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History and the Atmosphere **Stephen Perkins**

In the early morning of January 15, 1847, a rainbow appeared before the men of the Mormon Battalion. They had ten miles to march that day before dinner and another twenty miles after that. Water was so scarce that each man was rationed only one and a half pints a day. It was muddy and bad tasting, but they were glad to get it because they were so thirsty. The battalion continued to march until eleven o'clock that evening, rested and then started again at one in the morning. Down Carrizo Creek they pushed onward toward what is today known as Scissors Crossing--the junction of Highway 78 and S2 in eastern San Diego County. The men were exhausted and hungry and exposed, half naked, to a fierce tropical sun in the daytime and winter cold at night. Many men had no shoes. Averaging only twelve miles a day since leaving Santa Fe, they had just completed a march of nearly sixty miles in forty-eight hours, without water, and over the worst stretch of desert imaginable. (Ricketts 112).

Henry G. Boyle, of the Mormon Battalion, summed up the condition of the men:

We were all weary & fatigued, hungry, nearly naked & barefoot, but our burning thirst drowned every other suffering. At the Summit of every hill... how eagerly did we look forward and around us for the long expected watering place, but were as often disappointed. (Ricketts 113)

Ironically, water was all around them. The heat of the desert had evaporated the water into the air! The men and women of the Mormon Battalion were experiencing a meteorological phenomenon known as *rain shadow*. The Cuyamaca mountain range, rising six thousand feet from the desert floor, squeezes most of the moisture out of the air on its windward side by forcing that air up the slopes to produce rain. The air on the leeward side of the mountain, the side where the troops were, is forced downward and heated by compression, causing the remaining water to expand into the air. There is very little rain on the leeward side of a mountain (Ahrens 507).

Six months earlier, on June 26, 1846, Captain James Allen arrived at Mount Pisgah, Iowa, with orders from Colonel Stephen W. Kearny, First Dragoons, U. S. Army of the West, authorizing him to enlist five hundred Mormon volunteers to help secure California in the war with Mexico. Kearny was himself at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, preparing his army for the journey to California. The Mormon Battalion was made up of men representing various occupations and backgrounds, ranging in age from fourteen to sixty-eight years old. Thirty-one of the volunteers were joined by their wives and children. Three of their forty-four children and nine other boys served as aides to the officers of the battalion. One soldier brought his mother.

The Battalion arrived at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, on August 1, 1846, and were issued supplies and equipment. When the group left Fort Leavenworth thirteen days later, they began one of the longest infantry marches in United States history. The lack of food, water, and clothing caused unbelievable hardship and suffering as they traveled. The men would fill their mouths with buckshot and small stones in order to stimulate the flow of saliva. Some would fall to the wayside from exhaustion, only to be revived by stronger men who would bring water back to them at night after camp was made. Three separate detachments were sent back to Santa Fe

with the sick and emaciated. Only four of the women and one child who was not an aid, reached California (Ricketts 8,9).

The rainbow that the men saw that cold January morning in Carrizo Creek was a sign that their long journey of suffering was nearly ended, although, at that point, they could only hope it so. Moist mountain air, when mixed with a sun that is low on the horizon, produces a mirage of color that speaks of water at its base. Several more days of hardship lay ahead of them before they were to reach that water. Of the twenty-five government wagons and twelve private wagons that they set out with, only five remained. They crossed through a canyon the next day where they had to use crow bars and picks to carve a passage through the rock. The sides of the canyon were solid and the width of it was one foot too narrow for the wagons to pass. The wagons had to be disassembled and carried across, one by one, to the other side of the ravine. That night, they were cold and miserable and the following day the men had to use ropes to help the animals pull the wagons up the rocky terrain.

