

## Omaha Nebraska Marathon Trip Notes September 25-29, 2009

It wasn't the smartest choice to come to Omaha two days after Europe but it did turn out just fine as Omaha is a pleasant surprise. Not just blowing corn fields and horse hitches, though there was a rodeo, there are open spaces, and the horses do squire the tourists in carriage tours.

### **Why come to Omaha Marathon?**

- The tourist sites are plentiful.
- Old Market Place has blocks of restaurants and bars.
- The course is varied and well marshaled.
- The expo is plenty large for a field of only 3200 runners (about 450 marathoners).  
Pasta dinner is free and with a speaker.
- Tours of courses are free and arranged three times on Saturday.
- There are no timing mats on the first out-and-back for those who like to cheat themselves out of their full 26.2 miles.
- A continental service to Omaha from Newark is direct and cheap.
- The Omaha airport is less than 10 minutes from downtown.
- Hotels are cheap and reasonably convenient.
- The Midwesterners are amazingly friendly and accommodating.
- It's good enough for Warren Buffet and 4 other Fortune 500 companies.
- I have family that I haven't seen forever that live nearby.

### **Minor complaints**

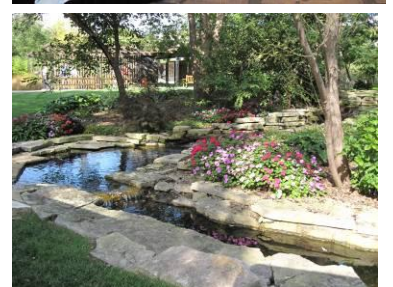
- The t-shirt is cotton. Who wants cotton! Yet it IS long sleeve.
- The course surface is primarily concrete.
- Walk about 1 to 1 ¼ mile to the start and finish line. No other way.
- If it's annoying to see runners cutting the course, this one's not for you.
- The pasta dinner had too long a line and the speaker's subject didn't strike me as being running related.

### **Pictures from the top**

Patriots Park with 150% sized bronze statues, the City from the Park, A vendor of hats at the Rodeo's Expo, Botanical Gardens, Cindy and Dan, the city from the river.

### **A marathon that almost wasn't – aka my glitch**

Coming almost direct from Europe wasn't my bigger problem but the knee that wouldn't bend and caused me to limp was. Had I not committed, I would have dumped the trip since there appeared to be no way I could do a 10K let alone a marathon. Was it a continuation of a long term tight IT band that traveled into the knee or was it how I curled up in the airplane seat for 8 hours? The body remains a mystery so who knows. When, on the morning of the marathon I felt reasonably free of gimping, I took the course map expecting to start but finish at about the 10K -- if even that long. Declaring that I'd stop if I changed gait, and asking for such reminder, oddly that time never came and I finished in 5:57, a personal worst but who cares about time if you're not in the money anyway. I was pleased to be pain free and totally mystified as to why. I was with good company and totally enjoyed the course and the day.





**Stats:** This was my 51<sup>st</sup> marathon 'start,' my 44<sup>th</sup> completed marathon, and 32<sup>nd</sup> state. And since it was my 13<sup>th</sup> marathon/ultra of the year, and the body is 64 years old, I can hardly complain of a little glitch now. It goes without saying that the twin Liberty Lady Maricar was with us for the weekend but race pictures are in her camera and she's there and I'm here so this 'family picture' with Diana's uncle and cousin .

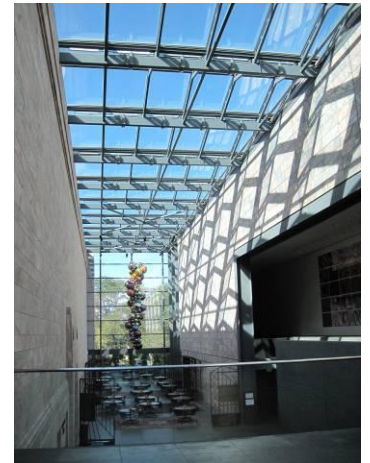
**Omaha held a calling card more than the marathon –**  
My folks were from  
Nebraska, mostly

Kearney, and I hadn't been there since I was a young teenager. I hadn't seen my Uncle Dan since sometime in the early 60s, and I'd never met his daughter Cindy who I communicate with quite regularly and have always felt like I know. They had agreed to come from Grand Island and stayed with us for a couple days at the same hotel. Maricar and I both enjoyed their company a lot. Dan had been an early Playboy and shared his photo albums. As it turns out, Cindy and I have much more in common than we had any idea and I felt a blood-sister relationship. I felt like she had the same feeling and I'm willing to make a bet that Maricar and I have encouraged her towards some walking/running for exercise at which time we'll have even more in common. Thank you Cindy and Dan for coming to Omaha!



