



Redman Triathlon Race Report Oklahoma City, Oklahoma September 20, 2014

Déjà vu, ([/ˌdeɪʒɑːˈvuː/](#)) from [French](#), literally "already seen", is the phenomenon of the strong sensation that an event or experience currently being experienced has been experienced in the past, whether it has actually happened or not.

My experience at the 2014 Redman Triathlon was a perfect example of déjà vu, and it wasn't in my imagination.

First, this is how I began my 2012 Redman race report:

"If you want to save yourself the time of reading this lengthy report, here it is in a nutshell: I wasn't well-prepared for this race, I wasn't enthusiastic about doing it, I had a terribly long and miserable day, and, for hours on end, I wanted to quit. Nevertheless, I persevered and finished the race, in a little over 18 hours. And--thanks to huge blisters on the bottom of both feet--I spent three days after the race being virtually unable to walk."

This pretty well also describes my experience at the 2014 Redman, with one exception: I finished in just *under* 18 hours. 17 hours, 59 minutes and 9 seconds, to be exact. Everything else was pretty much the same.

Going into the race, my biggest fears were of a repeat of that 2012 disaster. Well, my biggest fears were realized. Right down to the huge blisters that made life miserable for days afterward. It's as if this was the triathlon version of the movie, "Groundhog Day", and I was the main character, experiencing the same miserable day, over and over again.

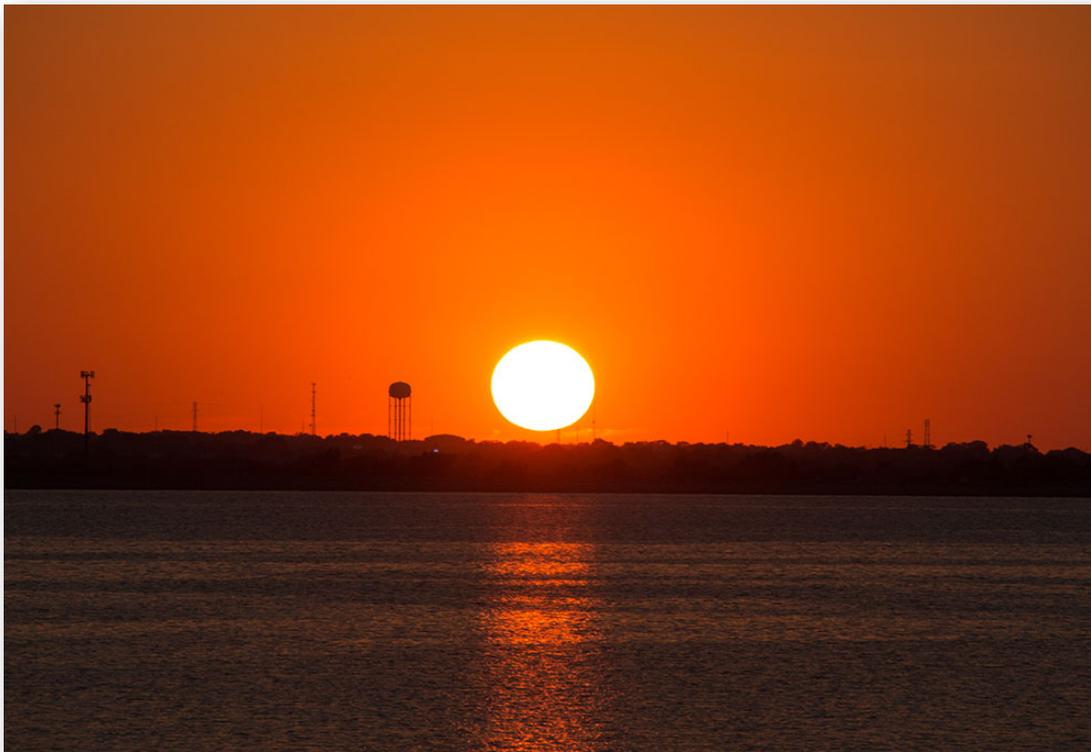
"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." - Albert Einstein

There are so many similarities between the 2012 and 2014 races that I could almost cut-and-paste my 2012 race report here and be done with it. That would be easy, and I always seem to do things the hard way.

My Return to Triathlons

I decided in the months before the 2012 Redman that, for the first time since starting to do triathlons in 2003, I wouldn't do an iron-distance triathlon (1.2-mile swim, 112-mile bike and 26.2-mile run)--or any other triathlon--in 2013. I needed a break from the big commitment of time and energy that it takes to train for one. I was a bit fearful, though, that I might find the layoff so enjoyable that I might end up never doing another iron-distance triathlon. I like the challenge of doing them, and they force me to stay physically fit.