They camped at dusk on some grass near a few oak trees and on the following day came up a lush valley and over a rise and down to the rancho of Juan Jose Warner. After traveling over one thousand miles across the most hostile country any of them had ever known, they arrived at what must have appeared to them a vision of unbelievable beauty and serenity. Warner's Rancho lay in a valley between the mountains with a hot springs just up from the homestead. The ranch itself was equal in size to forty square miles. "The climate here is very different from that on the coast," Mr. Warner told them. "It is not uncommon for snow to be on the hills in June. Winter wheat can be sown here anytime from September to March and can produce thirty to fifty bushels to the acre" (Ricketts 115).

The men witnessed a performance of Indian horsemanship unlike any they had ever seen.

Throwing lassoes the Indians caught cattle quickly and easily exhibiting great skill as horsemen. A hog was purchased and the meal that evening was declared by many as the best they had ever eaten. The men bathed in the hot springs downstream a ways where the water was not so hot. Upstream the Indians were cooking their food in baskets that were placed in the boiling water of the hotter pools. The hospitality that Jose Warner afforded the beleaguered troops soothed not only their tired sore bodies but also their souls. They had been safely placed into the hands of God, Himself.

"I always like to give a little bit of local history with the ride," I said to the young couple sitting behind me in the glider. "Warner Springs has a colorful past. If you look over the right wing tip you can see where S2 runs into highway 79. The old rancho is just a mile back up S2. Here, I'll tip my wing so you can see it. That's the route Kearny used to come up from the desert. The Mormon Battalion was about six weeks behind him."

"Where are the hot springs? Can you see them from up here?" Janet asked.

"I'll fly up to the big pool at eagle's nest. It's the only spring you can see from the air." I answer as I make a steep banking turn. I notice that Janet's boyfriend wasn't saying much. A sure sign that a passenger may be feeling airsick. "Everything OK with you, Daniel," I ask.

"Fantastic," he replies. "It's so beautiful. I was just thinking about your story. From up here the valley probably looks like it did 150 years ago." He paused, then added, "Seeing this place for the first time, after that terrible trip--it must of been awesome. Almost spiritual. You know, the Indians and all. Wow! This is awesome!"

“Yes it is awesome,” I say. “And spiritual. You really hit the nail on the head. These mountains are sacred to the Indians.”

It always amazes me how astute people can be. I have been flying scenic rides in gliders for almost eight years now and I still get that same thrill. Five hundred times I’ve taken folks aloft over beautiful Warner valley. Five hundred times I’ve shared my own fascination and wonderment of this enchanted area. What I haven’t shared is my theory about the air beneath my wings. Without being able to put my finger on it, or touch it if you will, I know that this air that holds me in the sky, that lets me use but not possess, the air that dictates its whims, and consorts and teases--this air is *alive*.

I’m not speaking metaphorically here. I truly believe that this air, the atmosphere, is a living, breathing entity with a mind and a soul. I also believe that it is comprised of everything in existence today and everything that has ever existed in the past. As I pass through her, like a dolphin through a glorious sea, I become emersed in an ocean of the earth’s essence. The atmosphere that I fly in over the serene Warner Valley, is both powerful and humble, forgiving and unforgiving, magical and credible. I know this because I’ve experienced it. It’s only recently that I’ve figured this out.

The science of meteorology is the study of the weather, the climate and our environment. From drought and famine to devastating floods, some of the greatest challenges we face are created by weather. From global warming to the cooling brought on by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, our climate demands our attention. The dynamic nature of our atmosphere is truly awesome. Mountains take years to form, while a cumulus cloud can develop into a raging thunderstorm in less than an hour (Aherns xv- xvii).

Our weather is created by the uneven heating of the earth’s surface. If the world did not turn, one side would be extremely hot and the other side would be frozen. No life could exist in those extremes. As the earth rotates on its axis, the ground heats up from the sun’s radiation and the moisture that is close to the ground evaporates into a vapor that then rises. As this water vapor rises it moves away from the warm ground and cools, where it condenses back to a liquid and falls to the ground once more. The rotation of the earth causes this moisture laden air to move in a helix toward the poles. Falling air at the poles then moves back towards the equator where it is heated once again. The tilt of the earths axis causes the seasons as the earth moves around the sun.