### ***Touring held nice surprises***

*The Joslyn Art Museum* (1) and sculpture park is an AAA GEM. It was built as a gift to Omaha from Sarah Joslyn in memory of her husband George, a prominent Omaha businessman and civic leader. The structure is one of the finest examples of Art Deco architecture in the nation and employs 38 kinds of marble from seven countries. It's especially noted for its collection of American West art and is world-renowned for its collection of works by Swiss artist Karl Bodmer, whose watercolors and prints document his 1832-34 journey to the Missouri River frontier with the German naturalist, Prince Maximilian of Wied. Also known for the watercolors and paintings by Alfred Jacob Miller portraying his experience in the West of the 1830s. Joslyn's Western American collection also includes paintings and sculpture by George Catlin, Frederic Remington, and William Robinson Leigh. See [www.joslyn.org](http://www.joslyn.org) for more information.



*Rodeo Roundup* weekend (2) was centered on the huge Qwest Convention Center, maybe the largest in the country, and this weekend it was full of animals, children and people either wearing cowboy boots and hats or buying them at the many vendor stalls. My first entertainment was watching a hog contest and seeing the little kids all decked out in cowboy gear bringing their animals to the judging stand. It was sufficiently enchanting to take me inside on both of Friday and Saturday and even better was the huge Saturday morning parade complete with Wells Fargo mail wagon, covered wagons, many horses, teenage beauty queens in convertibles and a plethora of bands and cheerleader squads. See [www.rivercityroundup.org](http://www.rivercityroundup.org) for more information. The bronze sculptures and giant clock outside the Qwest Center are worthy of a trip.

Central High School used to be the Capitol when Omaha held that title. It's the most gorgeous and largest high school I've ever seen and it's next door to the Art Museum.



Gene Leahy Mall is Omaha's Central Park. It's a ten-acre park set in the heart of downtown, featuring a lagoon, waterfalls, walking paths, gardens a playground, an amphitheater and sculptures. It connects to Heartland of America Park all near to the center market place.

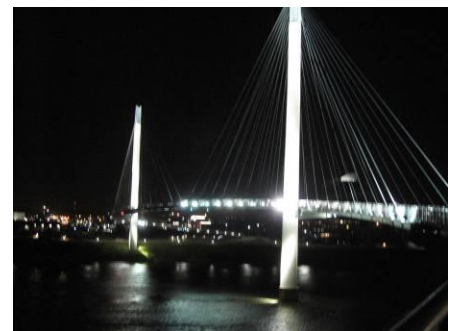
Lauritzen Gardens is a botanical garden of some 100 acres and listed by AAA as a GEM and we all agreed. A 55-minute tram tour allowed us to get an overview and also see Big Boy steam engine far up on the hill. See [www.omahabotanicalgardens.org](http://www.omahabotanicalgardens.org) for more information.

Kenefick Park is a site on its own but was included on our tram tour of the gardens. It's high on a bluff overlooking the Missouri River valley where they've created a stone wall canyon with historic photos and information on the history of the Union Pacific Railroad. Big Boy is the largest steam engine ever built and Centennial, staged next to it, is the largest diesel locomotive ever made.

Spirit of Nebraska Pioneer Courage Park kept pulling me back. I first saw it during my early walks on Friday and then again on Saturday for the parade and again Sunday evening to show Cindy in the dark and again on Monday with Maricar and again on Tuesday on my walk home from Joslyn Museum. At the Museum I found an entire section dedicated to the creation of these huge bronzes which piqued my interest again. This sculpture park stretches over multiple blocks and will have 30 bronze pieces when completed. From the 150% sized sculptures of pioneers and covered wagons begin a series of buffalo bronzes traveling another city block, eventually 'through' a building just like the Indians believe the spirit of the buffalo would travel, and into another city block with fountains and 150% sized bronze geese. This flock of geese is seen to fly off their water perch by the coming of the buffalo, and they too are spirits and fly through the buildings and into a huge glass atrium where they've turned from bronze to silver. Just amazing and quite a feat and something any city would be proud to host.



Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge (3) spans the Missouri River and connects Omaha to Council Bluffs Iowa. It is seen from a long ways away and is a highlight of the River Walk. I walked to this bridge on Friday, then we started our marathon near to it, then we walked its full length (to the next state!) on Sunday night. It's a 3,000 foot suspension bridge with heights of 55 feet over the Missouri River and it snakes across to Iowa in the form of the river.



