



Robert and Mirna on safari

Inside This Issue:

Ageless Running	4
FitKidz Classic Photos	5
Paris Olympics	6
Join SAR Today	7
Meet Tomatan	7
Race Schedule	8

Running Holiday of a Lifetime

By Robert Rezetko

Last summer I spent three weeks in Kenya. My wife and I were there together for the first week. We had an amazing time! Like almost all travelers to Kenya, we started off in Nairobi. We saw the major sites there and visited well-known nearby locations such as Nairobi National Park (full of migrating wildlife), Ngong Hills where one finds the Karen Blixen Museum (she is best known for her 1937 book *Out of Africa*) and Finch Hatton's Grave (Blixen's lover), and Lake Naivasha (with a sizable population of hippos) and its Crescent Island (having its own game sanctuary). But the highlight of our time together was four days of game drives, while staying in a tented camp, in the Masai Mara National Reserve. In Africa, the big five game animals are the lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo, and rhinoceros, and while we were not fortunate enough to sight the elusive rhinoceros, despite many hours of searching, several cheetahs resting on high-up tree limbs with their prey was first-rate compensation.

After my wife departed Kenya, I traveled to the town of Iten, the running capital of the world. I spent two weeks with a Danish friend, who trains there regularly, and a retired Belgian friend, who has lived there for many years. Iten sits on the edge of the Rift Valley at nearly 8,000 feet of altitude

(continued on page 2)



The entrance to Iten

Running Holiday of a Lifetime cont.

which of course makes for excellent high altitude training. (It's no wonder that famous Lornah Kiplagat's High Altitude Training Centre is there.) Fifty years ago the town comprised only a handful of houses, but modest development took place as East African running talent was discovered, there was an influx of Western money to support it, and runners started to gather in the town.

I was not fortunate enough to meet Eliud Kipchoge or the late Kelvin Kiptum, but I did cross paths with some of the best distance runners in the world, including several former and current European national record holders in the marathon. In a local minibus, having just arrived, I fell into conversation with a local who turned out to be a 2:14 marathoner. I naïvely asked him whether he was well known, and he smiled. He said there were so many fast Kenyan runners around that 2:14 was not only unremarkable, but he also had to quit running because he was unable to make a living at it due to his lack of running talent!

I met other lightning fast runners and had the chance to run with some of them.

Joshua and Johnny are 62 and 63 minute half marathoners, and I accompanied them on their afternoon jog. It took everything I had to stay with their extremely slow pace—it is quite difficult to run that slow! I can attest to the fact that the Kenyan shuffle is real. The afternoon shuffle, it turns out, is a staple of every serious Kenyan runner's running diet.



Robert with Joshua and Johnny

Mornings are a different matter. Kenyan runners will often run twice before noon. The first, so-called easy run invariably starts at 6:00 a.m. The pace can easily be 5:45 per mile, and we are talking on (often rough) dirt roads at high altitude. Later in the morning there is often speed work or hill work. Kenyans train incredibly hard. A large number of runners quit early due to running injuries, but since there are so many talented runners, Kenya can afford to lose maybe one third of its running talent to injury.

A famous, weekly recurring event is the Iten Fartlek (a Swedish term that means "speed play"). A swarm of runners meets at "Two Tires" south of town at 9:00 a.m. on Thursdays and run, for instance, one on, one off, meaning one minute hard, one minute easy. I did this run once, covering 7.5 miles "with" the group, and I was barely able to follow the slowest runners.

(continued on page 3)

Running Holiday of a Lifetime cont.

A little while after the workout we reached town and Kenyan milk tea and chapatis (flatbread) have rarely tasted better.

My friend who spends many months each year training in Iten led me on several adventurous runs along the escarpment and down into the Rift Valley. Where we were staying, it's a 3,000 foot drop over 2.5 miles to the bottom. The steep terrain, which can also be rocky and slippery, makes for challenging and treacherous running (often really fast walking). And let's not forget that what runs down must run up! Unlike my friend on the rare occasion in the past, I did not come face-to-face with any cobras, but I did marvel at the huge termite mounds that often towered high above my head, as well as the many herds of goats, cows, and even camels, not to mention the incredible landscapes and views.



On the edge of the Rift Valley

Another highlight of my trip was meeting the world's most famous running coach, the Irish

Brother Colm O'Connell, who arrived in Iten as a school teacher in 1976 and by happenstance became a gym teacher. He soon started training young runners, and over the decades he has trained dozens of Olympic medalists and holders of world titles and world records. I was lucky enough to spend an afternoon with the friendly and humble "Godfather of Kenyan Running" on the campus of St. Patrick's High School. We toured the school and its museum which has an incredible collection of running memorabilia, and we enjoyed tea and biscuits (cookies) in his home while talking about the "secrets" of Kenyan running (there are no "secrets," he says) and looking over momentos from the accomplishments of his runners on the world stage.