To a glider pilot, this is the basic concept which propels the sport of soaring. Being able to find the warm air allows the sailplane and her commander to stay aloft and participate in the natural phenomenon that is our atmosphere. “Get high and stay high,” I tell my students. “The better you fly, the longer you stay up, and the more fun you have.” It’s a simple formula, but a complex challenge. Mother Nature is a willing contender. While the game can never be won, the individual contests can. The level of competition intensifies with the level of skill and the exhilaration is endless. “No single flight can show the novice the ever changing character of the atmosphere which provides the spice of variety for soaring. Today the stable air provides a glide of silky smoothness-but no “lift”. Tomorrow the air may be unstable and the hot sunshine will produce thermals that can carry the glider up a thousand feet in a single minute” (Conway 1).

About five years ago I fully experienced the magnificence of this creation of God in my tiny glider high above Warner Springs. I had arranged to give a new friend I meet in Utah a

glider ride while he was on vacation in San Diego. The sky was supercharged that day and on an earlier flight with a student I was able to soar above 10,000 feet. I had cleared my afternoon for my friend Keone and we launched around one o'clock. The tow plane released us directly above the old Warner Rancho and we were able to climb to nearly 12,000 feet in a single thermal. I headed south toward Julian and was able to maintain this altitude hopping from thermal to thermal with ease. With minimum instruction Keone could pilot our craft equally as well. An hour of this is usually plenty as "first timers" become overwhelmed quickly. The flight was so enjoyable that ninety minutes had elapsed before the decision was made to return to the field.

I turned back in the direction of the airport and could see a small rain streamer hitting the west end of the runway. Pointing this out to Keone, I told him we would have to wait for that rain to move away from the field. The streamer did not move though. It became larger. We were south of the field and a second streamer was sighted which also began to grow. To the north, on the other side of the airport, a third had also begun. To our amazement, these infantile rain showers grew into thunderstorms. At this point there was still a good ten miles between each of the storms. All three continued to grow. They were beginning to merge. I decided to attempt to fly between the one to our left and the one over the airport. Heading west, the thunderstorms were approximately five miles off each wingtip. Half way across the valley, it began raining. In no more than fifteen minutes the two storms converged on top of us.

We could see lightning below us and the outside edge of the thunderstorm out ahead. I accelerated to one hundred miles an hour, the maximum airspeed of our glider. I deployed full spoilers, a device to induce rapid descent. It was raining very hard now. I looked at my instruments. We were going up at 800 feet a minute. We were literally being sucked into the thunderstorm. It was at this point that I made one of the best decisions of my life. I turned around.

Flying east now, we could see the desert ahead of us. As we exited the canopy of the clouds, we were engulfed in sunlight and blue sky. "What do we do now?" asked Keone.

"We wait," I answered. And as we waited, we watched. We saw the full intent of Mother Nature from the most exquisite location imaginable. I don't know if Keone felt the same as I did, because we didn't talk. We just watched. I was but a grain of sand in the vastness of nature. I have never in my life experienced anything remotely close to what I felt that day. No words can describe it. It was spiritual. When we landed an hour later, we were both in an elevated state of euphoria. Unable to talk, we still communicated to each other our awe. The air around us, which had always been taken for granted, had blown us away.

History is in the air. The atmosphere contains not only the molecules of its composition, but an energy as well. This energy is generated and expended by the changing of liquid water into water vapor, a process known as *evaporation*, and then back to liquid water once again, called *condensation*. When the sun heats the ground, the moisture near the ground, seen as dew or fog, evaporates and rises. This water vapor contains part of the heat that was in the ground, known as *latent*, or hidden heat. The latent heat rises with the water vapor to an altitude where enough cooling can occur, resulting in condensation. The latent heat is then released as energy into the atmosphere (Ahrens 4).

