

Notes from Tucson AZ Trip and Marathon

December 10 – 15, 2009

Highlights

- This was a trip originally booked for the marathon then later focused on touring.
- Tom accompanied me.
- The marathon was NOT the highlight.
- The mountains were.



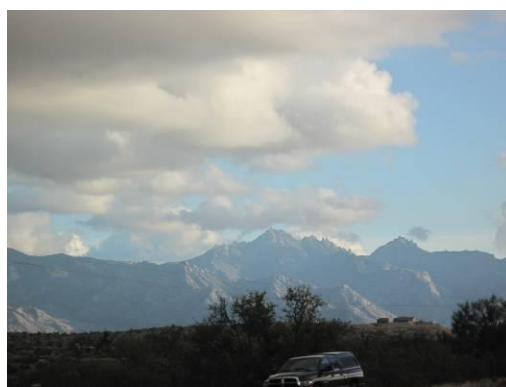
Tucson is the land of extremes

So were my trip plans, from a marathon with a group of friends which turned into five days of touring with Tom. I didn't exactly mean to visit but I'm glad I did as much to see the surprisingly different area but also to see a long-time friend from our days in Belgium. Had it not been for visiting Dick and Jacqui however I might not have known that there's a rich and lovely side to Tucson.

The marathon's host hotel is out in the boonies and the course runs through either desolation and/or a lot of ultra simple living areas, whereas Dick and Jacqui moved from high-dollar Washington D.C. area and acquired a gorgeous flowing house high up on a hill in Oro Valley with at least a 180 degree view.

Distances are great and driving is on the agenda for any activity

Big wide open spaces with gorgeous skies most of the time. Though desolate, it can be lovely. Particularly the skies.



The Hilton Tucson El Conquistador Golf & Tennis Resort

This was the host hotel in Oro Valley and as a golf haven one could have stayed here the entire time and been happy. Traveling with Tom generally means an upgrade to accommodations so thanks to my hotel friend Loudean and to Tom we had a huge hospitality suite complete with two bathrooms, fireplace, wet bar/kitchen, giant living and dining room, plus patio.



Tucson friends

Dick and Jacqui Sasser showed us a very nice side of living in Tucson. They are high up on a hill in a gated community in a lovely home of their own design. We'd known Dick from our days at SHAPE/NATO headquarters in Belgium and it was good to visit him again and see how

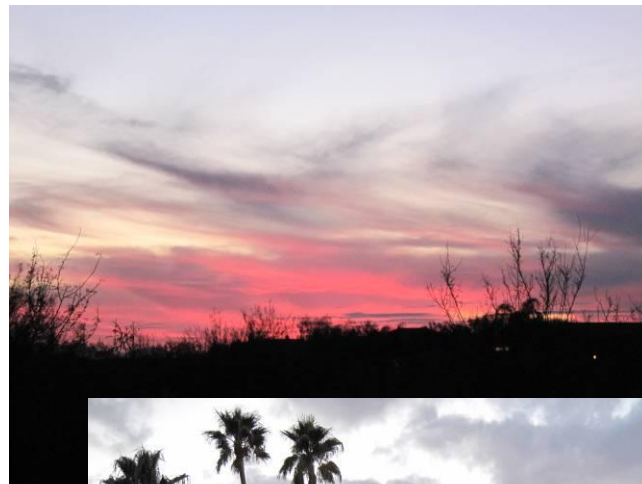
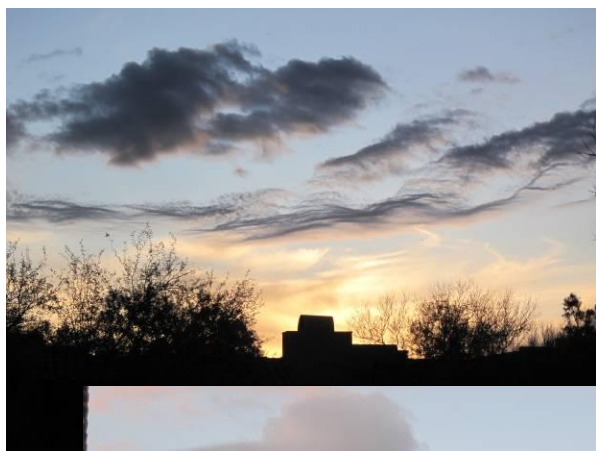


well he's doing and with a lovely bride Jacqui. (Well, a bride of a long time. They act like newlyweds and we knew Dick as a bachelor.) Both have retired but both remain very busy with



their lives and traveling and each other. To top it off, Dick cooked a glorious meal for us and shared some Black Wine of Cahors too (a wine from our French travels and shared Belgian history.) I remember when Dick was learning to cook using the book "Cooking Bold and Fearless" for bachelors.