Robert with his Danish friend Martin and Brother Colm

I could say much more about my experiences in Kenya—visits to Lake Baringo and Lake Bogoria National Reserve (which has up to two million flamingos), or workouts on iconic Eldoret track or Moiben Road, or the incredibly tasty (vegetarian) food dishes that sustained my running efforts—but I'll leave the reader with just one parting piece of advice: if you ever have the opportunity to go to Kenya to run with the world's best, whether on your own or with a group, perhaps with one of the many organized running camps for tourists, do it! I promise you that it will be your running holiday of a lifetime!





Ageless Running

By Bill Martin

I am 78 years old. Were I to keel over my keyboard this moment, no one would say, “Oh, and he was so young.” It is a curious feeling. Part of me is aware of this thing called, “age,” yet another part of me is ageless, remaining the same spiritual essence which has been observing the countless personas and roles I have played over the decades. One of the tasks of what is pejoratively called, “old age,” but is more appropriately, “elderhood,” is the rediscovery of one’s essential nature. That is no easy task in a culture which exerts every effort to deny or obscure that essential nature.

I used to be a runner, a strong, swift, long-distance runner. For almost four decades running was a given in my life. These years saw me thrive as I ran on mountain trails, along city streets, through parks, on canal banks, and occasionally on tracks. I would eagerly travel to road races just to get the t-shirt and the occasional medal in my age group. I ran the Avenue of the Giants Marathon through the coastal redwoods in California and the Fiesta Bowl Marathon through the desert of Arizona. Most of the time I ran 10K races rather than marathons, however. I’ve run in the company (for brief moments before they disappeared into the distance) of Bill Rodgers and

Alberto Salazar. (If you know these names, welcome to my age group.) When I ran I felt fully embodied and alive.

In the past decade I have gradually fallen victim to the stories my culture tells about growing old. “Slow down,” I am told. “Take it easy and don’t injure yourself,” I am warned. “Find ‘age-appropriate’ activities,” I am cautioned. The litanies continue, “Go to doctors at the first sign of whatever. Walk, don’t run, and walk shorter and shorter distances less and less often.” Nancy and I live in a retirement community and you can imagine some of the images of aging that surround us every day. I have a heart arrhythmia but it is not life-threatening and doesn’t preclude exercise. So what is going on here? I used the phrase earlier, “I used to be a runner.” Somewhere within, I still am. Decades ago, I used to read the wonderful works of George Sheehan, a running philosopher whose words informed and inspired a generation of athletes and would-be athletes. I picked up one of his books recently and marveled at the way his words seemed to speak directly to my soul about the myths of aging. My spirit is telling me that I have been listening to the wrong advice.

So now the neighbors see me jogging through the early morning coolness – slow, shuffling; resting often, but gradually getting stronger, and whatever the speed, feeling some of the old energy and power. So much is outside of my control. Society is toxic and I can’t fix it. Culture impinges on my spirit at every turn and I can’t change it. My body is mortal and I can’t avoid that. I can, however, refuse to believe and act upon the cautionary myths of culture. I want to continue emulating my elder teacher, Lao-Tzu, by stepping away from all that is fearful and inauthentic. There is more to me than an age. I am still alive and my body is asking me to pay attention. “I want to run again,” it is telling me. I’m listening to it. Screw the voices of cultural caution. I am alive.



The FitKidz Classic 1 Mile

The 2024 edition of the annual FitKidz Classic 1 Mile race was recently held at the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area. This “kids only” race had almost 200 participants.

The Southern Arizona Roadrunners FitKidz program includes a series of free, kid-friendly 1-mile fun runs that take place throughout the year. Each participant receives a race bib, a finisher’s ribbon, and a free t-shirt. The program is designed to inspire children aged 5 to 12 to lead active, healthy lifestyles through running and physical activity. The program aims to foster a love for running in a fun and supportive environment. With its emphasis on fitness, fun, and community, the SAR FitKidz program is a fantastic way for children to develop a lifelong appreciation for health and exercise.



The Paris Olympics

By David Sutherland



David and Lisa Sutherland at the Paris Olympics.
The Phryges mascot is in the background.