This energy is what drives the weather, as seen most dramatically in thunderstorms and hurricanes. The same energy is also present on calm days as the process of uneven heating and cooling of the earth's surface is continuous. The ground that this energy is drawn from has the

experience of every living thing that has ever passed over it. If you believe as I do, that the spirit never dies, then the energy of that spirit never dies either. *That* energy, the energy of every living thing that has inhabited the earth, is being transferred from the ground to the sky everyday as well. It is part of the latent heat that has been taken from the ground, and exploded into the air as vibrant, electrified molecules.

I believe that the spirit of all who have inhabited Warner Valley is mixed into the air that I am flying through. The more charged the atmosphere becomes, the more alive the air feels. The spirit of the valley certainly does affect the weather conditions that I have experienced. It is not a coincidence that I found that great thermal over the Warner Rancho, or that when I was exiting that huge thunderstorm to find safe air, it was again over the old ranch house. It is almost as if I was granted the privilege of experiencing that incredible thunderstorm up close. The spiritual feelings I experienced at that time could have been induced by the spirit of old Juan Jose himself.

Agua Caliente Village, today known as Warner Springs, was originally known as Cupa, the ancestral tribal grounds of the Cupeno Indians. The Cupenos, having lived in the valley from time immemorial, attached great religious value to the many hot springs of the region. They also used the springs for leaching their acorns, washing their clothes, and bathing (Gold 3 of 5). They continued to reside in the valley through the Spanish occupation of their lands with the missions, the period of Mexican rule and secularization, and into the American tenure. Once the Americans arrived, however, Antonio Garra, a Cupeno from Warner's Ranch, attempted to organize local tribes to drive out all the Whites. The attempt failed, Garra was executed, and the village of Cupa was burned (Five Views 1 of 2).

Juan Jose Warner, a naturalized Mexican citizen, received his land grant from the Mexican Government in 1844, two years before America's war with Mexico. The grant included the Cupa Village and tribal grounds even though that land belonged to the Cupenos. Warner, like most large landholders in California at the time, relied almost entirely on Indian labor to do the work of the rancho. He allowed the Cupeno Indians to continue living on their ancestral land provided they worked on his property. In observing the Cupenos' living conditions in 1846, W. H. Emory, brevet major with the Corp of Engineers of General Kearny's Army of the West, described the Indians as "being held in a state of serfdom by Warner, and as being ill-treated" (*Out West* 471).

Juan Jose actually treated the Indians fairly and with respect. The relationship was more symbiotic in nature in that the two cultures were dissimilar yet their intimate association was mutually beneficial. The Indians took pride in their work and the ranch proved to be a safe haven for the Cupeno from other aggressive tribes of the region. When Stephen Kearny descended onto Warner's Ranch, late on the afternoon of December 2, he and his troops were mistaken for marauding Indians (Harlow 179). The inhabitants of the rancho, including the Cupeno Indians, bore arms against Kearny's troops, not fully understanding the commotion of their arrival.

Warner's Ranch had become famous across the country as a way station on the southern route to the gold fields, being the half-way point between the Colorado River and the Pacific Ocean. Warner outfitted a store and greeted many weary travelers in the years after the Mormon Battalion passed through. In 1858 John Butterfield's Overland Mail began carrying passengers and mail by way of the Ranch on its route from St. Louis to San Francisco. During the next three decade more than 200,000 people entered or left California through Warner's Ranch (Gold 2).

What a fascinating time in the history of Southern California! Imagine riding the Butterfield Stage from Santa Fe, across the same hostile desert that Kearny and the Army of the West had forged only a decade earlier, and seeing California for the first time. For many, the vision of Warner's Ranch, a premier example of California's golden rancheros, was their first impression. It is believable to me that the emotion that these travelers felt as they arrived in this beautiful valley is an element of the elation I feel as I fly here, one hundred and fifty years later.

The original ranch house was actually built by Silvestre de la Portilla who had been granted a smaller portion of the valley in 1836. The adjacent barn, is thought to be the only remaining hand-hewn, timber frame barn in San Diego County (Patterson 2 of 2). Portilla abandoned the valley because of the constant Indian troubles. Warner occupied the old adobe house only long enough to erect a second residence that was elevated on a hill several feet behind where the original ranch house stands today. The "new" residence was burned to the ground in 1851 as a result of the last Indian uprising in Southern California.