Old Market Place and the Passageway (4) – About 4 blocks by 6 blocks, an old downtown area has been preserved and made into a dining and shopping dream. It looks like there had been an underground such as Seattle's with the city built up one street level above, as some below ground bars and passageways exist. There are lighted horse drawn carriages, one like Cinderella's carriage, with tours at night. Had we realized the price was as reasonable as about \$20 to \$55, we might have taken a ride. Instead we ate outside at a lovely



contemporary Italian restaurant where I'd eaten on my own the first day. We also ate at an interesting pub on Maricar's last day. See [www.omahaoldmarket.com](http://www.omahaoldmarket.com) for more information yet I hadn't found the history of the underground. There is a full tour at [http://www.oldmarket.com/pdf/graphic\\_identification\\_plan.pdf](http://www.oldmarket.com/pdf/graphic_identification_plan.pdf)

Visitor Center – hold not only guides and brochures, but Omaha memorabilia such as t-shirts that say “I walked on Bob” (the bridge) and a coffee shop. A kindly man advised me where to visit, where to eat, and later recognized me on the street and checked in. It was only my first of many examples of friendliness.

ConAgra campus was part of the marathon route and lovely enough to take me back two other times to walk through the ground and into the Heartland of America Park and the significant bronze sculptures, fountains, lakes and even a series of wooden bridges to connect to the River Walk.



Shuttle driver from the Hampton Inn – Yes, you read that right. This young fellow was full of statistics and information and most willing to give it. After about my 3<sup>rd</sup> shuttle ride with him and a reasonably good tip, plus a suggestion that he open a walking tour business, he joined me in the hotel lobby and spent about 45 minutes going through “Omaha Impressions” book and telling more details of the town.

***A pity that I missed a lot so maybe need to return***

Boys Town Hall of History where Father Flanagan started taking care of up to 1.2 million children a year in 1912. Remember “He’s not heavy, he’s my brother”? This is from Boys Town and it’s now a National Historic Landmark. See [www.boystown.org](http://www.boystown.org) for more info.

Gerald Ford’s birth site with rose garden and exhibit of White House memorabilia.

Joslyn Castle, the home of the founder of the Museum, and built in 1903.

Gondola tours out of the Heartland of America Park where we saw the gondolas and cruise boats stored for the season.

Farmers Market in Old Market Place.

Omaha Zoo, one of the largest and best in the country and soon to be THE largest and best when they take over the stadium and expand. Its 130 acres now and its desert dome is the world’s largest indoor desert. In their aquarium is a glass tunnel. [www.omahazoo.com](http://www.omahazoo.com)

Mormon Trail Center at historic Winter Quarters got a visit by Dan and Cindy while we ran the marathon. There’s also a white-granite Mormon Temple across the street.

Warren Buffet’s home is said to be at 55<sup>th</sup> and Farnham where he’s always lived and where it’s entirely unpretentious in a 1 ½ story plain home. He is still carries his lunch to work in a brown bag.

**Weather** was reasonably comfortable with a high of 81 degrees and some wind. The next day’s newspaper talked about the difficult headwinds which I hardly noticed, but that was in comparison to Monday’s severe wind. Everybody in the nation read about the Midwest’s winds but if you weren’t there, you can hardly imagine wind that nearly picked you off your feet. Yet still the temperature was nice with a jacket needed early morning and late evening but imagine my surprise when I went out

Tuesday morning and found it to be windy and 32 degrees. I took the shuttle to the museum but once it warmed up I was able to walk back the couple miles.

**Some faces of Omaha** including the children of the Rodeo, a wee one enjoying the botanical garden, a moss man at the garden's antique show, sculpture at the Qwest Center, 150% sized bronze from Patriots Square, lovely lady at the art museum's sculpture garden, Liberty Lady in a marketplace window, the dragon of Saturday's parade, a Mary Poppins at the Quest Center, and a permanent-fixture greeter whose arm and head moved and sat in the front of a market place old-fashioned store.



**What's next?** Hyde Park, New York next weekend to see the estates of the wealthy and Roosevelt's Presidential Library, Waddell & Reed Marathon in K.C. the following weekend and a small Trick or Trot race the end of October, as well as the NYC Marathon Expo. November brings the NYC Marathon followed by the Indianapolis Marathon 6 days later – a first and quickest turn around for me. Mid-month is six days in Rome followed by the Philadelphia Marathon and a couple small races locally. December is far too open with only Tucson Marathon booked so I'm open for suggestions.