My wife and I arrived in Paris by high-speed train from London to attend our first ever Olympic Games. Stepping into the station, it was immediately apparent that we had entered the center of all things sport. Everywhere we looked, there were advertisements, signage on the walls, directions plastered to the floors, souvenir stands strewn throughout the city, countless volunteer guides to help you find your way (or to help you with your deceptively complex Metro pass selection). There were even life-sized cardboard cutouts of the Paris 2024 mascot for you to take photos with (fun fact: these mascots are Phryges and are modeled after famous French hats - not red, white and blue cartoon bird-creatures as we had been assuming for more days than I care to admit). We spent the first night staving off the jet lag underneath the glow of the Eiffel Tower, emblazoned with the fresh addition of a bright white set of the Olympic rings, and accompanied by thousands of others who had the same idea. The atmosphere in Paris was certainly alive with the buzz from thousands upon thousands of tourists from every corner of the world, each person proudly representing their home countries.

The following day, we attended a session of

gymnastics event finals and got to see the exceptional Simone Biles secure one more Olympic medal. The athleticism and power those athletes demonstrate is somehow even more apparent in person. Our third and final day was set aside for attending Athletics, my favorite Olympic sport. In the evening, my wife and I excitedly arrived at Stade de France, the massive soccer stadium turned athletics venue for the games. "Is that... Michael Johnson?!" I excitedly exclaimed while fumbling for my phone as the track & field legend sat just 50 feet ahead in a booth prepping for the evening's BBC Sport broadcast.



Stade de France

We took our seats and awaited my most anticipated event of the night: the men's 1500m final. The outcome had been almost already decided: the race would almost certainly come down to either Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen or Great Britain's Josh Kerr. But to the surprise of most, Cole Hocker, an American, would emerge the Olympic champion, following his epic 300m kick to close the gap from 5th to 1st. Not to be outdone, another American, Yared Nuguse, would slip past Ingebrigtsen in the final 50m to secure the bronze. The race finish led to the entire stadium erupting in a flurry of impromptu high fives between strangers and the

(continued on page 7)

The Paris Olympics cont.

indistinguishable cheers of tens of thousands. Following that race, we also had the opportunity to watch Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone secure a spot in the women's 400m hurdles final, making an incredible athletic achievement look deceptively effortless. And to conclude the night, the marquee event: the women's 200m final. Gabby Thomas had an incredible performance, accelerating off the curve and taking home the gold for Team USA. Following the race, the competitors wander around the stadium, celebrate with their coaches and families and take in the moment. Lucky for us, the Olympians took their victory lap around the stadium, stopping to celebrate with the fans. I even got a high-five from Gabby Thomas! The whole trip was full of incredible memories I happily brought back home with me to Tucson. Now on to planning for how to get tickets for the LA Olympics in 2028!



Gabby Thomas celebrating her 200m gold medal



Join SAR Today!



If you are not yet a member of the Southern Arizona Roadrunners, please consider joining today! Whether you are a runner, a walker, or somewhere in between, becoming a member of SAR keeps you in touch with Southern Arizona's running and walking scene, and offers great member benefits such as discounts from local merchants and discounted race entry fees. Visit runsar.org for more information.

Meet Tomatan

Tomatan is a Japanese invention designed to feed runners tomatoes while they exercise. Created by Japanese juice company Kagome and revealed at the 2015 Tokyo Marathon Expo, the wearable robot sits on a runner's shoulders and delivers tomatoes directly into the mouth. Tomatan ensures that runners can enjoy the health benefits of tomatoes without stopping. Tomatan weighs about 18 lb! A smaller version dubbed "Petit-Tomatan" is a slender 7 lb.



2024-2025 SAR RACE SCHEDULE



November 28, 2024



January 19, 2025



January 26, 2025



February 9, 2025



February 16, 2025



March 2, 2025



March 16, 2025



March 22, 2025



USATF Certified Course



Gabe Zimmerman Triple Crown



FitKidz Mile



The Running Shop / Mizuno SAR Grand Prix

About SAR

The Southern Arizona Roadrunners is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting health and fitness in Tucson and Southern Arizona through running and walking.

Our vision is to strengthen and support the running and walking community in Southern Arizona through high-quality, affordable, and family-friendly events and programming that empower people of all backgrounds, abilities, and ages to pursue a healthier lifestyle. We promote community engagement by celebrating the joy of athletic achievement, individual and group participation, philanthropy, and volunteer service.



For the latest information, visit us online at runsar.org
You can also follow us on Facebook and Instagram at:
[@azroadrunners](https://www.facebook.com/azroadrunners) & [@runsar](https://www.instagram.com/runsar)

If you would prefer not to receive future issues of The Roadrunner, please contact us at: info@runsar.org or (520) 812-0159