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Dr. Rip's Essential Beach Book: Everything You Need to Know about Surf, Sand, and Rips

By Rob Brander (2010). Sydney: University of New South Wales Press. 238 pages. Paperback. ISBN: 978 1 74223 097 9

Reviewed and written by Stephen Langendorfer

This is one of the first media reviews I have written of a text not published by Human Kinetics so you may be wondering why a review of this particular book with the rather odd title. The answer is simple: Rob Brander walked up to me during the World Conference on Drowning Prevention (WCDDP), complimented me on *IJARE* and its contributions to the aquatic literature, and handed me a copy of his recent book, while at the same time wondering aloud if *IJARE* ever published book reviews. Of course we do publish reviews, and as I am fond of saying, "flattery will get you everywhere!" I should probably note that Rob is the "Dr. Rip" in the title, an honorific bestowed by fellow beach aficionados for his fascination with and dedication to studying and understanding rip currents.

When I opened up Rob's book I had no idea what to expect other than to test the author's claim that more people need to know about the topic of his book. As a western New Yorker by birth and a Midwesterner by adult habitation, I have had meager exposure to ocean beaches having grown up swimming in "ponds, cricks, rivers, and the Finger Lakes. Of course, as I wrote in one of my earliest editorials, I did first begin my road toward learning to swim in the Atlantic Ocean off North Carolina's coast as an infant. My wife, children and I vacationed with close family friends a week for each of 8 straight summers during the 1980s and early 1990s on one of the Brunswick beaches in southern North Carolina near the South Carolina border. Everyone seems to have very fond memories of those weeks, much as Rob does from his childhood vacations on Cape Cod. I admit that beaches are an acquired and somewhat narrowly-experienced taste for me although I enjoy body surfing perhaps almost as much as Rob does. I have to say up front that I did learn quite a bit about beaches from Rob's book. I relate what I think are some of the more interesting elements subsequently, so read on.

For readers who wonder about reading this book, I have to say that I was pleasantly surprised with the book. First of all, it is a quick and enjoyable read. Rob writes with a very easy, folksy voice in which his humor comes across loud and clear. I can tell I would like to spend more time with him. I can imagine the laughter from swapping aquatic tales. Rob has organized the book into six logical chapters, each with its own unique story to tell. He illustrates the book with plentiful panoramic photos and a few drawings of beaches from around the world while providing numerous other sidebars to support his chapter topics. I easily finished reading his book cover-to-cover on the plane flights back from Vietnam and the WCDDP. I suppose while this organization manages to provide nifty examples to reinforce his stories, I actually sometimes found his stories to be so engaging that I

found myself mildly annoyed to have to skip several pages of photos or sidebars to continue the “rest of his story.” In case Rob wonders, this criticism is a backhanded compliment to his engaging writing style. As a trained and practicing “coastal geomorphologist,” it would be easy to succumb to spouting jargon about beaches. While introducing the reader to appropriate terminology about beaches, he manages to do so without coming across as stuffy or excessively erudite. Instead, to me it was apparent that this was someone who knows his stuff about beaches and is keen on helping others share his passion for all things beaches.

The book’s chapter organization follows a consistent, yet not boring approach. In a way each chapter adheres to the old journalistic maximum of “tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them.” It is surprisingly effective, remaining fresh chapter after chapter. I particularly liked “The Bottom Line” sidebar of “take-home messages” that concluded each chapter. I found myself reading each and quizzing myself to see if I remembered what I had learned from reading that particular chapter.

Whether you are a landlocked Midwesterner like me or someone who lives near a coast and beaches, I predict you can learn something from *The Essential Beach Book*. Do you know the standard parts of any sandy beach? Do you know what the four types of beaches are? Can you identify the existence of a rip current and know the best way to “save yourself?” What are the differences between rips and “undertow?” How do “tidal waves” and “tsunamis” differ? These are just a few of the amazing pieces of information imbedded within this popular, but very informative book. I know that I will be an insufferable bore on my next trip to an ocean beach as I describe the type of beach and the parts of the beach! As an avid “know-it-all,” I cannot wait!

Of course, *Dr. Rip’s Essential Beach Book* is not for everyone. If you are a died-in-wool landlubber who avoids beaches with a passion, it probably holds limited interest. If you are a “don’t bother me with facts” type, you may also not appreciate the book. For those who occasionally visit beaches and have some curiosity as well as who wish to remain safe at beaches, then I can recommend this book for your preparation before your next beach visit or maybe for some interesting beach reading.