January is the Mississippi Blues Marathon in Jackson, a yet undecided mid-month trip, and maybe the Toughest Little Marathon in Texas in Waco the end of the month. February is both the Austin and the Gasparilla (Tampa) Marathons followed by St Augustine where I've intended to visit for a very long time. March takes us to the National DC and the Knoxville Marathons, and April is annoying me with it being so wide open. The month of May is the Capon Valley 50K for the third time. In between there's hope for a few hikes.

I'd still welcome some invites!

### **Backup notes**

(1) From Wikipedia.com - The museum opened in 1931, a gift to the people of Omaha from Sarah H. Joslyn in memory of her husband, George A. Joslyn. It occupies a large and impressive Art Deco

building designed by John and Alan McDonald, constructed of Georgia Pink marble, with 38 different marbles from all over the world in the interior, close to downtown Omaha. The decorative panels on the exterior were designed by sculptor John David Brcin and refer to the peoples of the plains - the original Native American inhabitants and the later European explorers and settlers. Inscriptions carved on the building were written by Hartley Burr Alexander. A substantial extension, designed by Sir Norman Foster, opened in 1994.

The permanent collections are: Ancient, including an exceptional collection of Greek pottery  
European: 16th and 17th century works include paintings by Veronese, Titian, Claude Lorrain and El Greco. However the strongest collections are from the 19th century, including romantic works by Delacroix and Gustave Doré, realist works by Corot and Gustave Courbet, and an impressionist works by Degas, Monet, Pissarro, and Renoir.

American: the collection includes early American portraiture by James Peale and Mather Brown; many works by painters of the Hudson River School, realist works by Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins, and works by the American impressionists Childe Hassam and William Merritt Chase

Western American: including important collections of work by the Swiss artist Karl Bodmer based on his 1832-34 journey to the Missouri River frontier, and by Alfred Jacob Miller, also illustrating the West of the 1830s.

Native American: including both traditional works and work done under the influence of, or in reaction against, European conventions and training.

Twentieth Century: a wide range of 20th century painting and sculpture is represented, including paintings by Henri Matisse, Stuart Davis, Theodore Roszak, John Sloan and Robert Henri, and sculpture by Deborah Butterfield, Robert Haozous, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Martin Puryear. The collection stresses significant American artistic movements, including regionalism (with paintings by Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton) and Abstract Expressionism (with work by Jackson Pollock, Hans Hofmann, and Helen Frankenthaler) and Pop Art (with work by George Segal and Tom Wesselmann).

Although the best known names appear in the European and American collections, it is probably the Western American and Native American collections that have the greatest importance as collections, allowing a rare opportunity to study these genres and periods of art as well as giving an important insight into the history of the western United States.

In addition to its permanent collections, the museum mounts regular special exhibitions. It also serves as an important regional educational and artistic resource, and its building includes an auditorium where regular concerts are held.

(2) From [www.rivercityroundup.org](http://www.rivercityroundup.org) - River City Roundup will run from Sept. 24 through Sept. 27 at the Qwest Center Omaha and include a variety of activities, including rodeos, contests and the annual Douglas County Fair, a major staple in Omaha now in its 82nd year. River City Roundup began in 1982 with the purpose of educating local residents and celebrating the region's culture, but has since broadened to the festival that it is today. Along with the Douglas County Fair, it is also home to the Ak-Sar-Ben 4-H Livestock Exposition, which hosts nearly 1,200 4-H exhibitors annually within an eight-state region. Competitors use the expo to showcase their talents and animals, and can enter to win for several categories including Dairy, Feeder Calf and Breeding Beef, Horse, Market Beef, Market Broilers, Meat Goats, Market Lamb, Market Swine and Breeding Swine. The Ak-Sar-Ben Rodeo is another event on the festival's line up that has a long-standing tradition in Nebraska. The rodeo first started in 1947 and is known for being the largest indoor rodeo in the state. Over the years, the rodeo has attracted some of the world's best entertainers like Roy Rogers, Brooks & Dunn, Reba McEntire and others. River City Roundup will also feature the 2009 Wrangler Million Dollar Tour presented by Justin Boots. Since February, applicants all around the country have been competing for a chance to make it to the semi-finals and finals in Omaha. The rodeos will take place Sept. 24 through Sept. 26 and air on ESPN. Other events will include a western-themed parade, trail

rides, children's barnyard, State Barbecue Championship and free entertainment activities that offer over \$820,000 in prize money. Last year, more than 1 million households watched the Wrangler Pro Rodeo Tour Omaha Round of the Ariat Playoffs on television. The metro received numerous free commercial bumps that highlighted the city and according to their Web site, generated \$28 million in economic impact that drew nearly 100,000 people to the event. However, the festival gives back to its local community, contributing over \$150,000 in educational support to 4-H youths annually.

