

# THE RESCUER



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## Riverboard Ecstasy 2001

By Julie Munger, SRT Instructor Trainer

Last December, three well-trained and eager women set out to fulfill a dream thought by some to be impossible, imprudent, and ill conceived. The dream: to riverboard 295 miles of the Colorado River, from Glen Canyon Dam to Lake Mead, unassisted by a raft, in the cold waters of winter. That we would succeed is only a small part of this story of joy and adventure, and maybe not the most important part, for this is a story based on the belief that a simple journey is still worth doing. Our success was not only measured in the distance we traveled, or accomplishing the unaccomplished, but instead in the more intangible elements of solitude, new intimacy with the river, teamwork, humor in the face of crisis, flexibility, and dogged persistence.

Our story actually began in November of 2000, when Teresa Yates, Kelley Kalafatich, and I showed up at Lees Ferry with a riverboard permit in hand and were literally laughed off the river by some Glen Canyon



Rangers. Word got around and another ranger, sent by the River District Ranger, informed us that we could not launch without a boat, as it was illegal for us to use the riverboards because they were an “aid” to swimming. We peacefully contested their decision and departed with our hearts in our shoes. We were also left with the impression that the park just didn’t understand exactly what a riverboard was or what we were trying to do.

The three of us, along with Ruthie Stoner, spent the next three days preparing a 100 page document showing the riverboard as a watercraft; the historical evolution of watercraft in the Grand Canyon; the board’s recreational, commercial and rescue applications; our ability to carry all park service required gear; and our experience as applicants. Barry Edwards, Eric Martin, Bob Carlson and Casey Garland contributed personal testimonies to the document that were essential!

When it was done we presented our document to the River District Ranger. After looking it over he actually agreed with our contention that it was indeed a misunderstanding that prevented our launch. All that was left was for our proposal to work its way up through the correct channels.

Despite monthly phone calls nothing happened until one of the rangers who laughed us off the river was promoted to River District Ranger. The first thing that landed on his desk was our proposal. The irony of the situation must have struck him because he navigated

### In This Issue

Riverboard Ecstasy .....	1
Caring for Your Drysuit .....	4
Down the Creek .....	5
Meet Our Talented People .....	6
Accident .....	7
Surfin’ the Web .....	back page
Calendar .....	back page

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

our request through the bureaucratic channels all the way to the Park Solicitor. In November of 2001, an enthusiastic voice informed me that we would be allowed to go, partially based on our river and rescue experience and partially based on the sensibility of our arguments.

On November 24<sup>th</sup>, under clear and cold winter skies, Kelley Kalafatich, a lifetime partner in adventure; Rebecca Rusch, a newer friend and teammate of ours on the U.S. Women's Rafting team, myself, and some supporters headed to the base of Glen Canyon Dam. It was an emotional start to the trip because my dad accompanied us upriver. The last time he had been on that section of the river was in 1959 during a six-week descent of Glen Canyon and the Grand Canyon with the Sierra Club in protest of the dam. His tear-stained cheeks were a testament to someone who knows from real experience what is under the waters of the dam.

Our entire trip would be a process of discovery. It was not like we had it all exactly planned out. We figured out techniques that worked as we went, which was part of the fun. There were no "how to" books, just good equipment, good spirits, and lots of extra cord and duct tape in case something went wrong.

Friends, fishermen, and rangers were shaking their heads as all of our gear, towed behind us on another riverboard, turned turtle before we even made it out of the Lees Ferry eddy at mile 15. The idea to use a riverboard for our gear came after realizing that the minimum amount of weight we needed for a safe winter trip was about 80-100 pounds each. The abalone floats, daypacks and other brilliant ideas we came up with were inadequate for this amount of gear. Kelley spent a day in the surf with Bob Carlson (developer of the Carlson River Rescue Board), and the idea to use a riverboard for the gear evolved. We tried it out on the lower American River in early November and we soon realized that it was the best idea.

