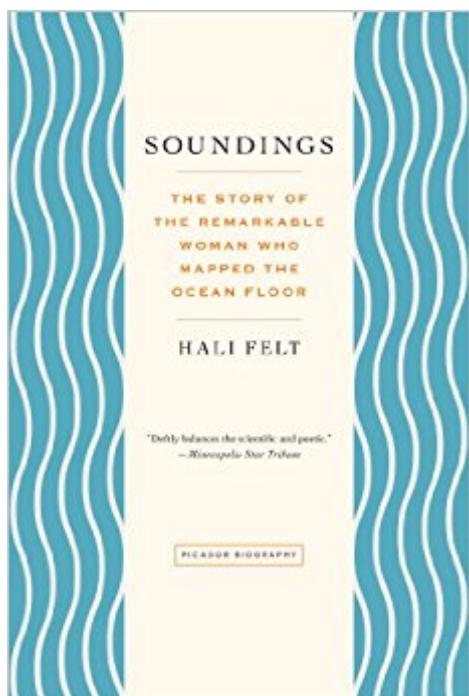


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# Soundings: The Story Of The Remarkable Woman Who Mapped The Ocean Floor



## Synopsis

"Deftly balances the scientific and poetic." — Minneapolis Star Tribune "Soundings is an eloquent testament both to Tharp's importance and to Felt's powers of imagination." — The New York Times Book Review Before Marie Tharp's groundbreaking work in the 1950s, the ocean floor was a mystery — then, as now, we knew less about the bottom of the sea than we did about outer space. In a time when women were held back by the casually sexist atmosphere of mid-twentieth-century academia — a time when trained geologists and scientists like Tharp were routinely relegated to the role of secretary or assistant — Tharp's work would completely change the world's understanding of our planet's evolution. By transforming dry data into beautifully detailed maps that laid the groundwork for proving the then controversial theory of continental drift, Tharp, along with her lifelong partner in science, Bruce Heezen, upended scientific consensus and ushered in a new era in geology and oceanography. "A playful, wildly thoughtful writer" (Oprah.com), Hali Felt vividly captures the romance of scientific discovery and brings to life this "strong-willed woman living according to her own rules, defying the constraints of her time" (The Washington Post).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The publication of this extensively researched and very warmhearted re-creation of Tharp's life fills out a previously blank region of our knowledge of scientific history. One wonders what other treasures still lie buried in the deep. — Britt Peterson --This text refers to an out of print or

unavailable edition of this title.

Ã¢ “Felt is a playful, wildly thoughtful writer, who can extrapolate meanings about our view of the past from outdated scientific termsÃ¢ –Ã|that illuminate the text with the kind of evocative details that make the story of real life so real.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢Oprah.comÃ¢ –Ã“Felt’s enthusiasm for Tharp reaches the page, revealing Tharp, who died in 2006, to be a strong-willed woman living according to her own rules, defying the constraints of her time.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢The Washington PostÃ¢ –Ã“This is a fascinating account of a woman working without much recognition who used recorded soundings to map the ocean floor and change the course of ocean science.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢San Francisco ChronicleÃ¢ –Ã“[Soundings] provides a memorable account of oceanography during the 1940s to 1960s: a thrilling time when so much was being discovered. And it celebrates the extraordinary life of Tharp as a woman and a scientist.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢NatureÃ¢ –Ã“[Tharp] is the woman who mapped the ocean floor, forever changing scientific understanding of the planet. Ignored and marginalized for much of her career, Tharp has at last come into her own.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢Science NewsÃ¢ –Ã“Felt has been able to perform the sort of data-handling magic on these mountains of memorabilia that Tharp earlier performed on Heezen’s soundings--distilling a sharp and illuminating biography that reveals the profiles and contours of a life.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢Natural HistoryÃ¢ –Ã“Felt follows the traces of Tharp’s life by deftly balancing the scientific and the poetic.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢Minneapolis Star TribuneÃ¢ –Ã“[Felt] wrestles complex research procedures and concepts into submissionÃ¢ –Ã|In the same way researchers sound the floor of the ocean, Soundings finds the depths in Tharp. Both the life and the biography are rich in accomplishment.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢Cleveland Plain DealerÃ¢ –Ã“Hali Felt poignantly imagines a private life the way her subject interpolated the unseen deep: hauntingly conjuring what cannot be known firsthand. Tharp [is] a fascinating character in the saga of oceanographic exploration and deserves this admiring biography.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢Bust MagazineÃ¢ –Ã“Felt’s biography reimagines [Tharp’s] progression from a nomadic childhood through scientific breakthroughs with a vivid, poetic touch, revealing an idiosyncratic and determined woman whose ‘vigorous creativity’ advanced everyone’s career but her own.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢Publishers WeeklyÃ¢ –Ã“Felt’s biography brings [Tharp’s] contributions to life...readers interested in biographies will appreciate Tharp’s remarkable scientific work. Recommended.Ã¢ –Ã¢ –â ¢Library JournalÃ¢ –Ã“A complex, rich biography of a groundbreaking geologist who discovered ‘a rift valley running down the center of the Atlantic’...A well-researched, engaging account of an important scientific discovery that should also find a place

