'round this was a period of significant progress. Archeological finds from Scandinavia and eastern peoples, although disconnected geographically demonstrated improved abilities to take fresh water and ocean fish species. The Dark Ages of Europe did for this literature what it generally did for others.

In 1450, the library of fishing lore was endowed with a touchstone for all that would later come. The Treatise of Fysshynge with an Angle, was written purportedly by Dame Juliana Berners, Prioress of Sopwell, a nunnery near St. Albans in England. The greatest treatment of the subject to this point in history, it described tackle of that era, types of fish and

seasonal strategies. It can be downloaded in entirety from the Internet and is well worth an hour for its reading. In commentary in the epilogue, Berners reveals that she intentionally imbedded the text about fishing in a larger compilation on hunting. Thus concealing it from idle types who would have easier access if it was printed alone and likely destroy sport fishing. Her advocacy of conservation echoes across almost 600 years.

"And when you have a sufficient mess you should covet no more as at that time. Also you shall help yourself to nourish the game in all that you may, and to destroy all such things that are devourers of it. And all those who do as this rule shall have the blessing of God and St. Peter."

Of all the literature ever penned in the English language, The

Compleat Angler or the Contemplative Man's Recreation, by Izaak Walton and Charles Cotton remains of the first order. Although published in the style of Old English in 1653, it's eminently readable today and virtually unsurpassed in importance as a literary work for disciples of fishing. It deserves a place by the hearth on every fisherman's armchair. Humorous and insightful, Walton's reflective nature and incorporation of fishing into a philosophy of life touches an inner chord with the modern reader. Abhorring the slaughter of fish, he elevated the concept of the sport as a virtue. For Walton, in the pursuit of fishing as sport, he found a meditative philosophy connecting the mind and soul.

"You will find angling to be like

the virtue of humility, which has a calmness of spirit and a world of other blessings attending upon it."

THE MODERN ERA

Our forebears knew the feel of the boat underfoot and the beckoning of the far horizon. After four decades of international fishing with my father, we're trolling this morning with our family's new progeny for the annual Father-Son Tournament. Biologically and socially, the strides of evolution are measured in terms of generations.

Charles F. Holder pioneered open ocean trolling with rod and reel in 1886 off California's Catalina Island. The first to take a large bluefin tuna with this new style of trolling, he founded The Tuna Club, the oldest fishing club in the United States. This organization not only forged a new sport but also a code of ethics and record keeping that would become models for subsequent organizations. Game fishing soon spread to the Atlantic and great fisheries were soon discovered around the world.

Other seminal events gave shape to our modern sport. Taking the first "grander" marlin off Tahiti. Zane Grey set the modern bar height in 1930. In 1939, the same year as Grey's death, Michael Lerner formed the International Game Fish Association with anglers from England, the United States and Australia. It has been the worldwide leader in promoting sport fishing, supervising competitions and in 1978 took over formal record-keeping responsibilities from Field and Stream magazine. The Old Man and the Sea's protagonist relived the meaning of his life while battling a great fish. Touching the psyche of our culture, Ernest Hemingway subsequently won the 1952 Nobel Prize in literature.

In 2005, a seminal event occurred in Panama which likely defines the future era. Australian sportsman Neil



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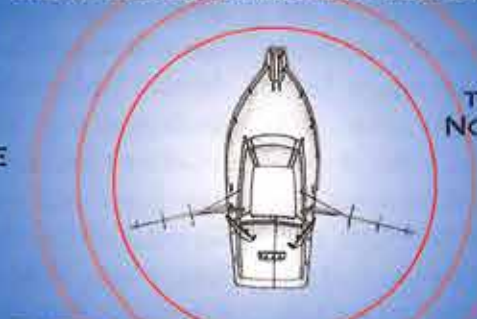
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Patrick hooked a giant blue marlin and finding himself in a world-record opportunity. The tackle was too light to push the matter to conclusion so rather than risk the mortality of the fish; his fellow angler, the renowned marine artist and biologist Guy Harvey dove in scuba gear and attached a second rod's line to the leader above the fish. Obviating any potential for a record, they were able to bring her to safe release and attach a pop up satellite archival tag for The Billfish Foundation (TBF). This key moment shapes the persona of the modern angler as conservationist and student of science, first, and trophy hunter second.