Glorious sunsets



With weather that was likely unique for Tucson and had the locals bundled up. There had been a national news story about their 3-feet of snow up in the adjoining mountains and I'm sure the local marathoners who wore sweats, long sleeve shirts jackets and hats during the marathon were still cold. But we easterners had no complaints except maybe for the strong winds and light rain – with only the former gracing the marathon.

The marathon - I'm working hard to find some good things to say about this marathon.

- The famous Pam Reed (ultra runner and author) is the race director.
- It's a new state for me – my 49th completed marathon and my 35th state.
- The Expo on Friday was plenty acceptable. I learned that more vendors came in on Saturday when I might have gotten samples and a pace band.
- Busing to the start was in new luxury buses with toilet facilities (though there were a few school buses too.)
- Mountain ranges surround Tucson and are gorgeous with a new 3' of snowfall on one range.
- While waiting for the start, I climbed far up a hill to see the sunrise and watch the confusion down below. The sunrise was lovely. The confusion was novel – to drop your bag, find the school bus window with your bib number and toss it in.
- The course is said to have a total of 4500 feet of downhill. Careful with those statistics: That's a misnomer because looking at the altitude charts shows more like 2500 feet thus exposing the heavy hills between miles 5 and 9 and again at 25.
- The spectators were kind but there were very few and far between.
- The medal was a cute little cactus in a bronze finish.

The pitfalls keep returning to my mind.

All of which makes me feel guilty to point out in view of the number of volunteers and efforts it takes to put on a marathon, and yet, this one could never be on my top ten list of anything. Well, maybe if there were a classification of 'mountain views.'



- The host hotel is in the boonies about 45-60 minutes from the airport or from town. A rental car is required.
- The t-shirt is white, short sleeve and cotton (how 1980s) and there was not a single shirt even to purchase any smaller than men's small – which was huge.
- The course is an out-and-back requiring a bus to the start about 25 miles north.
- The course doesn't finish near to anything and busing is required to return to any of the hotels. At the finish there's a sign "shuttle bus at the school entrance" but what was that? I found a lot of runners waiting at what appeared to be the school entrance but was not.
- Busing is exceptionally confusing. There's a different bus for half (a different start location) than for the full marathon and of course some boarded incorrectly since there were no signs. No one at the info desk knew the arrangement and the hotel concierge had it wrong. Thus we had some half marathoners on the marathon course and nothing to do but run it all.
- Busing required a 5:15am departure for a 7:30am start.
- All those buses had to return via a portion of our course. We were gasping for air in the continual line up of bus fumes.
- Looking for sights while you run? There are mountain ranges far in the distance but in between is nothing but scrub other than a very few lone and pathetic businesses and some housing, if you can call it that. Much of this housing should never have a certificate of occupancy.
- The majority of the course was on a major highway with cars going in both directions and rather close. More fumes. We were reminded of the danger by the many memorials along the highway.
- Along the main route were hunters with bow-and-arrows. Were there guns too?
- The sports drink was vile. It was a throw-up pink color and left grunge in the bottom of the cup. Fortunately I had my own Gatorade at the start but shortly after consuming this official sports drink I felt rather ill (confession – GU products do that to me too.) I presume that was the reason for the four (yes – four!) bathroom stops though the Mexican food the day before could be implicated.
- There was no food on the course – no bananas, no oranges, and no candies. Well, once there was a piece of hard candy. There was some odd branded GUs.
- Had it been a very hot day, there would have been too few fluid stations.
- The port-a-potties were far-far apart and there were only low and sparse shrubs for many miles.
- Pacers are only provided to 5 hours.
- Not the marathon's fault but the brutal headwinds were through most of the course and strong enough to limit running and enough to pick a lightweight off their feet. At 4am the downtown (protected area) winds were at 20mph and this picked up strongly especially being in the open desert. When the southerly winds switched to southeasterly I expected my bib would tear off. Runners were hunkered over like old folks.