Those fears turned out to be for naught. When I signed up for the 2014 Redman on December 8, 2013, I was ready to get back into triathlons. I was looking forward to going back to Oklahoma City for the sixth time since 2006. I enjoyed my year off, but realized just how much I needed the break.



Lake Hefner, where Redman starts and finishes, offers spectacular views of the setting sun.

Spring and Summer 2014

I ran the GO! St. Louis Marathon for the 12th consecutive time in April 2014, finishing six minutes faster than in 2013. My 2013 finish time (5:20:57) was my slowest ever, but after years of getting slower and slower, even a tiny improvement was welcome. It gave me a little bit of encouragement for Redman.

My training went well in the months leading up to Redman, but there simply wasn't enough of it. It seemed like every time I needed to do a long bike ride or a long run, something more urgent came up and prevented me from doing so. As a result, too many of my bike rides were done indoors on the trainer, and not on the roads or trails where I could ride longer and force myself to push harder. It's important to have a lot of bike fitness going into a triathlon because it largely determines whether your legs will have anything left for the long run afterward. The run is always the most grueling part of the race, and if your legs aren't prepared for it, it's a nightmare.

The weather was great for training in 2014 until a brutal heat wave hit in late August. One of the reasons I looked forward to taking off from triathlons in 2013 was to avoid having to train in yet another hot summer. (The three summers from 2010 to 2012 were hot, with 2012 being the hottest since I started doing triathlons in 2003.) Naturally, with my luck, 2013--the year I skipped doing a triathlon--had the mildest summer since 2009.

12 mos. ending September 30	Swimming (yards)	Bike (miles)	Run (miles)	Total training hours
2003	141,100	3,412	957	384
2004	155,100	3,462	797	395
2005	183,700	2,265	883	326
2006	97,600	2,160	789	298
2007	82,600	1,958	565	257
2008	80,300	1,319	559	215
2009	42,700	1,067	530	190
2010	52,000	1,003	542	192
2011	70,580	1,251	675	241
2012	52,204	894	675	214
2013	10,020	151	587	124
2014	29,200	1,293	634	216

At first glance, the 2014 training totals don't look too shabby. The bike miles, though, came mostly from indoor riding, which isn't nearly as vigorous as outdoor riding.

September

Because I hadn't been able to train like I had hoped or needed, by the time September rolled around, my enthusiasm in doing this race was pretty much gone. I just wanted to get it over with. It was exactly the same feeling I had two years earlier.

Off to Oklahoma City

I left for Oklahoma City on Wednesday, September 17th. That gave me a full day (Thursday) to settle in and relax before things got busy on Friday.



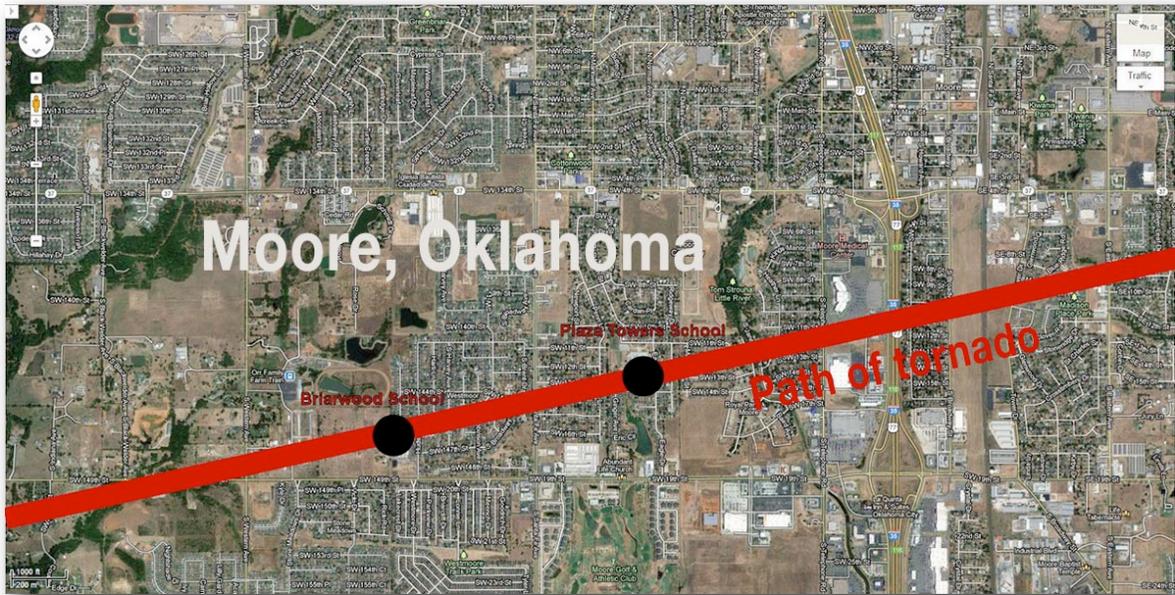
Just as I did on the way to Redman in 2011 and 2012, I stopped in Joplin to see the rebuilding efforts after the massive and deadly tornado that hit in May 2011. The commercial areas are completely rebuilt, while the residential areas still have years to go before a full recovery. I drove over to a huge tree that was ravaged by the tornado and snapped a photo of it, just as I had done in 2011 and 2012. The tree is slowly growing back, although the damage is still apparent.