Our new contemporaries of "Generation Y," will steward sport

fishing on a planet of six billion people and growing. GPS, electronic fish locators, e-mail charters and jet travel have availed exotic destinations to these masses. Heavy equipment, now available in the third world regularly develop big, new ocean marinas in a single year.

Coming into blue water 12 miles out, Teaser and our other boat, the Gadiel, throttle back down off surface plane. With sailfish jumping nearby, it's time for "lines in;" you could light a small city with the electricity of the moment. Captain Jose Valdez, former mate for Ron Hamlin on the Captain Hook, expounds modern concepts.

"We use only circle hooks. National law requires these and that

no fish is intentionally killed. For the last two years we've been cutting leaders rather than unhooking billfish, this also helps survival rates." Captain Valdez displays a package of 7/0 Eagle Claws. "I keep a bucket of water at home. With every new order of hooks I put a couple in the bucket to ensure they dissolve. None have lasted more than six days. We think that the fish lose them in two days. All the captains keep a daily log. Last season with boats releasing 60 sailfish per day, no captain found another hook in a sailfish's mouth.

The Billfish Foundation and other organizations have successfully lobbied America's National Marine Fisheries Service to amend the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species

Fishery Management Plan to require circle hooks. TBF has emerged as the world's leading non-profit organization for billfish research and public policy issues. With basic tagging equipment on board, our "Gen Y" anglers have had the opportunity to tag several Pacific sailfish. During the tournament's third day, with over 100 sailfish safely released, you felt Izaak Walton and Juliana Berners were smiling somewhere.

Back at the marina, the jubilant leaf's dance has reversed its direction in the evening hour's sea breeze coursing in. Perhaps it knows that it is part of something old and large and important.

The new contemporaries, each a modern Prometheus will always be fishermen; for what youth has not been molded by fishing on the sea? There are yet many far away places where great fishes await. Was it just yesterday on the shores of the Aegean that our ancestral spirit Theocritus wrote... "Asleep we dream of things we wish, dogs dream of bones and men of fish."

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FISHING TACKLE

Early man was far removed from sport fishing, as we know it today. The history of mankind is at least by one perspective the story of the development of tools and technology. So, too, is the evolution of modern sport fishing the story of the development of equipment. Chumming fish into range was not dissimilar to modern practice and dates back over 100 millennium. A variety of nets and traps bear some resemblance to those still in existence, but in its day the fishing weir was the apex expression of technology on the planet. Depictions on tombs in pre-dynastic Egypt of such fish traps dates back 5,000 years. On the North American continent a weir known as the Boylston Street

fish trap was discovered in 1913 while building the Boston subway. It is the oldest known evidence of human construction in the Eastern United States. The device consists of 65,000 stakes that form a wall-like fence that were then interlaced with brush. It is estimated to have been built about 1,700 years ago and was in use for over 300 years. In many cultures around the globe similar traps were maintained for centuries and passed down as ultimate objects of familial inheritance.



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THE FISHING HOOK

"Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish hook, or snare his tongue with a line that you lower?" Job 41:1

Neolithic man first used a gorge, or straight piece of bone or shell, imbedded in bait and tied to a line. When pulled upon from its center it would straighten perpendicularly and lever against the fish internally. The first hooks discovered were made from bone; these were discovered in Czechoslovakia and arguably date back 20,000 years. Wooden and bone hooks were probably in use tens of thousands of years before. The Egyptians used copper about 6,000 years ago and this was the source of the first metal hooks until the discovery of bronze and then iron and steel. In the Treatise, Dame Berners describes how to make hooks necessary for a variety of fishing endeavors.



ors. Commercially available hooks were used by Izaak Walton who purchased his from Charles Kirby Of London, "the most exact and best hook-maker this nation affords."

Although circle hooks are one of the oldest shapes known for fishing, the modern device was developed for fishing in Australia. Too many hooks were being lost because of snagging on the reef and so local fishermen wanted a model with a more turned in point.

THE FISHING LINE

Early man certainly used vines and hemp like material to attach to his early gouges and hooks. One Fourth century documents the utilization of silk in China for fishing. Catgut, from the intestines of domestic animals was also a source of line. However it is the tail of the horse that tells the

tale of centuries of sport fishing development in Europe and the East. This is mentioned in the writings of the Greek, Aristotle. A single strand of good quality stallion hair has breaking strength of about four pounds so numerous hairs were braided together and became less numerous towards the tip. This was a source of considerable egotism among early anglers, as the more accomplished sportsman would differentiate himself from the less skilled fishermen over this issue. In the *Treatyse of Fysshynge with an Angle* the author prescribes various methods of coloring white hairs for different seasons and water conditions.