- No one on the bus knew what the name “Holualoa” for Tucson Marathon meant and I thought what a stupid name if we couldn’t pronounce it let alone know what it is but I realized later that it’s a sponsor company name so I’d use it too.
- A woman at the finish line who has run 102 marathons and is being featured in “Runners World” this February said this was the worse marathon she’d ever encountered. I might agree.

Cheaters -- We’ve noticed this before and still surprised and I am wondering if cheating is becoming more rampant. When I yelled to some runners that they were missing the course (skipping the turnaround when they heard there was no mat at the end) they just shrugged. When I saw some runners picked up by a car I hoped they were relay runners or DNFs but in at least one case I saw them at the finish line and that was unfortunately not the case.

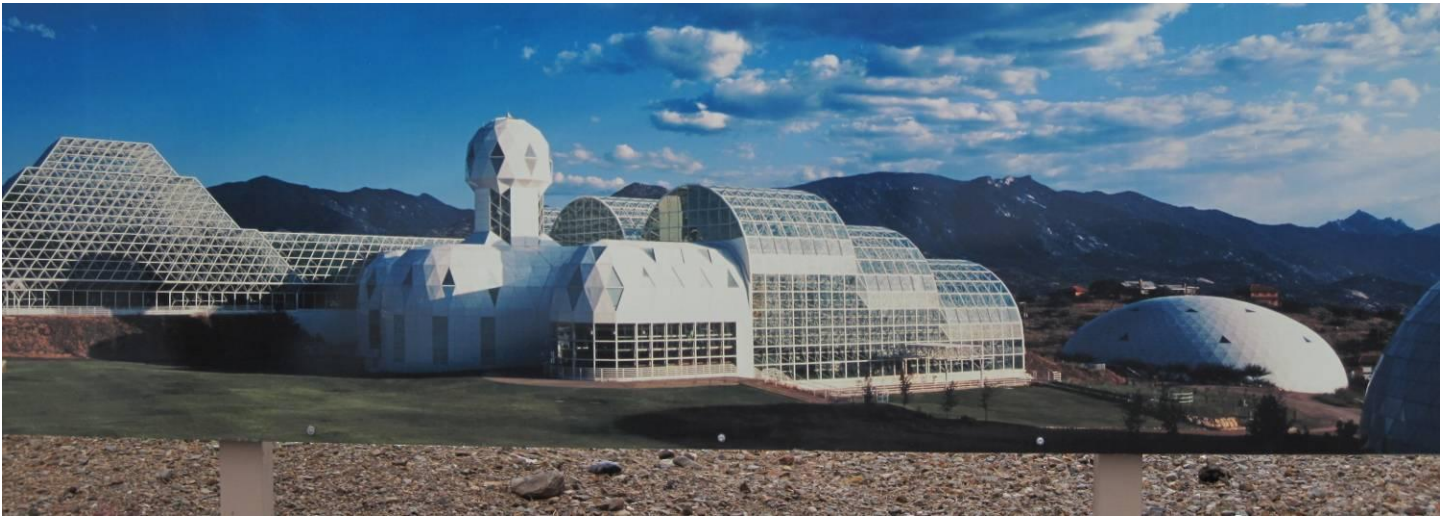
Race Results – We all love to come up with excuses. It’s a disease of the runner so let me preface this by saying that I should be very happy with my 5:39. Yet I know that my legs do very well on down-hills (my lungs are my short-fall probably due to never having exercised until late life). Excuses abound: (1) this is the desert with very dry conditions, (2) we started at a high altitude whereas I’m used to sea level, (3) there were extremely strong winds and a surprising amount of high hills (think Constitution Road), and (4) I was probably a bit dehydrated with chills and goose bumps despite high 60s/low 70s temperatures. (5) Towards the end I went off course by about a block. (But that wasn’t necessarily the race management’s fault. I came out of a port-a-potty, saw cones continuing along the main road that I thought took us to the finish, and missed that the course turned. When I couldn’t see another runner I realized there were two directions with coned road.) (6) Certainly I’d had the wrong food and too much drink the day before -- not unusual for someone who makes touring a priority. (7) Then with four potty stops, and (8) the soft and deep sand at last stretch, there you have it. Enough excuses?

