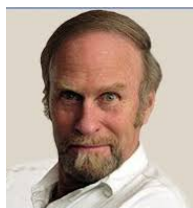


Hawk Fluttering in the Sky: Snake Coiled on the Ground



by Frosty Wooldridge

Heading eastbound across southern California, the sun set low in the sky. MY cycling mate and I looked for a campsite in the rocky terrain east of Joshua Tree National Monument.

“We better find a spot soon,” Sandi said.

“I’m looking, dear,” I said.

Up ahead, we noticed a fluttering hawk, holding his position as the sky effervesced into pink-white thunderheads in the twilight. Very still! Very quiet!

(Sandi with her touring bike.)

We pedaled the bikes toward the hawk on that lonely highway. The bird continued its fluttering like a helicopter holding position in order to land. We pedaled closer, closer—until we rode up to the perfect camp spot 100 feet off the highway behind some big rocks.

“I’m going to check out that hawk,” I told Sandi.

“I’ll get the tent set up,” she said. “You want pasta for dinner?”

“Sounds great,” I said. “I’ve got Pesto in my pack.”

Quietly excited, I crept over several 20-ton rocks on my way to get under the hawk. He kept flutter until, suddenly, he dove straight down.

I hurried over rocks and dirt until I crept up to where I figured he landed. Before me, not 20 feet away, in a dirt arena surrounded by rocks, the hawk stood in front of a transfixed rattlesnake. The big bird hopped into the air as it dared the rattler to strike.



And yes, the rattler complied by lunging at the hawk. Quickly, the snake recoiled into striking position.

The hawk, using his wings and talons, jumped back into the sky toward the head of the snake, toying with him, daring him to strike. The rattler struck again, but the hawk danced out of the way. For the next 10 minutes the hawk danced into the air toward the rattler, but avoided the snake's deadly fangs.

They pirouetted the dance of life and death. One looked for dinner while the other struggled for life. One dared death while the other lunged for its life.

I crouched in the rocks transfixed with wonder. Sometimes, I cannot help but thank the Bicycle Gods for their gifts to me as I travel around this planet on Condor, my iron steed. Who could serve up a moment like this? Who could dream it? Who could imagine it? I have witnessed dozens of moments like this one. Each time, I feel tremendous gratitude for this sublime journey on a bicycle.

Before me, the snake struck, and then recoiled. The hawk hopped up to dare the reptile to strike. Each time, the snake grew wearier and more fatigued. Until, as the last rays of the sun slipped below the horizon, the snake made one last strike for its life, but the hawk seized it by the head with his talons. Seconds later, he pecked it on the head until it died in his clutches.

Moments later, the great hawk flapped his mighty wings with the snake securely gripped in his talons. The elegant bird took to the sky with dinner for his family. One life lost to give life to another. I watched the mighty hawk fly into the sunset for a memory that sticks with me through the years.

Frosty Wooldridge takes a moment from the ride.

This enchanting moment visits me often when I move into Nature. Without a doubt, Condor carries me into exquisite life-moments that render poetic beauty, life and death struggles, mountain heroics and storms that fulfill my spirit.

Such moments cause me to write this about the Power of Adventure:

“When coyotes howl outside your tent, that may be adventure. While you’re sweating like a horse in a climb over a 12,000-foot pass, that’s adventure. When howling headwinds press your lips against your teeth, you face a mighty adventure. While pushing through a raging rainstorm, adventure drenches you. But that’s not what makes an adventure. It is your willingness to struggle through it, to present yourself at the doorstep of Nature. Can any greater joy come from life than living inside the ‘moment’ of an adventure? It may be a fleeting ‘high’, a stranger that changes your life, an animal that delights you or frightens you, a struggle where you triumphed, or even failed, yet you braved the challenge. Those moments present you uncommon experiences that give your life eternal expectation. That’s adventure!”
– Frosty Wooldridge

Excerpt from: **Bicycling Around the World: Tire Tracks for Your Imagination** by Frosty Wooldridge, on Amazon.

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