My journal entry at Rider Canyon, Nov. 29, Mile 34 reads:

"We pushed off the beach from Badger at 12:30 pm and the first thing that happened, again, was that Kelley and Rebecca's boards rolled over on the eddy lines and we pulled over and rerigged! We found today that a low

and wide rig works much better than getting up high at all. A low, wide profile is key. We floated down to Soap Creek rapid. We stopped briefly to look at reptile tracks in the Coconino and then Rebecca and I pushed off, letting our gear boards run in front of us. Soap had big waves today. Feel so small, dropping into these rapids on those little boards. I actually know the river so well that I can figure out where I am, but otherwise you are just lost amidst the waves. You can really feel



copyright Rebecca M Rusch

the power and gentleness of the river all at once."

We learned over the first couple of days that by rigging our gear wide and low we actually created a stable craft. Like packing a horse, weight distribution was the key to creating a perfectly stable platform.

We towed our loads in the flatwater with a floating rope and handle attached into the quick release ring on the back of our live bait jackets. Anytime the water got rough we detached them from our jackets and stuffed the rope into a bag attached to the front of the board. Through rapids we would either float next to our gear holding on tight, or simply let it ride through on its own and retrieve it at the bottom. We found that we would expend less energy by actually holding on to the side of our gear board than kicking back to them afterwards, and after we learned to highside, the extra weight of our gear helped to stabilize us.

We were able to keep our gear 100% dry in our Watershed drybags. The only time we had ANY water was when we failed to close them correctly and even then there were only drops of water. The bags were unbelievable. The stories of Bill Beer and John Daggett, men who actually swam the canyon in the 50's, convinced us that the amount of fun we would have

would be directly proportional to how dry we could keep our sleeping bags, camp clothes, and food. Because of the Watershed bags, we slept warm and dry every night and ate delicious meals instead of soggy pasta and disintegrated oatmeal. If we had the added challenge of wet gear, I am honestly not sure our spirits would have held out as well as John and Bill's did.

It seems our trip provided us, uniquely, with one challenge at a time. After we got some of our leaky drysuits fixed, we had a gas stove canister burst into a stream of fire.

My journal entry at South Canyon, Dec. 2<sup>nd</sup>, mile 45:

"Beautiful light on the walls, normal dinner routine, normal night until something happened with the fuel bottle and gas started spewing out and ignited Rebecca's hand and down jacket on fire!... Take a deep breath, one step at a time, manage the burns tonight, see how bad they are in the morning. We put her hand in a pot of cold water and gave her some whiskey. We popped the blisters as they started to fill with fluid and I have codeine in my pocket if it gets bad."

Fortunately for us her burns were only partial thickness and we were able to manage them each day by individually wrapping her fingers with gauze and tape, and further protecting them in a surgical glove. Eventually, even after hours and hours of repair work, those same stoves would all fail us completely, and we would resort to cooking on small fires for the duration of our trip. We had a metal oil pan and were very glad that it was required.

We frolicked in the rapids of the Inner Gorge. They were big, all encompassing, and completely exhilarating. At times we were scared, but aren't we all down there. Obviously, each day had its individual challenges and glories of which the details could fill a book. Ultimately, the more comfortable we became with ourselves in this new environment, the more we became a part of the river and the canyon.

As we reached Separation Canyon and knew the rapids were behind us, we started to relax a little bit and spent time reflecting with each other about our journey. Even so, the Canyon's powerful beauty kept our focus on her.

My journal entry, Dec. 15: 5 am, mile 280 reads:

"Cold, rainy night. Asleep at 7:30 pm yesterday. Exquisite, clouds pouring over limestone walls, snow everywhere, Yosemite like, it is like another world here where pterodactyls should be appearing and dinosaurs. We are camped above the lake line in a tamarisk grove - slippery, slidey mud to get down to the river. Lashed boards together into a big floating platform - kicked some, floated some, sat backwards and kicked some, 26 miles yesterday. We think we will make it to Pierce's Ferry today. Rebecca is wet and worried, we've had a couple cold days, cold but so beautiful. Will we really emerge today, into a land of flashing Christmas tree earrings, is it really Christmas out there?"