Saved by the touring and good company

- Tom came along. He’s great company.
- We upgraded the Hilton El Conquistador room to a hospitality suite with a huge living and dining area plus two bathrooms. It’s a lush and lovely golf and resort complex. Too bad it’s so remote.
- Our friend Dick and his “bride” live in the area and graced us with a visit to their home/complex and cooked a glorious meal for us to include an old favorite wine. They were uniquely special hosts and that was likely the highlight of Tucson.
- There were some great museums and in particular the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. These are unfortunately about an hour’s drive away.
- There’s an Old Town (movie production complex) where over 350 movies have been filmed such as “Tombstone” but it’s about an hour away.
- Tucson has a famous Mission – also about an hour’s drive. (Are you getting the idea that this is big open spaces like Texas is famous for?)
- There’s a downtown area that’s in restoration and with a self-guided walking tour but it too is about 45-60 minutes away.
- We love Mexican food and had one very good meal and one very bad meal (which might have followed me to the marathon if that gross sports drink wasn’t the cause.)

- I don't know why we didn't see Lance. He was in town and I can see why he likes the hills for training.

Biosphere 2 (Biosphere 1 is Earth) is at the base of the stunning Santa Catalina Mountains. This one-of-a-kind facility sits on a ridge at a cool elevation of nearly 4000 feet and is surrounded by a magnificent natural desert preserve. *Time Life Books* recently named this one of the 50 must see "Wonders of the World". I can see why visitors from around the world visit this unique specially designed mini-world. Remember one of the Bass brothers put about \$400 million into this design and scientists lived entirely in this created world for about 2 years on the first experiment.



From their website www.b2science.org : "The visitor center houses numerous exhibits and multi-media displays along with a Bookstore and Cafe. You won't want to miss our new feature movie showing in the main theater which describes the past, present and future of the project. Your entry into the Biosphere is led by a tour guide who takes you inside and under the glass. The beautiful trail system takes you on a once in a lifetime tour that lets you smell our ocean and see a tropical Rainforest up close. In addition to escorting you through the upper Biomes, your interpretive tour guide takes you through the basement "technosphere" and into the amazing lungs that help the Biosphere system breathe. Your tour will conclude in the custom-built underwater ocean viewing gallery where you can explore the million-gallon ocean and its real coral reef. Before or after your tour, take time to enjoy the many different programs or events that are offered throughout the season. Your experience will be like no other!" That's an understatement! See additional facts at the end.



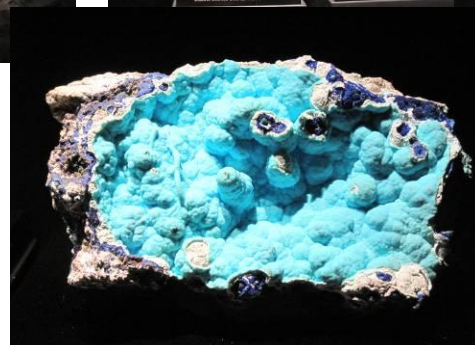
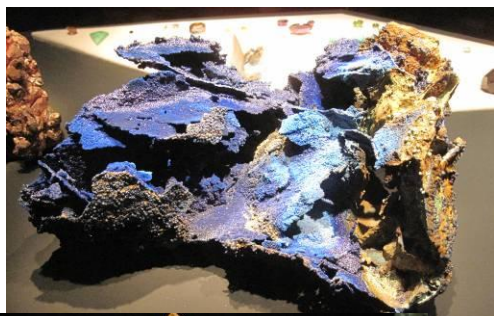


Sonora Desert Museum

From their website at www.desertmuseum.org: For a half-century the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum has enchanted millions of visitors with its exhibits of live animals in astonishingly natural settings, while intriguing and instructing them with fascinating educational programs. At the same time, the Museum has gained a worldwide reputé in the scientific community as an institution committed to researching and protecting the land, plants, and the animals of the Sonoran Desert region. The mission of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is to inspire people to live in harmony with the natural world by fostering love, appreciation, and understanding of the Sonoran Desert. In a nutshell -- The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is a world-renowned zoo, natural history museum and botanical garden, all in one place! Exhibits re-create the natural landscape of the Sonoran Desert Region so realistically you find yourself eye-to-eye with mountain lions, prairie dogs, Gila monsters, and more. Within the Museum grounds, you will see more than 300 animal species and 1,200 kinds of plants. There are almost 2 miles of paths traversing 21 acres of beautiful desert. Founded in 1952 by William Carr and Arthur Pack, the Desert Museum is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of the Sonoran Desert.