(3) Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge, from [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) – This is a 3,000 ft (910 m) footbridge across the Missouri River between Council Bluffs, Iowa and Omaha, Nebraska. It opened on 28 September 2008. Interest in a landmark bridge across the Missouri River arose after Omaha and Council Bluffs began replacing their older crossings with girder bridges which do not have towers (most notably the Ak-Sar-Ben Bridge). The bridge is named after former Nebraska Senator Bob Kerrey, who secured \$18 million of federal funding for the bridge in 2000. The bridge was redesigned in 2004, after the lowest bid for the project was \$44 million. In May 2006, a final cable-stayed bridge design by Kansas City engineering and architectural firm HNTB was selected for the bridge. The \$22 million bid included two 200-foot towers and a clearance of 52 feet above the river. Groundbreaking for construction of the bridge occurred on October 26, 2006. [ The bridge is north of the I-480 girder bridge and connects the Port of Omaha's Miller Landing in Omaha to One Renaissance Center in the former Dodge Park Playland in Council Bluffs, making it the first ever pedestrian bridge to connect two states. The lights on the bridge were donated by Gallup, which has their corporate headquarters and Gallup University located on the Missouri River adjacent the Omaha landing of the bridge. The bridge lights include programmable controls that can display multiple colors in the large lights at the top of the towers and alter brightness and timing of the lights that run the entire length of the bridge. The lights were officially unveiled in a ceremony on September 13, 2008. The bridge lights were turned on while the Phil Collins song "In the Air Tonight" was played over a PA system. The event was accompanied by fireworks.

(4) Old Market Place – is one of the nation's most successful examples of adaptive reuse of an historic district for contemporary commercial and entertainment activities. The district's lively and diverse mix of shops, restaurants, galleries, places for entertainment, and residences infuse it with a special vitality and energy. Particularly notable is the district's history of steady, incremental growth, guided over a long period by a set of agreed-upon patterns and relationships. This phenomenon gives the district an authenticity and quality that is often absent in projects that developed as conventional real estate ventures. The Old Market has benefitted from the stewardship and nurturing of its environment by both property owners and businesses. The Old Market's urbanistic and commercial successes have made it one of Nebraska's leading visitor attractions as well as one of the city's most recognizable features. In order to reinforce the area's character and to provide information to visitors, the Old Market Business Association (OMBA) received a grant from Douglas County in 1998 to design and install identifying graphic features. While banners have been used frequently to identify urban districts, OMBA members believed that other solutions were more appropriate to the character of the district.

## Itinerary

### Fri Sep 25 Diana

7:59am Depart Newark (EWR) via CO #2352 (snack)  
10:14am Arrive Omaha

### Maricar

9:00pm Depart Newark via CO#2558  
11:23pm Arrive Omaha

Hotel Hampton Inn by Hilton  
1212 Cuming Street between 12<sup>th</sup> and 13th, Omaha NE 68102 Tele 402 345 5500

Host hotel is Fairfield Inn and Suites, 1501 Nicholas Street, one mile from start/finish  
And next door to Tip Top Ballroom, site of pick up and pasta party

### Sat Sep 26

10:00am Expo and race packet pick up at Tip Top Ballroom, 15<sup>th</sup> & Cuming, to 5pm

1:00pm Free bus course tours available at 11am, 1pm and 3pm from Tip Top

4:00pm Pasta party at the Expo until 6pm.  
Runners & volunteers eat free, additional plates \$10.00.

### Sun Sep 27

7:00am 34<sup>th</sup> annual marathon, half-marathon, & 10K  
Start and finish at the Lewis & Clark Landing near the Qwest Center

11:30am Awards ceremony/post race party with food, drink and entertainment starting at 9:30am

See [www.omahamarathon.com](http://www.omahamarathon.com) – see shocking elevation chart! The marathon course consists of approximately 17 miles of relatively flat terrain, 8 miles of rolling countryside and approximately 2 miles of "real" hills. The running surface consists of mostly concrete though the website claims there's some asphalt pavement. Starts and finishes along the Missouri River at the Lewis & Clark Landing located at 10<sup>th</sup> & Gallup Blvd.

### Mon Sep 28 Maricar (holiday)

4:26pm Depart Omaha via CO#3113  
8:20pm Arrive Newark

### Tue Sep 29 Diana

4:26pm Depart Omaha via CO#3113 (snack)  
8:20pm Arrive Newark

### Participants:

908 907 5054 Maricar cell  
732 804 7514 Diana cell  
402-630-2282 Susie Smisek, race director, cell