We kicked into Pierce's Bay on Dec 15 at around 2 pm. We celebrated our arrival and disgust with the reservoir at the same time with a bad bottle of rot-gut whiskey as we kicked the last half mile in the flatwater of the reservoir. Two good friends, Carr Clifton and Abigail Polsby waited out a two-day snow storm to meet us at the closest turnout and we staggered up a silty shoreline with gear in tow for our final look back.

My last journal entry reads:

"We were immersed in the intimacy of water. A part of the river - its gentleness and strength. Enveloped in its light - the snow catching the emerald reflection of the river, the walls bathed in orange and red. The solitude and silence of our days punctuated by the songs of canyon wrens, calls of migratory ducks and geese, the shrieks of wisdom from the herons, and the soft storm of wind from the flapping of an eagle's wings."

To all of you who believed in this dream and contributed ideas and encouragement, or even just smiles, I say a huge, "thank you". When you have a dream that is initially a little off the wall, you find there are two kinds of people: the ones who simply say it will never happen and have all sorts of sensible reasons why and those that immediately start thinking of how to help make it work! Without these latter people, our trip would not have been possible. The American spirit of adventure and discovery is still very much alive in the spirits and souls of all those willing to support someone trying to do something different--not for the glory or money involved, but just for the doing of it. 🏔️

## Tech Tips

# Caring For Your Drysuit

*The following tips come from OS Systems, one of the leading manufacturers of quality rescue drysuits. It is intended for OS Systems suits, but the tips apply equally well to other brands.*

### Shell Care

Your shell is primarily nylon with a waterproofing layer physically bonded to the inside. After use, the material should be rinsed in clean, fresh water. The dirt or grime can be washed off with a mild soap and a soft brush. The inside of the suit should be cleaned also, to remove perspiration and body oils. **DO NOT hang your suit in the sun** to dry as this damages the material and causes leaks. Allow the shell to air dry, perform seal and zipper maintenance and roll the suit for storage.

To roll the suit, lay it with the zipper open and facing the floor. Begin rolling from the feet towards the neck. When your suit is rolled up to the neck, fold the arms/zipper over the roll and the suit is ready to be stored in the suit bag (optional).

### Seal Care

Wash the rubber with a mild soap and water solution to remove all contamination from body oil, pollution, lotions, etc. Apply silicone to the cleaned rubber. Insure that you are using a food grade silicone grease, oil or spray.

**NOTE:** Applying silicone to a contaminated seal will only trap the contaminants and accelerate the deterioration. Store the suit rolled up, in a bag to minimize the air flow around the seals. This allows the silicone to protect the rubber longer.

New neck or wrist seals may feel tight or a little restrictive at first but will relax with use. It is possible

to pre-stretch your seals by inserting a soda bottle into the neck and/or wrists while soaking the rubber with liquid silicone. This should make the seals feel more comfortable. Contact your dealer if you still need any additional sizing or trimming.

### Zipper Care



While operating the zipper, care should be taken to insure that no dirt or foreign material is trapped at the sealing surface that could cause a leak or dislodge a tooth. Zipper teeth are to be cleaned regularly using a soft bristle brush and mild soap.

Lubricate the outside of the teeth using **OS Systems Zipper Ease** (not paraffin or a MAX WAX type of product). **Do not** use silicone spray, grease or oil on the zipper teeth as it will attract and hold dirt and accelerate wear damage at the rubber's edge. Apply **OS Systems Zipper Ease** to the inside of the teeth in the same manner as the outside.

Firmly grasp the zipper teeth between two fingers and squeeze while drawing your hand the length of the zipper. This does two things ...it forces the lubricant between the teeth where it does the most good and it removes the excess lubricant .

Apply a small amount of silicone grease or oil on the zipper fabric between the teeth and the seam. This helps protect the rubber of the fabric and keeps it from discoloring the surrounding material.

