

A Remarkable Constellation

On a summer weekend last year the United Nations held its 50th birthday celebration, Pearl Jam played to 50,000 fans at Golden Gate Park for one half hour before their lead singer/songwriter left with the flu, and Jose Van Dam and the Opera de Lyon sizzled at Stern Grove. For some that would be enough to remember that Sunday as a landmark day.

In a very different way, San Francisco shimmered from sunrise to sunset with such a unique elemental constellation of natural forces that it boggles the mind to consider what actually went on.

It took until Monday the next day at 4:15pm for it all to finally condense into awareness - that a completely unique set of water and atmospheric confluences of chaos/complexity had taken place all day long. A conversation I had with my friend EH, early in the day Sunday set the table for understanding. We were driving home after surfing many sets of clean gorgeous waves on a glassy sea - commenting on how unusual it is (for most anyplace else in the world outside of Ocean Beach) for there to be good size rideable waves at the south end of the beach, while just a half mile or so north the waves were barely riffling at a foot to two feet. This disparity is a fairly common occurrence. South near the zoo can be triple the size of the waves at Lincoln or the Beach Chalet. The ocean is set up in little micropockets of varied sandbars and conditions. That term micro struck a chord and we realized that it was akin to the varied weather in the different neighborhoods of the city. A multitude of microclimates exists concurrently throughout San Francisco from the hot baking sun of the Mission to the often chilling dense fog of the Sunset and Richmond district. It was then just a short jump to acknowledging the incredibly diverse, microcultural humanity that makes up this place. This unusual "microness" is, for many people, what makes this city and area such an amazing place.

With those new connections steeping in my brain like tea, I was now more open to seeing the complexity of what went on. The morning brought immediate heat to the coldest parts of the city - near the beach. The water was like rippling glass with sets of extremely organized waves rolling in continuing throughout the afternoon. For a summer day the water was colder than any I have felt in 10 years living here (a number of surfers are wearing hoods and gloves). No breeze to speak of. A gorgeous summer day of which there are sometimes only a handful a season. While this is going on, just around the corner past the Cliff house and north towards the Golden Gate Bridge, Baker Beach is sizzling. The sun is beating down with an almost white light intensity, probably related to it being just a few days after summer solstice. The heat is much more pronounced than at Ocean Beach and with it brings nude bathers from all over. Normally Baker beach has a few fishermen casting from the sand and a smattering of folks walking its length. Today it looked like Rio or Long Island with barely a place to put a blanket. There were actually a fair number of people in the water, with two brave souls swimming fifty yards off shore without wetsuits! No wind. It is dead calm.

A half mile or so north is the golden gate gap where a huge rust colored bridge was built and financed during the depression.

At this very moment of blistering heat and dead calm on Baker Beach, and classic wave sets pulsing through Ocean Beach there is enough wind powering through the gap from west to east such that the bay is dotted with a hundred or more windsurfers sailing along with wind in hand. I was incredulous when I found this out at 4:15pm on Monday. This set of natural circumstances is nearly impossible.

In a way the area renegeed on its elemental "microness" and for one brief day became all things at once. These conditions are normally present during different seasons of weather. If there are high west winds for windsurfing the waves are blown out. Good shaped waves requires no real wind or off shore east wind. With high heat at the shore there is no differential between the heat of the inland agricultural valley and the normally cool ocean air. Without this differential there is no wind created by the suction from low pressure to high i.e. no windsurfing. Somehow none of these principles were at work in the usual way. All of these conditions were present concurrently transcending their particularities, leaving us humans to marvel in awe at the tremendous beauty and unpredictability of nature.