Room 234 at the Courtyard by Marriott on the Northwest Expressway in Oklahoma City. I stayed in this very same room in January 2015 on a one-night layover on my trip home from Houston, and booked the room again for Redman in September 2015. Being on the second floor and close to the stairwell, I can come and go very quickly. My only complaint about the room is that I have to block cold air from the air conditioner hitting my back when I sit at the desk.

Moore, Oklahoma

On Thursday, September 18th, I had some free time and drove a few miles south of Oklahoma City to the city of Moore to see its condition after a devastating EF5 tornado hit the city one year earlier, on May 20, 2013. Winds hit over 200 mph during that tornado, with the destruction killing 24 and injuring nearly 400. The damage was typical of what I've seen with tornadoes. There can be complete destruction along the central path of the tornado, and little or no apparent damage outside of it. Whether you and/or your house survives a tornado comes down to the luck of the draw as to how close you are to its path.



The path of the tornado. Note the location of the Plaza Towers School in the center of the satellite image. It was completely destroyed, and seven children inside were killed.



Plaza Towers Elementary School, pictured the day after the tornado struck in May 2013.

Moore is making a quick comeback. Lots of new homes have been built, and the construction is continuing. Except for the occasional vacant lot and absence of trees, you can't really tell that a massive tornado ripped through the area sixteen months earlier.



A completely new Plaza Towers Elementary School opened for classes in September 2014.



Across the street from the school was one of a number of lots where a home was completely destroyed, leaving only a concrete slab behind. The homes surrounding it are all new, and all have brick exteriors.



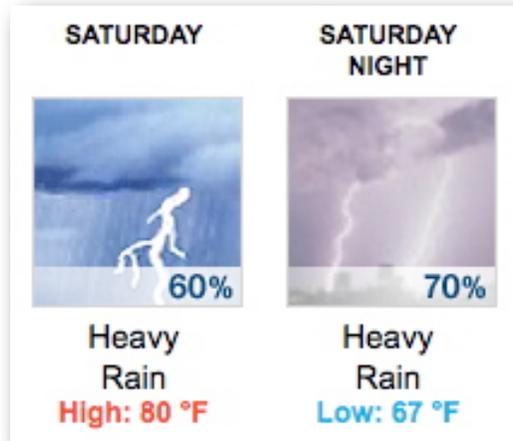
Fresh piles of dirt can be seen in many front yards where underground storm shelters have recently been installed. The two homes pictured are older homes about a block north of the Plaza Elementary, and were spared from the tornado.