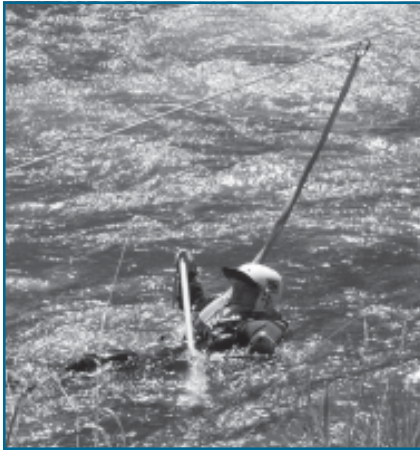
Store the zipper completely open and **do not close it** until the suit is on and ready to use. Sliders should operate smoothly and easily.

If binding does occur **STOP! DO NOT FORCE THE SLIDER!!** Reopen the zipper; inspect; clean and lubricate as necessary. 🚫

## Down the Creek *With* a Paddle

by Phil Turnbull

We've all seen it many times: a student swept downstream while practicing shallow water crossings attempts to swim to shore with a paddle in their hand. You swear the darn thing was going to drown them and of course many of them figure out they can swim a whole lot better without it and let it go... bye-bye paddle.



But it doesn't have to end this way. There is an alternative known to seasoned paddleboat rafters and

SRT Instructors that will allow the student to keep their shallow water crossing paddles. In fact the *Back Paddle Swim* technique not only saves paddles, it's also an excellent aggressive swimming skill in its own right.

Simply instruct students to obtain their ferry angle, then hold the paddle to the outside (opposite the direction they wish to travel) and use a backstroke. It needs to be a deep stroke with the blade held in close to their body. A wider grip than used in a raft will work best. You may also need to tell them to pull the paddle completely out of the water for the return stroke. Oh, and have them kick like heck in order to maintain their 45 degree ferry angle. Other than that it's pretty simple.

With a little practice they'll have a surprisingly swift and powerful ferry technique, and you'll have all your paddles. 🐾

## New Rescue Catalogs are Mailing!

The Rescue Source team has been hard at work this winter putting together information on all the newest rescue "toys". The result is *The Rescue Source's* 2002-2003 catalog!

### *New for 2002*

- RQ3 Stretcher Rigging System - This 4 point adjustable litter bridle features 4 locking snap links so no searching for carabiners when you need them! Retail price: \$189.00
- The Pocket Pouch Drop Bag - Designed to fit into most cargo pockets, this bag comes empty or with 60' of 5mm tech cord. Bag only is just \$16.95; w/ cord it retails for \$79.95

There are many other new and exciting items plus all of your old favorites. Look soon for your catalog and call if you need extras! (Prices listed are retail and do not reflect normal instructor or volume discounts.)



## Featured Product from The Rescue Source Clearance List

### DS2100 Tsunami Gore-Tex Drysuit

This drysuit is very popular for rafting and rescue. It has a special pile lined collar that is ideally suited to wind chill situations like early season rafting and rescue work in heavy air. Features include reinforced seat and knees, neoprene cuff covers, extra heavy-duty latex neck, wrist, and ankle zipper. Tsunami is made of Gore-Tex MI-211 Laminate fabric and includes YKK metal tooth waterproof zipper. Color: Navy/Yellow Size: Medium only

List Price \$609.95

**Clearance Special \$465.00**

Only 6 left!

Rescue Source has a number of products on the clearance list. Call 1-800-457-3728 for a full list.



## Meet Our Talented People!

A number of our readers have asked to know a little about our office staff. In the next few issues we plan to introduce some of our talented people.



Many of the Rescue 3 instructors and students have already “met” Debi on the phone. Her friendly laugh and love of people can’t help but come through in her conversations. Debi is in charge of almost everything that relates to instructors. She takes class material orders, determines whether an instructor is active or inactive, and answers any number of instructor related questions. She is also in charge of helping instructors to understand Rescue 3 policy as it relates to them. Debi is a great resource for instructors, and should you have any questions, she is always more than happy to answer them.

### Personal info:

Debi is the mother of two teenage boys, as well as being married to a pilot. Most of her time is split between watching her sons play baseball, and going to the theater.