Juan Jose Warner lost his land grant along with the rancho and store to Dona Vincenta Sepulveda who had granted the land originally to Silvestre de la Portilla in 1836. After California became part of the United States, many legal battles were fought over the land grants of the Mexican government. Silvestre Portilla and Dona Vicenta had been in litigation for many years over ownership claims to the Warner Valley. On November 6, 1858, Dona Vincenta was deeded four squares of land, which included the Ranch House, with the provision that Silvestre Portilla reserved the right "to live on said Ranch or lands during the period of his natural life...as his own property" (Flanigan 3).

Dona Vicenta and her husband Don Ramon Carrillo, a veteran of San Pasqual, occupied the old Ranch one year earlier in anticipation of the court ruling. Carrillo, ironically, served under Pico on the Mexican side and fought against General Kearny at the Battle of San Pasqual. William L. Wright, who pieced together the history of the Butterfield Stage stop at Warner Valley, wrote that "during the entire Butterfield-Southern Route operation, October 1858 to April 1861, Carrillo's Buena Vista, being the olden Warner Ranch House acquired from Portilla and repaired by the Carrillos, served as the home-owned Butterfield station on Warner's Ranch (Flanigan 8 of 19).

In November 1869, 4,000 acres of Warner Valley was conveyed to Ex-Governor John Downey after Dona Vicenta retired from ranching and moved to Anaheim. Downey specialized in raising sheep and employed Charles Ayres to supervise his stock. Charles and his wife and daughter lived in the Warner Ranch House. Ayers used the springs on the ranch to wash the sheep before shearing them and produced what the San Diego Union called "superior wool fleeces, unique to San Diego because of the environment from which they were produced" (Flanigan 13).

Downey produced 90,000 pounds of wool fleece in 1884, one of the largest clips in Southern California. In 1888, Downey leased the Valley to Walter Vail, a cattleman who owned and operated ranches in Temecula. The Cupeno Indians, who had always worked on the ranch, would make periodic raids on the stock to supplement their food supply. Warner, Dona Vicenta and Don Carrillo, even Downey tolerated this condition, but not Walter Vail.

The Cupeno band of Indians were moved off the Ranch in 1903 and relocated to the Pala reservation 70 miles away. The march took three days and has been referred to as the mini-Trail of Tears. Suit had been filed against the Indians for stealing cattle, although the impact of thirty-

five Indians on a herd in excess of 5000 was negligible. When the decision of *Barker v. Harvey* was handed down, the United States Government offered to buy new land for the Cupenos, but the Indians refused. Cecilio Blacktooth, Cupa Chief at Agua Caliente Village, Warner Springs, said: "If you give us the best place in the world, it is not as good as this. This is our home. We cannot live anywhere else; we were born here, and our fathers are buried here" (*Out West* 475).

The Cupeno Indians still believe the area of Warner Springs is sacred, and the spirit of Cupa Village lives in the descendants of the Cupenos as they make efforts to regain their cultural and religious areas. The expression of their spiritual essence is only a part of what I feel in the air as I soar above their ancestral land. I know the same spiritual essence of Juan Jose Warner is there as well. His glorious rancho and how it served to welcome immigrants to the still wild but wondrous area of eastern San Diego county is also part of the amalgamate. The spirit of Dona Vicenta Sepulveda de Carrillo is also present here today as well as all who passed through her affable homestead.

I flew again this past Sunday at Warner Springs, where the thermals lifted my insignificant glider high above the annals of Cupa and Agua Caliente Village. I soared, not over the entirety of Warner Valley, but through its essence. The air was alive. I was engaged once again with an atmosphere that was charged with the spirit and vitality of everyone who ever spent their emotions here. That intimacy served to overwhelm my emotions as well.

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