

Swiftwater Rescue the Slim Ray Way

Review by Jim Segerstrom

Slim Ray knows of what he writes. An accomplished whitewater boater, he worked for a number of years at Nantahala Outdoor Center in North Carolina, where he and partner Les Bechdel pioneered many of the river rescue programs which are still taught today.

He was part of early national efforts to interchange rescue information, first through the American Canoe Association, then at early national conferences, such as that held by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources in 1980, where I first met him. He traveled Europe to participate in river rescue conferences, bringing back their ideas to us. In 1983, he wrote, in conjunction with Les Bechdel, the first nationally published book on the subject, *River Rescue*, now in its third printing.

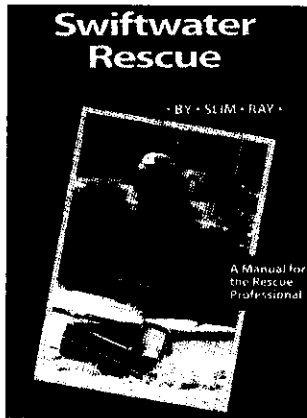
Slim became a Rescue 3-certified instructor in the mid-80s, quickly becoming one of the most active—teaching firefighters and rescue personnel throughout the U.S. He encouraged the American Canoe Association to approach Rescue 3 to aid in that organization's initial efforts to train river rescue instructors. He was also key in the formation of the Swiftwater Rescue Advisory Committee, now a part of the National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR).

Finally, he became both a symbol of rescue training and the hazards of swiftwater after he fractured his spine during a kayaking trip when his kayak became vertically pinned.

Fortunately for Slim, all of his companions on that trip were trained in swiftwater rescue and emergency medicine. They were able to extricate and immobilize him, then set up an evacuation system so that he could be moved to a rescue helicopter. The accident left Slim in a wheelchair. . . which slowed him down precisely for a year.

Slim still teaches for Rescue 3 International, and acts on the Advisory Board of the International Rescue Instructors Association. He rafts, kayaks and swims swiftwater, leaving the demonstration of the legged skills in swiftwater rescue classes to his co-instructors, but is still on deck to give students the benefits of his worldwide experience in river rescue.

Swiftwater Rescue is a compilation of the key facets of the many Rescue 3 courses that Slim teaches, combined with salient points from myriad river rescue courses, sources and lessons from real-life incidents. Additionally, he highlights many of the "tips and tricks" from other areas and specialized courses, including incident management concerns, Rescue 3's Aquatic Helicopter Rescue course, and advanced problems, such as night searches, major flood incidents, and urban situations like confined spaces and hazardous materials.



This book provides the student with an excellent overview of what has become a vast area of technical rescue. Slim rightly identifies two concerns: Such a text is no substitute for certified training, and major urban floods will quickly become the No. 1 weather-related rescue problem in the next century.

For individuals and agencies interested in getting on, or remaining on, the cutting edge, *Swiftwater Rescue* is an indispensable part of the library.

Swiftwater Rescue: A Manual for the Rescue Professional by Slim Ray; CFS Press, 1997; ISBN 0-9649585-0-3; \$24.95 plus s&h. To order, call 828/253-9102 or access the CFS website at www.cfspress.com.

Jim Segerstrom is founder and current vice president for operations for Elk Grove, CA-based Rescue 3 International. He is a 24-year member of the Tuolumne County, California Sheriff's Search and Rescue Team, where he is the current technical team leader. He is also a member of the Advanced Rescue Technology editorial advisory board.

Review by Norm Rooker, EMT-P

Ask just about any fire or EMS department if they do animal rescue, or have SOPs for dealing with trapped or injured animals, and you'll pretty much get the same response: "We don't do animal rescue."

My wife, Vicki, a paramedic of many years, has recently become hooked on two cable TV shows. Seven nights a week, on the Animal Planet station, they air *Emergency Vets* and *Animal Rescue*. Both of these shows follow the *Rescue 911* format established by William Shatner. I teased Vicki about this when she had it on one night until I too found myself entranced.

One segment was about a horse whose barn had been hit by a large mud slide. The slide collapsed part of the barn, knocking the horse down and burying the back half of it beneath mud and debris. A southern California fire department responded to the mud slide, and proceeded to try to free the trapped animal while the unstable hillside continued to slip down on the rescuers and the horse. Through the valiant efforts of the firefighters, ranchers and animal control people, the horse was pulled out just before it would have been buried by a last wave of mud. I literally had tears in my eyes. It was a heroic rescue in the face of overwhelming odds. I'm willing to bet though that the fire department involved officially doesn't do animal rescue. After all, what is the stan-



Slim shares time-proven strategies and recommendations on how to safely approach an animal without startling it.

standard fire department response to requests to get a cat out of a tree? "We don't do animal rescue." (Despite the fact you don't see trees full of cat skeletons.)