on women's-studies shelves.  Kirkus  Booklist, starred review  Story Circle Book Reviews

Kirkus' review of *Soundings* describes it as a "Delightful" biography of Marie Tharp. The review notes that the book is an "exceptional story told by an equally exceptional writer." Booklist's review, also a starred one, describes the book as a "Biography readers who love discovering stories of fascinating, historically important figures should rush to find a copy of *Soundings*." The review highlights Felt's mission to "embroider or alter Tharp's essence, but to discover it, and she succeeds in this powerful portrait of a woman so driven that society could not stop her from changing the world." Shelf Awareness' review also describes the book as an "outstanding job bringing Marie Tharp to life as an eccentric and colorful character." It is described as "it's a fascinating human story that reads better than some fiction."

It appears that the two most important discoveries of the twentieth century had a woman at a key position in there discoveries, but received very little credit for their contributions to these discoveries. Rosalind Franklin in the discovery of the DNA with x-ray diffraction and Marie Tharp with the sonar readings was the first to map the ocean floor and with her geology education was the first to recognize the terrain of the ocean floor importance's to the Continental drift hypothesis proposed by Alfred Wegener in 1912. The first reaction by the scientific community is amazement, then followed by denial and then every body wanted there name attached to this discovery. As Marie Tharp stated " I was so busy making maps I let them argue". After world war II, the discoveries from 1950's to the 1980's was overwhelming and I lived through all of it. What a great time to be born. Now we have better understanding of life and the planet earth. It appears that they are intertwined with each other by an infamous process called Evolution. Plate Tectonics changes the Earth's environments and life keep's up by evolving into different species to be compatible with these new environments.

In the literature of the history of science we seldom get a glimpse at the personalities involved in scientific discoveries. In *Soundings* Hali Felt has applied a style that can only be termed intimate to the life and times of Marie Tharp - a style that is a blend of autobiography and biography. Perhaps it will be considered sexist, but Marie Tharp could easily be called the "mother" of Plate Tectonics. Yet her name often appears only in passing when the history of the Plate Tectonic revolution is told. What was it about Marie's life story that might have presaged her accomplishments, and, why, the author repeatedly asks, does she not rate a more prominent position in the history of science? In the first half of *Soundings*, Hali Felt does a good job in establishing how Marie's eclectic early life and