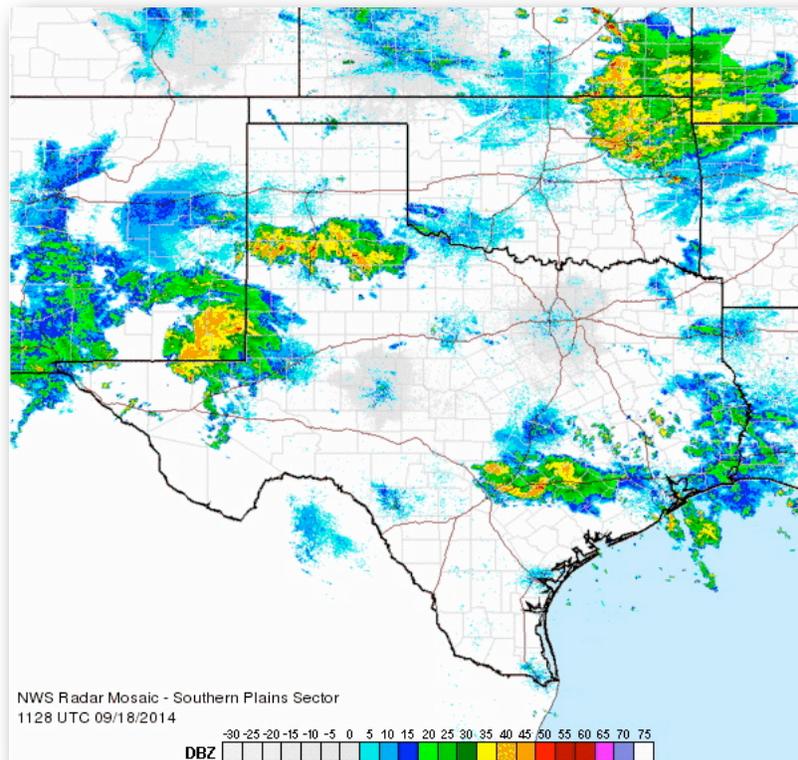
A close-up of an underground storm shelter in the front yard of a new home. Plaza Elementary is directly across the street.

Weather Forecast

Early in the week leading up to Redman, the weather forecast for race day (Saturday) looked about as gloomy as could be. The remnants of Hurricane Odile were moving over the southwestern United States and headed east toward Texas and Oklahoma. It was expected to bring heavy rain and thunderstorms to Oklahoma City on Friday and Saturday.



This was the weather forecast for Saturday, as posted by NOAA on Tuesday, September 16th.



Weather radar on Thursday morning, showing areas of heavy rain and thunderstorms moving east/northeast.

This was a huge concern for the athletes and race staff. Contingency plans were being prepared in case of bad weather on race day. The biggest fears were lightning, which would cancel the swim, and heavy rain, which could cause flooding on the bike course. (We had to deal with one instance of a flooded road during Redman 2009 by carrying our bikes around the flooded section.)

As it turned out, the weather forecast improved day-by-day as the storm system weakened and stayed to the south. Oklahoma City received no rain on Friday or Saturday. We were very, very lucky.



The lighthouse replica at Lake Hefner. It's obviously a popular subject for photographers.



The drought that resulted in low water levels at Lake Hefner in 2012 was broken in 2013. In 2012, the boats in these dock slips were sitting on dirt.



Lake Hefner is a man-made lake that supplies water for Oklahoma City's municipal water system. Pictured above is the intake tower for the water treatment plant located across the street.

No Cameras

I carried a videocamera--sometimes two--with me during the 2011 and 2012 races, and made videos from the footage recorded. I decided not to do that for this race, for two reasons: I didn't want the hassle of carrying a videocamera the entire day, and I knew that making a video would consume an enormous amount of free time that I didn't expect to have in the ensuing months. (The 2012 video took about 250 hours to complete over several months.) Besides, a 2014 video would have looked much like the 2011 and 2012 videos since I would be getting pretty much the same kind of footage. I have so many other things to do that I didn't want to commit myself to doing the same thing once again.



Vegetation took over the spot in which I had formed a Redman logo using stones in 2011. (The logo appeared in my 2011 and 2012 race videos.) I didn't venture out to try to find it, as I'm sure it would be largely unrecognizable even if I did locate the stones.

Friday

The day before the race is always busy. The morning was spent laying out all of the clothes and gear I would use during the race. Even though it's easy (after all, I've done the same thing for eleven prior iron-distance races), it's no fun. You also have to do it carefully. If you make a mistake and forget to pack something, it could be a disaster on race day.

After lunch at Chick-Fil-A, I went to the race site at Lake Hefner to pick up my race packet, and then headed back to the hotel to stuff my transition bags and get my bike ready to race. Late in the afternoon, I drove back to Lake Hefner to drop off my bike and transition bags for the bike and run segments.



Packet pickup takes place in one of the large tents set up in Hefner Park for Redman.

What makes Redman so special, and which keeps me coming back, is its wonderful race staff and volunteers. I've been able to meet many of them, and they've become friends, even though we see each other for just a few minutes on one weekend of the year.

While putting my bike in the racks on Friday night, I saw one of my favorite Redman people, Tonya Brown. Tonya has been on the Redman race staff since the very first race in 2005, and she did the full-distance race herself in 2011. I first met her in 2008 when I went out to Lake Hefner the day after the race to help clean up. This year, Tonya and was among those overseeing the transition area. She instantly recognized me and came over to see me, wearing her ever-present smile. It was great to see her again. Redman simply wouldn't be the same without her.