"The yellow colour in every clear water from September till November; for it is like the weeds and other types of grass which grow in the waters and rivers, when they are broken."

The Industrial Revolution affected the development of fishing line in the latter half of the 19th century. Silk, linen and flax were impregnated with waterproofing oils during manufacture.

Modern lines are now made entirely from synthetic substances. Nylon monofilament gave way to fluorocarbon copolymers, which have such a low refractive index as to be almost clear. Interestingly, more recently "super lines" of braided and fused materials are opaque and once again spark the debate over line color. It will remain to see if they will be as durable as horsehair line, which was so durable that strands were handed down for generations.

THE ROD

Although the term "angling" certainly derives from the bend of the

fishhook, this word commonly became applied to early European fishing with rods. The first rods depicted in Egypt and then for the next several thousand years were short and probably made of local cane. Alian, when writing of the Macedonians described those shafts as 6 feet [1.8 meters] in length as is the case with rods depicted on Greek and Roman vases.

By the 15th century rods had become longer, up to around 22 feet. The device was handmade by craftsmen of perhaps four or five different kinds of finished wood so that the pieces could collapse down and fit into the base section. These were likely to be finely crafted instruments, which would compare favorably with today's rods for physical beauty. In the *Treatyse*, Dame Berners describes how to build a rod and suggests some alternative motivation for a collapsible device. She also included a drawing.

"And so you will make for yourself a rod so secret that you can walk with it, and no one will know what you are doing."

More modern rods began with the use of bamboo strips glued together to create a strong yet thinner rod. The preferred source of this was the toughest known bamboo called Tonkin Cane, which grew only on a 48,000-acre area of the Guangdong Province of China. Credit for this belongs to Samuel Phillippi, a gunsmith of Easton, Pennsylvania about 1848. Although bamboo rods are still desirable, fiber glass and then composite materials such as boron and carbon fiber have become the usual materials for both fly rods and big-game gear. Intraline design seems the latest thinking on the horizon. In these rods, the line travels up the interior of the shaft and removes the potential for problems from

external eyelets. The most expensive modern rods sport custom design and workmanship, hearkening back to their origins.

THE REEL

No one knows when the first fishing reel was invented, but the credit certainly is deserved by China. Although perhaps in use for centuries, our first glimpse derives from a work by master landscape painter Ma Yuan in 1195 in which a solitary angler sits in a boat holding a rod and reel on a wintry day. Almost 500 years later, Europeans began attaching a wire loop at the end of their rods to run a line through, perhaps for both casting and playing a large fish. In 1651, Thomas Barker presented an illustration of a reel and a description of its use in his *The Art of Angling*:

"...because there must be a little wire ring at the upper end of the top for the line to run through, that you may take up and loose the line at your pleasure; you must have your winder within two foot of the bottom to goe on your rod in this manner, with a spring, that you may put it as low as you please."

Reels were of limited use, other than line storage until later developments. The earliest reels were made to be inverted so that cranking would reverse the spooling of line back onto the reel. Beginning in the late 18th century, multiplying or gear-retrieve reels became available in England. Watchmaker George Snyder of Paris, Kentucky is credited with developing the first American multipliers, the "Kentucky Reels" between 1805 and 1810. Other innovations followed, such as the balanced crank, free turning spool and internal drag. Although German and English companies were advancing new models of reels for fly-fishing through the late 1800s, the modern design is little changed from that patented by Charles Orvis in 1874. 🐟

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



RILEY LOVE is a physician now residing in Kentucky. In early childhood he discovered fishing in the ponds, lakes, and streams of the Midwest then began a life-long love affair with the sea from the first time he saw it. He lived much of his adult life in San Francisco, Cal., and has a home in the Florida Keys where he fishes regularly and also scuba dives. Over the last 40 years, the trio of Dr. Love, his father, and his brother have fished not only the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of Panama, but most of Central and South America. They maintain a three generation family tradition of international travel for the purpose of sport fishing with an emphasis on new and less-traveled fishing destinations. He has written numerous professional articles and several short stories and is a member of the International Game Fish Association.