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In Sacramento area, short drive can help beat the heat

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Talk away about the weather and honor Mark Twain by doing something about it, too. Change temperatures by switching locations, and sometimes by surprisingly small distances.

Meet our microclimates – like rooms in an office building where one is cold and an adjacent one is hot. Within these weather pockets, temperatures can vary noticeably, even if they're near each other.

In the Sacramento region, Rocklin gets the honor of being the most scorching spot, while the 1,500 residents of Clarksburg must feel vindicated in their breezy choice of hometown.

Tom Loffman, a 30-year meteorologist who has written three books on weather in Sacramento and the world, declared these two communities the bookends of heat, based on long-term average high temperatures in July, compiled over the past 30 to 100 years by the National Climatic Data Center, government agencies and home weather stations. Clarksburg's July average is 91; Rocklin's is 98.

So how did that work out Thursday, the third day of our current heat wave? Rocklin roasted at 104, 4 degrees higher than Clarksburg's 100, according to WeatherBug.com. Sacramento also hit 100.

"There's an enormous difference between one part of the area and another," Loffman said. "There isn't one temperature in Sacramento, there are many."

As a general rule, it gets hotter farther from the Delta, said National Weather Service forecaster George Cline. The coastal mountain range just west of Fairfield separates the Bay Area's balmy air from that of the dry Central Valley, and the Carquinez Strait offers a lifeline for air to travel up the Sacramento River.

How much air depends on pressure systems and wind direction.

"When the wind is coming from the south, it's cooler because it's pulling in the sea breeze from the Bay Area, and wind from a northerly direction pushes the sea breeze back," Loffman said. "Our summers are almost completely controlled by the wind direction."

Geographic features such as hills influence air flow, and trees offer shade.

Man-made construction affects temperatures as well, since concrete and tall buildings absorb heat and emit it back into the air.

"You could have two different weather stations a quarter mile apart and have two different temperatures," said Cline, the weather service forecaster.

He lives in Loomis but says his neighborhood is usually cooler than the surrounding area because of a nearby

creekbed.

In sweltering Rocklin, where it felt like a giant electric heater was toasting the town Thursday, members of the Sierra College diving team cooled their feet with a water hose before climbing up for another dive.

"It's hard sitting out of the pool," said sophomore Jodie Darnell. "The heat is radiating off the pool deck, and it makes it feel 10 degrees hotter."

A mere 40 miles away, in Clarksburg, it was also hot. But the town is shady, cars crawl along rural roads, alfalfa fields absorb heat, and buzzing cicadas battle the sound of barking dogs. Plus, there's the Delta breeze: It was weak Thursday, but blowing nonetheless.

"We don't have the buildings, the asphalt or the concrete," said Becky Frame, who runs the public library.

Retired teacher Mary McTaggart, who took advantage of the light air conditioning inside the library to do some Internet research, agreed. "It's the best weather in the area, but don't tell anyone that," she said.

Call The Bee's Gina Kim, (916) 321-1228.