Tonya Brown at Redman in 2012.



The bike transition area early on Friday afternoon. By Friday evening, it was packed with bikes.



The finish line. Over 600 athletes would cross it the next day, including 129 doing the full iron-distance triathlon.



For its tenth anniversary, Redman introduced a new logo. Personally, I think they could have done much better. The “RM” is too large relative to “RedmanTri” and you can’t quickly tell that RM stands for Redman. (Redman is one word, not two, after all). Initials only work well when people are familiar with them. Redman athletes will recognize the RM abbreviation; all others will be clueless until it’s explained to them.



The old Redman logo.

Race Morning

Race day was finally here. I woke up around 4:00 a.m., ate breakfast, got dressed, grabbed the bag of stuff I needed for the swim (plus a few items to be put on the bike), and then left the hotel just before 5:00 a.m. It was a quick 10-minute drive to Lake Hefner, followed by a nearly one-mile walk to the race start. Then, it was the usual routine of getting the bicycle tires inflated, filling my water bottles, etc. I waited until 6:30 a.m. to put on my wetsuit. It's all pretty routine by now, but the waiting for the race to start is nerve-racking. I would love to do a race where, as soon as get there and you're ready to go, you start.

The weather for race day was far from what had been forecasted and feared days earlier. The skies were partly cloudy and the air temperature at the start was 70°. Rain was not in the forecast.

Weather had been a factor in four of the five Redmans I had done previously, and it was going to be a factor once again. The high temperature for the day was expected to reach the upper 80s--the price we'd pay for not getting a cloudy, rainy day. This was a problem for me since I don't do well in heat, which you'd know if you read my 2011 and 2012 Redman race reports. Heat is my kryptonite.

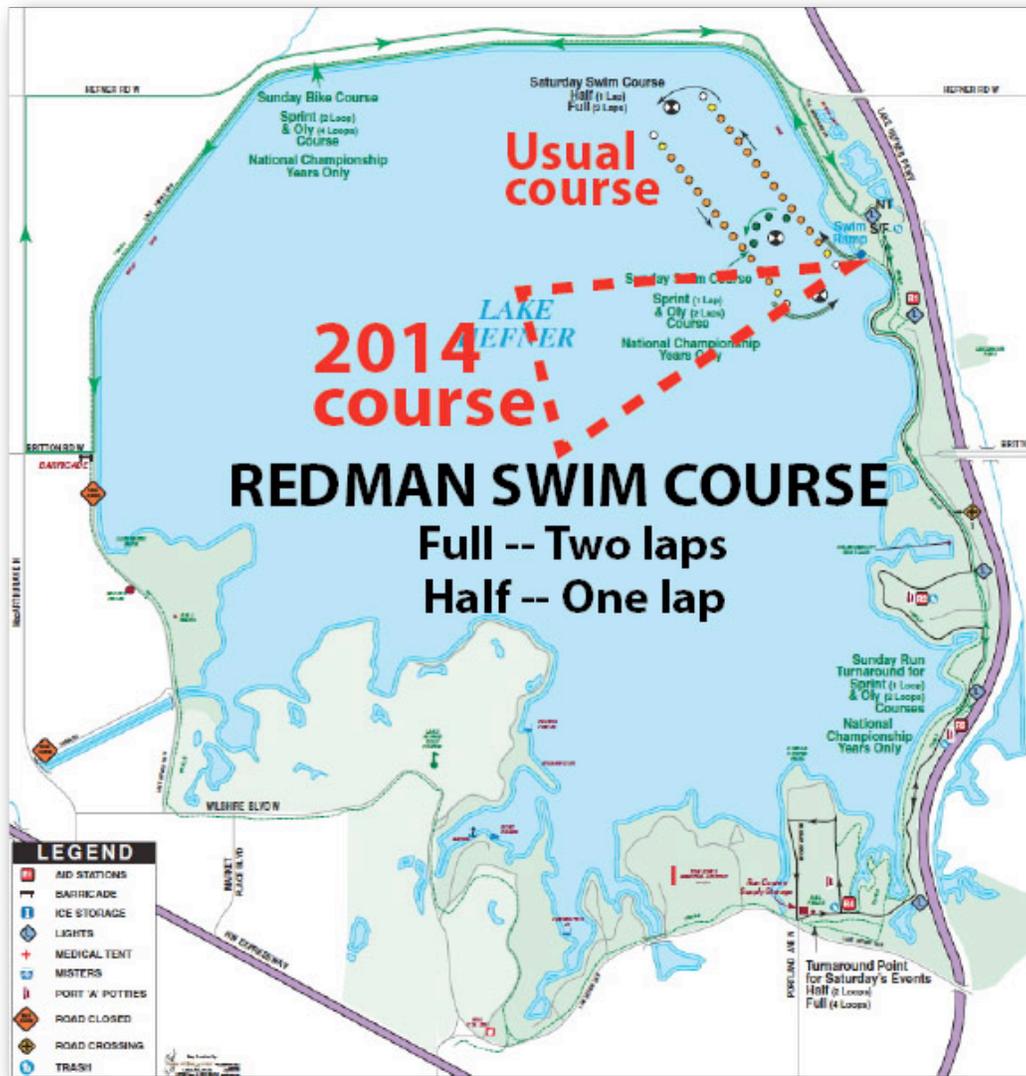
Wind would also be a factor, as it had been in every Redman I've done save one. Here we go again, I thought.

