Lockheed Fire 8-13-09
reported by Debra Means
Santa Cruz County’s
South County Equine Evac Team Leader

Partners in crime: Loren Keeley, Debra’s co-team leader & Otis Johnson, Debra’s trailer partner
Highway 1 view
heading toward Scott Creek
Lookie Loos from Highway 1
Both the northern & southern Swanton Road junctions to Highway 1 are closed off by CHP. Loren & I arrive at 577 Swanton Road to evacuate 2 older horses. Unfortunately, I did not think or have time to take pictures as the horse owner attempted to hand me the 1st horse. The 2nd horse plowed over the horse owner who fell down, lost control of the 1st horse, & we think he broke his wrist.

Both horses galloped away full speed in the direction of the fire. There were several people around to help ‘catch’ the horses (including an Eyewitness 5 TV cameraman & a kid on an ATV), but their attempts drove the horses further away. As I hiked up the hill, with leaping flames in sight, I was able to jump on the chestnut horse’s dragging lead line, catch him & walk him back down the hill to Loren & the trailer. Shortly thereafter, a screaming black horse came thundering toward us & the trailer to be with his equine companion.
Helicopter flying low to pick up water in marsh
After Loren & my eventful equine rescue, Otis & I are standing by in the ‘hurry up & wait mode’ at Equine Evac’s staging area which is located at the cement plant in Davenport. Besides us, there are about 8 other horse trailer teams, a couple Animal Services representatives, & Hap, an ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Services) ham radio operator who are all chomping at the bit to help out.

A call comes in that there are 40 (Yep, that’s 40 !!!) llamas that need to be evacuated in Bonny Doon. Since cell phones do not work well in most of Bonny Doon, & Otis & I are ham radio operators as well as Equine Evac members, we are dispatched as the reconnaissance team to confirm the location of the llamas & how many trailers will actually be needed for such a mission.

After going through several road blocks, passing numerous pieces of fire equipment & busy enforcement & fire personnel, we find a huge bucolic meadow in front of looming blob of smoke. There is Danielle, an Animal Services employee, who is flagging us down. We notice the driveway will be tricky to maneuver too many horse trailers at once. Justin, a jovial Animal Services specialist, who’s been looking around to confirm the llama count, suggests we acquire as many humans as possible to help corral the llamas. It turns out there are only 14 llamas instead of 40 which is...WHEW...WAY more manageable. I radio in the news & request just 5 more trailer teams. Trailer teams show up in record speed & they all somehow maneuver their way into the driveway & park to prepare for llama rescue.
We decide to corral the llamas into smaller quarters, thinking it will be easier to ‘squeeze’ them into the horse trailer from the gate. Cardboard worked really well for ‘walling’ them into a smaller area.
After corralling a few llamas into smaller quarters, a trailer was backed to the gate & with the trailer door open, the llamas were guided from behind into the trailer. Note the words of wisdom on his shirt. 😊
Curtis, the owner of the 14 llamas, shows up after we have almost all of the llamas loaded up. He explains this llama has injured his neck & should probably stay separated from the stud llama. He thanks us profusely for our help.
We are VERY happy to be successful & professional llama wranglers.
Only 1 out of 14 llamas spit on us !!!
Ah, but the story is not over yet…

Half of my mind is back to work on Friday, mostly sharing with my neighboring offices about the latest fire stories. I’m also listening to the scanner & ham radio traffic regarding the fire’s current status. About 2:00pm, Resource Net is asking for a ham operator to take the next shift at the Fairgrounds as a liaison between Resource Net, Animal Services and ARES. So, I volunteer myself, lock up the office & head to Watsonville Fairgrounds, where evacuated horses, goats, sheep, ducks, geese, 1 pig, & the infamous Thayer Road llamas are temporarily housed on one side of the grounds & on the other side is the base camp for the hundreds of fire personnel fighting the Lockheed Fire.
There are plenty of tasks to occupy my time during my shift at the Fairgrounds. There are already devoted volunteers helping to exercise & feed the horses & other livestock, & they are under the friendly command of Amelia from Animal Services. I find out that assistance may be needed for some troubled horses who might have issues when the usual Friday night car races start up at 6pm. So I help move them out of box stalls & into bigger pens.
Shortly thereafter, Animal Services delivers 2 more late arrivals. I am truly honored & privileged to say that not only have I been spit on by a llama for the first time in my life, I have also been peed on by a scared goat as I help carry him out of the Animal Services van.

Signing off for now, your fellow animal lovin’ fool,

Debra who Means well...