education probably provided the foundation for her unique and revolutionary approach to visualizing the ocean floor. But the author fails to document (despite several passing comments) Marie's "abundant other contributions" to marine science. Reading the second half of the book brought to mind images of Leonardo endlessly retouching *La Gioconda*. How significantly did Marie influence ideas that Bruce Heezen went on to publish and take credit for? What impact did the updates of her ocean floor maps have on the course of marine science after their initial dramatic appearance? To her credit, the author does not dwell on discrimination as the basis for Marie's eventual banishment from Lamont. Sexism was certainly a component of the social atmosphere of Lamont, but it was not the primary driving force that defined status at the lab. That role fell to a hierarchical system based on education, friendships, and a sustaining (and perhaps fanatical) commitment to hard work and productivity. Tharp's woes are more properly assigned to the fact that she did not have a doctorate and that she remained steadfastly devoted and loyal to Bruce Heezen. Whatever Heezen's accomplishments, his expanding Earth explanation for the mid-ocean ridge put him outside the circle that eventually (ala Hess) put the Plate Tectonic/sea-floor-spreading model on the right track. With Heezen's untimely death, Marie was left high and dry. This raises some unseemly questions about the professional relationship between Heezen and Marie, not developed in this book. Certainly Bruce was aware of the underlying forces upon which power was wielded at Lamont and in the overall geoscience community. The issue of Marie completing her doctorate must have been mentioned at some point, and it is entirely conceivable that Marie, with her pre-eminent position in the geoscience community already established, could have obtained her doctorate without much trouble (there were women in the doctoral program by the late 1960s.) That Marie seemed to be satisfied with that odd arrangement is no excuse - it sealed her fate. Marie's place in the pantheon of Plate Tectonic Theory is better established than Felt would have it. And, Tharp is not the only geoscientist to be slighted in the crush of praise reserved for Hess. For example, textbooks often give short shrift to J.T. Wilson's transform faults - without them the interpretation of the pattern of the mid-ocean rift would be meaningless. When examining the history of scientific revolutions, one must take a holistic view and not focus on one idea or individual. The time was ripe for change. Geosynclinal theory had reached an absurd, Rube-Goldbergian low point. The ocean floor maps (and their iconic mid-ocean-rift-valley) provided the visual spark essential for understanding the parallel denouement of seismic and magnetic signals. The ocean-floor maps that Marie Tharp and Bruce Heezen produced will stand the test of time - they are on a par with Amerigo Vespucci's 15th century map of the new world. Several pages of notes and an index but no real bibliography accompany the text, which for the most part was free of errors (with the notable exception of the

There was so much about this book that was well conceived and written. Then there were the parts where the author was confused about whether she was writing a novel or a biography.. The ridiculous personal details, like Marie wadded another piece of paper and threw at the floor or the secretary took off her earring when she answered the door, ad nauseum, ruined this reading experience and was a disservice not only to Ms. Tharp but also to the author. The so called editor of this book should go back to editing romance novels.

I always enjoy reading about moments of discovery. Marie Tharp turned geology on its ear when she rightly interpreted the Great Atlantic Rift and the Rift Valley from the soundings she was recording on paper and the map of known volcanoes. It must have been an exciting moment.

I enjoyed this book very much , and had not even heard of this wonderful woman, who mapped the ocean floor. I thought it might be a bit dry, or dull, but it was not. I feel quite a kinship, and also some sorry for Marie Tharp. She was so brilliant, but sadly did not receive much credit for all of her work.

I really enjoyed reading about Marie Tharp, the woman who first mapped the ocean floor. She first visioned the great Atlantic Rift that runs the length of the Atlantic Ridge. Many poo-pooed her until none other than Jacques Cousteau took the first video of the rift. Marie never received the credit she deserved for her many maps, and ultimately The Map of the entire ocean floor that led to the confirmation of Plate Tectonics - Geology's equivalence of Biology's Evolution. I would have given the book five stars, but it was a bit repetitive in places - only due to Hali Felt's admiration of Marie Tharp.

I was assigned to read this book for my GEOL 100 class. The book is a very easy read and very insightful to the world of early Geology research. Would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in Geology and the ocean floor.

An interesting story, reasonably well told. I greatly enjoyed the science behind the tale and the all too frequent story of how women were generally not allowed to reach their full potential or gain full credit for their work. While not perfect, the situation for women today is much improved.

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