From caves to native animals to the desert plants, one could spend a day. The minerals in the cave were treasures.



Hummingbird forests where they hummed around you (but moved too fast for a good picture), desert gardens, weird people, and more.



There was Old Presidio in downtown where we took a walking tour, not to be confused with Old Town far outside of downtown where over 300 movies (Tombstone) have been filmed.



Back to marathons: I am overall happy with the marathon as much because this brings to a conclusion a Maniacal 2009.

- The crazy idea of doing 9+9=18 in '09 was met – this was my 18th marathon of the year. I went to Mobile, Miami, Greenbelt, Little Rock, got snowed out of Olathe, Illinois, Kentucky Derby, Capon Valley, Buffalo, Lake Placid, San Francisco, Turkey Swamp, Albuquerque, Omaha, Kansas City, New York, Indianapolis, Philadelphia and finally Tucson.
- Included my first two 50K trail runs.
- Reasonably consistent finishing times of 5:26, 5:33, 5:36, 5:24, 5:33, 5:50, 8:38/50k, 5:46, 5:49, 5:40, 7:40/50k, 5:51, 5:57, 5:39, 5:47, 5:29, 5:28 and 5:39. (Though these are a long shot from my 4:25 Boston qualifier its safely training runs.)
- Qualified for Marathon Maniacs 6-star (out of 10) Osmium level with 16 states, up from last year's 13 states and Ruthenium level. Any star category qualifies as Maniac in my mind!
- Now I'm looking forward to a rest until Mississippi Blues early January.

Want to see more of the tourist pictures? Check out Tom's Tucson Photo Show at

<http://www.photoshow.com/watch/BR6lj5Av>

or see any of this trip shows at www.photoshow.com/members/tomskoi

Itinerary

Thu Dec 10

1:30pm Depart Newark thru Houston for plane change
7:40pm Arrive Tucson, AZ

Rental car

Hotel Hilton Tucson El Conquistador Golf & Tennis Resort
10000 North Oracle Road, Tucson, AZ 85737
Tele 800 325 7832 or 520 544 5000 11.5 miles from City Center

Fri Dec 11

Noon Expo at Hilton to 5pm

time? Dinner with Dick and Jacqui Sasser at their home in Oro Valley

Sat Dec 12

8:00am Expo at Hilton to 5pm

Pasta dinner Did not sign up - \$25

Sun Dec 13

7:30am Marathon www.tucsonmarathon.com - Pam Reed race director

Times? Shuttles are provided from Hotel El Conquistador and Holiday Inn Express
Hotel shuttle service to the Marathon starting lines from hotels is provided ONLY for guests staying at Hilton El Conquistador, Holiday Inn Express and Wingate by Wyndam Hotel. Shuttles will run from the Finish Line to these properties (look for signage on race day).

To the bus pick up taking to start line – running from 5am to 5:45am
Directions to Ventana Medical, 1910 E. Innovation Park Drive, Oro Valley, 85755 (from Tucson and the Race Expo/Hilton El Conquistador Resort): go north on Oracle Road to Tangerine Road (light), turn left (west) and turn right at the first traffic light (Innovation Park Drive) just before Northwest Hospital. Go up the hill, past the hospital, about half a mile and park on the right at the first building you come to (Ventana Medical). If the lot is full, there are plenty of open fields beyond it for parking. Buses will pick up Marathon and First Marathon Relay runners at the entrance to Ventana Medical.

Finish line at Coronado Middle School, 3401 E. Wilds Road, off SR #77, 85739. Shuttles are provided to host hotels – about 7 miles from Hilton?

Finish line clocked in '08 to 7:56. Pacers only to 5:00.