The Swim

The lake water temperature was around 75°. It was a bit cool when I first got in, but proved to be comfortable in a sleeveless wetsuit. A late summer heat wave threatened to make this the first non wetsuit-legal (i.e. 78° or higher) race in Redman's ten-year history but, to everyone's relief, the water temperature dropped in the week before the race.

The wind doesn't usually kick up and become a factor at Redman until the afternoon. This year, though, wind was a factor from the very start of the race. The day was going to be much tougher because of it.

The official wind speed recorded at Oklahoma City's Will Rogers Airport when the race started was 5 miles per hour. At Lake Hefner, though, it had to be blowing at least 15 mph. (There's a video on Facebook showing race banners blowing hard in the wind.)



Redman's alternate swim course, which extended away from the shoreline instead of along it, was used in 2014. This meant that, with winds from the south, we would always be swimming with either a crosswind or a headwind on the counterclockwise course.

Of the twelve iron-distance swims I've done, this was the toughest, and proved to be my slowest. Unlike the second-toughest swim--at Silverman in 2007, when one large wave after another smacked you squarely in the face after the halfway point--the water at Redman this day was so choppy that you were being pushed all over the place. You simply couldn't swim in a straight line due to the crosswinds. You had to lift your head more frequently to see if you were still on course, and oftentimes you'd find yourself zig-zagging. It was very, very frustrating. I've had some good swims at Redman (my best was 1:16:13), and it's hard to believe it took me 1:39:23 to finish this year. It was even slower than 2012, when I finished in 1:37:22 while dragging a GoPro camera strapped to my chest and another camera stuffed down my wetsuit.