### Message to Instructors and Students:

“I really enjoy talking to each and every one of you. Someday I would like to get the opportunity to meet you all so that I can put a face with your voices!” 📞

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## Accident on the Pacuare River

### Based on Information from Jim Rowe

On Saturday, February 16, a 21 year old man drowned on the Pacuare River in Costa Rica. Moises Torres Scoze was an experienced river runner, a Swiftwater Rescue Technician, and a native of Turrialba, Costa Rica. He was a capable swimmer and had previously run this section of the river. He was in the process of becoming a guide with a company called Costa Rica Rios y Aventuras that was running the rafting trip.

This is a company that focuses mostly on kayaking trips and courses, but they also have one raft. The day of the accident the company had two clients in the raft, the river guide, as well as two guides in training. The river guide worked mostly as a kayak guide and instructor. He had been serving as a raft guide for 3-4 years and is a Swiftwater Rescue Technician 1. There was also a safety kayak that went with the group.

The safety kayak ran the normal route through the rapid, Lower Huacas, (left-center-left) prior to the paddle boat. The route that the raft took was a left extreme route to the left of the marker rock and to the left of the rock that is approximately 20 feet from the left hand rock ledge. The raft became lodged on some rocks, and the guide instructed the passengers to bounce so as to get the raft off of the rocks. The raft became free, but lacked the velocity to clear the left side re-circulating hydraulic wave. The raft began to bounce. The back end sunk with the bow end down, causing the raft to flip. When it flipped all clients and guides entered the water, and most people went very deep. The people were pushed into the far left wall while the raft continued down stream.



It is most probable that the drowning occurred against the rock wall, which is slightly undercut. Also, those who first entered the water may have been pushed further into the currents. This is due to the fact that the raft may have pinned some of the passengers against the rock ledge for a short time. Everyone emerged from the hydraulic area, including the victim who was face down. Guides from the other companies on the river pulled the victim from the river and began CPR. CPR was continued for 45 minutes on site, but to no avail.

The victim was wearing a Type III PFD and a helmet, both of which remained on him until he was removed from the water. The victim also had a history of shoulder problems, including a dislocation. During the autopsy it was discovered that the victim had dislocated his shoulder during the incident, which may have impeded his ability to swim.

*We deeply regret the loss of life of a friend and student of SRT Instructor, Phillip Perez.* 🖤

#### FDNY 9-11-01 Memorial Decals



- 100% of profits are donated to FDNY Widows and Orphans Fund
- 3 1/2 inches square
- Suitable for any nonporous surface such as glass or plastic

**Cost is \$5.50 which includes postage.**

(California residents add \$.35 tax)

**Available only through  
Rescue 3 and Rescue Source  
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## Surfin' the Web



- North American Safe Boating Campaign [www.safeboatingcampaign.com](http://www.safeboatingcampaign.com) The week of May 18-24 is National Safe Boating Week. This website offers materials, logos, and suggestions for planning public education events in your area.
- Wilderness Medical Association [www.wildmed.com](http://www.wildmed.com) The Wilderness Medical Association (WMA) and Rescue 3 have begun working together in many areas. To learn more about who the WMA is and what they do, please visit their website!

## Calendar

- April 14, 2002. *National Disaster Medical System Conference*, Atlanta, GA. The purpose is to promote interaction between local, state and federal public health practitioners and policy makers. For more information visit their website at [www.oep-ndms.dhhs.gov](http://www.oep-ndms.dhhs.gov), call 800-872-6367, or e-mail at [ndms@usa.net](mailto:ndms@usa.net)
- April 8-13, 2002. *FDIC 2002*, Indianapolis, IN. This is the annual Fire Dept. Instructor's Conference held each year in Indianapolis. For more information on this show, visit the website at [www.fdic.com](http://www.fdic.com)
- April 28-May 2, 2002. *FDIC-West 2002*, Sacramento CA. Similar to Indianapolis for the west coast. For more information on this show, visit the website at [www.fdic.com](http://www.fdic.com)
- July 19-21, 2002. *Firehouse Expo*, Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore, MD. This conference is dedicated to Fire, Rescue and EMS personnel. For more information on this show, visit the website at [www.firehouseexpo.com](http://www.firehouseexpo.com)