Tue Dec 15

11:25am Depart Tucson through Houston for plane change
8:30pm Arrive Newark

From Website of www.tucsonmarathon.org for Holualoa Tucson Marathon:

Enjoy beautiful Tucson winter weather with temperatures at the start averaging in the high 30s and reaching 65-70 degrees Fahrenheit by 11 a.m. This is primarily a downhill marathon. with some hills around mile 2 and mile 10. Come run your FIRST MARATHON or your FASTEST MARATHON. You'll drop almost 2,200 feet in elevation as you run on the mostly downhill, point-to-point course along the beautiful Santa Catalina mountain range. (There are some rolling hills and inclines between miles 2-9 and at mile 25).

The Old West historical town of Oracle marks the starting line. The course winds through the desert on paved roads and finishes at the Coronado Middle School, just off of E. Wilds Road. Our runners continue to tell us it's one of the prettiest courses in the country and one of the easiest to run a personal best. Be sure to train your quadriceps as you'll be running downhill! Benefits local school sports programs and other selected youth groups.

Marathon Info - The race finishes at the Coronado Middle School on E. Wilds Road, just off of SR#77.

The Holualoa Tucson Marathon course has been certified by USATF and is an official qualifier for the Boston Marathon. Results are automatically sent to Boston for those qualifying in Tucson. There will be no mailed confirmations. Check the website beginning in October as all received entries will be posted on the "participants' list" under the PARTICIPANTS tab.

Aid Stations will be located at the following locations along the course: Start, 2.5mi, 4.9mi, 6.6mi, 8.3mi, 9.6mi, 11.3mi, 13.6mi, 15.6mi, 17.1mi, 19.2mi, 20.3mi, 21.4mi, 22.3mi, 23.2mi, 24.2mi, 25.3mi, Finish Line.

Maps - There has been a change to the 2009 Tucson Marathon course. The marathon route will no longer utilize the hilly out and back section on Biosphere Road. Instead, there will be an out and back section earlier in the race, in the town of Oracle.

Biosphere 2:

Fast Facts

Stats on the Biosphere 2 facility

3.14 acre Biosphere facility

7,200,000 cubic feet of sealed glass, 6,500 windows

91 feet at highest point

sealed from the earth below by a 500-ton welded stainless steel liner

40-acre campus

300,000 sq. ft. of administrative offices, classrooms, labs, conference center, housing

Name

“Biosphere 2” derives from the idea that it is modeled on Earth, the first biosphere.

Elevation

3,820 ft.

Visitors, 1991-2007

2,300,000 visitors

325,000 K-12 student visitors

Ecosystems under glass

Ocean with coral reef

Mangrove wetlands

Tropical rainforest

Savannah grassland

Fog desert

Mechanics of the Biosphere

The Technosphere

The basement area of Biosphere 2, known as the Technosphere, covers nearly 3.14 acres. It is where all the electrical, plumbing, and mechanical systems are housed. There are 26 air handlers (AH) located in the technosphere. Of these, 14 are large units that can heat and cool the air, remove particles from the air, maintain humidity levels and generate condensate water (for rain, fog and resupplying the ocean). The 12 smaller AHs can cool the air and generate condensate water. To make condensate water or create dehumidification, the air temperature is lowered below the dew point and this cooled air is blown across the chilled or tower water AH coils. Cooling the air causes condensation to form on the coils, which is collected in drip pans located on the floor adjacent to the handlers.

How an Air Handler Operates: The water temperature required by a biome for creating its climate is manufactured in the Energy Center. Then passed along through an underground closed-loop pipe system, to the proper AHcoils, and is recycled.

The Energy Center

The building with the five arched segments and three towers is the Energy Center complex. The Biosphere 2 laboratory requires continuous power to maintain proper conditions for the living organisms inside and for ongoing experiments.

Temperature rise following power failure on a sunny summer day could within 20 minutes irreparably damage the plants in the Biosphere biomes. The Energy Center responds within minutes to maintain power and to control the environments in the biomes during the frequent power outages due to summer monsoons.

Within the five arches are two large generators. The primary generator uses natural gas for fuel and a back-up generator uses diesel fuel. In addition to the large generators inside this building, there are also boilers to heat water and chillers to cool water. The large towers are used to cool air by drawing it across a column of water.