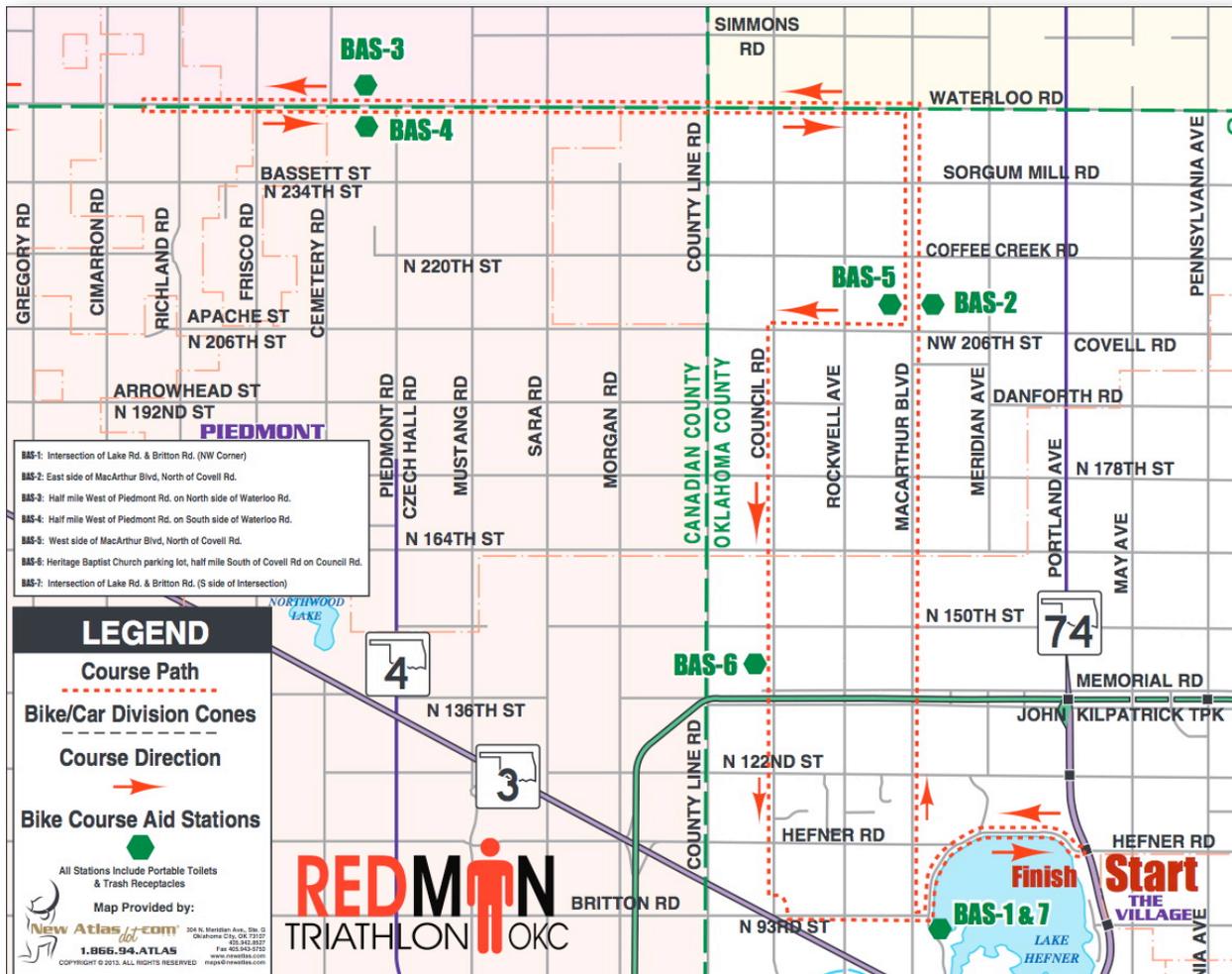
I wasn't the only one who found the swim difficult. Everyone else commented about it as well. I don't recall the number, but race director David Wood told me at the end of the race that dozens of competitors either had to be rescued during the swim, failed to meet the 2:20:00 cut-off, or called it quits right after finishing. It didn't surprise me at all.

T-1

I got through the swim-to-bike transition in 11:24. I wasn't actually hurrying, but I wasn't dilly-dallying, either. It's not like I'm out there competing to win an award. My only goal was to finish the race in good shape, so if it takes a few extra minutes to get ready for a 112-mile bike ride, that's fine with me.

The Bike

I soon discovered that the brutal swim took a much bigger toll on me than just a slow swim time. The moment I jumped on my bike, I noticed a lot of discomfort in both shoulders--the deltoid muscles, to be precise. It was clearly due to the very hard swim. I was hoping the pain would go away, but it never did. It's very discouraging to think you're going to be miserable for the next eight hours or so, but short of quitting the race (not an option), there was nothing I could do except suffer through it.



This is the usual Redman bike course, except that for 2014 there was a slight change due to road construction. (We turned east on Hefner Rd. and then south on MacArthur Blvd. when approaching Lake Hefner for the halfway point and the end of the bike course.)

The stiff winds that created so much trouble during the swim provided a wonderful tailwind for the first 15 miles of the bike course. I was able to pedal easily (I always take the first part of the bike segment easy, anyway), yet still travel about 17-18 mph on average.

Of course, tailwinds always give way to headwinds when you turn around, so I knew there would be a price to pay. The winds were blowing from the south/southwest, so as soon as we turned onto Waterloo Rd. at mile 15 to head due west for 13 miles, the wind hit us at a slight angle, creating a bit of a headwind. These next 13 miles to the turnaround are nothing but hills, albeit gradual. The turnaround is near the highest point on the entire bike course, so miles 15 through 28 involve more climbing than descending. Between the hill climbing and slight headwind, those were tough miles.

After the turnaround at mile 28, the slight headwind turned into a slight tailwind for 13 miles, and it made a noticeable difference. Pedaling was much easier.

Most of the following 15 miles--to the halfway point of the course at the 56-mile mark--were directly into the wind, and it was very tough. My shoulders were killing me. I knew what I would be facing, and absolutely dreaded the thought of doing the second loop of the bike course. It took four hours to complete the first half. Years ago, I was able to do it in about 3:20:00. This was very demoralizing.

The second loop was pretty much a repeat of the first, except that it was now early afternoon, and much warmer.

Heat was a huge factor in my last Redmans in 2011 and 2012, when the afternoon highs hit the low 90s. On this day, the high hit 88 degrees. There's really not much difference between 88 and 93 degrees while on a bike. They're both hot.