My department will tell you the same thing. Yet I can show you news footage of one of our truck companies being sent to assist an animal control officer in securing a 4' iguana. The segment begins with a tight shot of an angry, frightened, hissing iguana, with large, highly visible claws, and a long tail whipping about. The camera pans back to one of San Francisco's finest climbing a ladder with an animal control capture stick while softly calling, "Here, lizard, lizard."

Over the past two winters, El Nino and La Nina storms have severely damaged California coastal cliffs, which has resulted in numerous landslides and much damage to trail systems. In the last 11 months, we have assisted the National Park Service in 23 cliff rescues for foolish humans and 27 more for dogs who were off leash and followed old trails right off the edge of newly formed bluffs and cliffs.

At several fires, our paramedics have revived cats overcome by smoke, and, in a recent case, successfully resuscitated a dog in respiratory arrest, which included intubating and transporting the canine, with supervisory authorization, to an emergency animal hospital where the dog made a full recovery. But don't get me wrong: "We don't do animal rescue."

Slim Ray, a pioneer of modern swiftwater rescue, author of *Swiftwater Rescue: A Manual for the Rescue Professional*, the *Swiftwater Rescue Field Guide*, co-author of *River Rescue* (with Les Bechdel), and recipient of the Higgins and Langley Memorial Award for Outstanding Achievement in Swiftwater Rescue Lifetime Achievement Award, has come out with a new book, *Animal Rescue in Flood and Swiftwater Incidents*, the first in his Floodfighters Series.

I caught up with Slim Ray at RESPONSE 99, the annual educational conference for the National Association for Search and Rescue, and asked him what the genesis was for *Animal Rescue*.

"There are several reasons for this book," explained Slim. "In the 1990s, we started seeing more animal rescues in flood situations. Approximately half of all U.S. households have a pet of some kind, and there are thousands of head of valuable livestock in flood-prone areas. This leads to two classic problems that came to the forefront in the 1997 California floods: First, people will not evacuate without their animals or they won't evacuate because they don't know what to do about their animals. Second, after they've been safely evacuated, they start to feel so guilty or concerned about their animals back at the homestead with no food or clean water, that they sneak back in, usually in the dark of night, and frequently have to be rescued again, this time with their animals. Therefore, animal rescue was being identified as an increasingly frequent flood rescue problem, yet most emergency services still had no policy or SOPs for addressing it. What was being done was usually winging it. Adapting, improvising, and hopefully, being

successful. The funny thing about animal rescue is that everyone says they don't do it, then they turn right round and tell you all about the ones they've done."

To address this growing need, Slim wrote a succinct book on the topic—just 70 pages from start to finish, including an introduction, three chapters and 10 appendices. Everything is covered in clear text, free of jargon, with multiple illustrations and photos to support the points being made.

Chapter one is a brief review on swiftwater rescue and the dangers and hazards of moving water. This chapter is aimed at animal control officers and others not familiar with swiftwater rescue to familiarize them with the hazards inherent in water rescue.

Chapter two deals with communicating with animals and animal behavior. Beginning with an orientation on how animals communicate and perceive humans, including tone of voice and body language, Slim shares time-proven strategies and recommendations on how to safely approach an animal without startling it. From this general introduction, he divides the chapter into three sections: small animals, large animals and exotics. Each animal profiled features a photo of the animal, an attack profile, the recommended way to approach the animal, how to read that animal's body language and how to safely handle the animal. Animals covered include horses, cows, goats, ostriches, emus, llamas, large cats, snakes, wolves and iguanas.

Chapter three covers the handling and transport of animals, hazards to watch for and avoid (such as where to position your boat or raft in relation to a swimming animal), and basic animal first-aid. The chapter finishes with a section on working with animal control agencies, the Humane Society and veterinarians.

Ten appendices support this information, including a swiftwater rescue site checklist, pet care in disasters, how to do a pet population estimate in your response area, disaster preparation for horses and how to treat critical injuries before the vet arrives. There is even an appendix on the Anderson Sling, which is a commercially available sling and rigging system for the aerial evacuation of horses.

Animal Rescue in Flood and Swiftwater Incidents provides a tremendous amount of useful information. It is richly supplemented with numerous photos and illustrations, and provides a list of references and resources for the reader to track down further information.

There are few "must have" books in the rescue field, but if your department or agency does swiftwater rescue of any sort, this book is as close to a must have as you can get. ■

Animal Rescue in Flood and Swiftwater Incidents (Floodfighters Series) by Slim Ray; CFS Press, 1999; ISBN 0-9649585-2-X; \$7.95 plus s&h. To order, call 828/253-9102 or access the CFS website at www.cfspress.com.

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