

Duke City Bridges

by John Farrow

This year's Duke City Marathon and Half-Marathon featured a new course that showcased one of the most unique and beautiful areas of the city, the Rio Grande Nature Center in the North Valley. The paved bike path and numerous dirt trails through the Bosque lined with purple asters and yellow black-eyed susans have long been an undiscovered running mecca in the city, although the area's popularity is increasing rapidly.

The Nature Center is also a wonderful place to watch migrating ducks and geese and cranes in the brilliant sunshine out over the blue Rio Grande. If you're lucky, you might spot a beaver, coyote, eagle or pheasant, not to mention the rabbits, squirrels and songbirds.

The races also featured an interesting twist, a jaunt across the new but as yet unopened Montaña Bridge. It was a great idea and gave runners the chance to experience first-hand the beauty of the Bosque along the Rio Grande as well as attempt to sooth some of the wounds inflicted on the city by the incredibly contentious history of the bridge, which actually began before many of the runners were born.

And the irony of running across the empty but completed bridge that has employed more lawyers per square mile than any other in the state's history also moved the poetic muse to some rather semi-eloquent verse (with profuse apologies to Joyce Kilmer):

I think that I shall never know
a bridge as lovely
as an empty Montaña.

Frankly, the bridge was a foregone conclusion years ago with the election of

Martin Chavez as mayor. Chavez had vowed since childhood to put a bridge at that very spot, hell, high water, divine intervention or a more practical and cost-effective alternative elsewhere be damned. More than a few people could not mention the bridge without including a colorful modifier or two, as in "that [expletives deleted] bridge!" Or, more specifically, "that [expletives deleted] Marty Chavez's [expletives deleted] bridge!"

As bridges go, it's actually not bad-looking, if you like bridges. The colors blend nicely into the surrounding scenery, and there is a bike lane and pedestrian walkway along the south side, complete with three enlarged viewing areas looking down-river. Just be careful if you ever think about using the bike lane. The bridge is supposed to be one lane and a shoulder on each side. This being New Mexico, however, count on those shoulders being full of road hogs.

Well, regardless of one's original feelings, this is a big city with a big river flowing through it and jobs and people on both sides. Anyone with half a brain knows that for years we have needed another river crossing, with the only question being where. The point has been argued *ad nauseam* for years and, for better or worse, the bridge is there and it's time to move on. For me it'll be the Bridges to Babylon.

But I hope that this isn't the last race to be run across the Montaña Bridge. It's too nice a bridge in too beautiful a location.

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Albuquerque Road Runners Club