The volunteers at an aid station at about mile 75 came through with a great way to help me deal with the heat--a way that seemed obvious, but one that I've never tried before. They filled a plastic bag with ice, and then stuffed it inside the back of my jersey at the base of my neck. It not only felt good, but it helped cool me down. The ice melted between aid stations, so volunteers at subsequent aid stations would empty the bag and refill it with ice. Once again, Redman's volunteers proved to be the most supportive I've seen at any race. In years past, they've done things for me that go far beyond what you'd expect of them.

I finished the bike segment in 8:30:39, averaging a sluggish 13.2 miles per hour. To my dismay, it was even slower than 2012, when I had big problems with an irritated eye, and finished the bike in 8:28:00. I was convinced this year's poor performance on the bike was due to too little outdoor riding, and too-few long rides.

I've obviously lost a lot of bike fitness over the years. My bike splits in 2006, 2008 and 2009 were all around seven hours. I don't think any amount of training will ever get me back to that level of fitness, but 8:30:39 is pathetic.

My legs were trashed after the bike, and I was in no hurry to start the marathon. I took an embarrassingly long 17:20 to transition to the run.

The Run

This year's marathon was pretty much a repeat of that from 2012. It was too warm at the start (88 degrees at 6:00 p.m.) to run, so I walked the first few miles. My legs wouldn't run for me even if I wanted them to.



The run course is four laps of a perfectly flat, 6.55-mile route along the lake. There's no shade on the course, so the sun can make the run much tougher. A four-lap course is a mental nightmare. On your second lap, you wish you were on your third, and on the third, you wish it were your last.

Sunset wasn't until 7:15 p.m., and with no shade on the course, I was sweating a lot for the first lap of the run course, even while walking. It wasn't until darkness arrived and temperatures fell that I stopped sweating so heavily.

When things cooled down, I was able to run a bit, although never for long. Mostly, I ran just to try to get the race over with earlier. In 2012, I didn't finish until 1:30 a.m., and I really didn't want to be out there that late again. I wanted to be done no later than midnight--16:45:00 after the race began. That wasn't going to happen.

As the night wore on, the course got more and more lonely. By 11:00 p.m., there were about 30 of us left on the course. By midnight, there were just 10. All of the aid stations remained opened until the last of the athletes passed by, although a few were left unattended. At these stations, volunteers had left plenty of food and water on the tables for us to take as needed.

One thing I did differently this year was to make sure I consumed some solid food--cookies, pretzels, Gummy Bears, etc.--during the marathon. I had neglected to do so in 2012, and ran into trouble with six miles to go, feeling very weak. I didn't want a repeat of that, and fortunately I didn't.

It took me 7:20:25 to finish the marathon, only a few minutes faster than 7:24:45 in 2012. I crossed the finish line around 1:15 a.m., 17:59:09 after the race began. It's hardly worth bragging about beating my 2012 finish time by 12 minutes.

Waiting for the Final Finisher

I felt fine at the finish line, and decided to hang around to see the six remaining athletes cross the finish line. The final one came in about 20 minutes later.

David Wood, Redman's race director, and a number of other race staff, were there at the finish line, waiting for the final finishers as well. They really didn't need to be there, but they're so dedicated to this race and the athletes that they won't leave until the last athlete crosses the finish line. I can't say enough good things about them. They're the best. No one else comes close.

The Last to Leave

Minutes after the last athlete crossed the finish line, everyone started heading home or to their hotels. I went over to get my bike and collect my gear bags. I was moving pretty slowly, and soon found myself the only person left at the race site, except for a police officer who would be staying at the site until morning. I talked to her for a short while, and then made the long, very slow walk to my truck about a mile away. There was no one around to see me, but I must have looked like a bum carrying all of his worldly possessions, with a bicycle substituting for a grocery cart.

As I did in 2012 and 2011, I stopped at a McDonalds drive-thru to pick up some "real" food. I made it back to the hotel about 2:30 a.m., and hauled my bike and gear bags to the room in several trips. I used the stairs, which made it especially slow and painful.

Blisters, Again

When I said at the beginning of this report that this year's race was a repeat of 2012, that means my horrible blisters, too. I could tell during the latter parts of the marathon that I was developing blisters on my feet. Taking off my shoes was one of the last things I did before taking a bath (standing for a shower would not have been possible) and climbing into bed. I climbed into bed around 3:30 a.m., nearly 24 hours after I woke up to do this race.

Just as in 2012, I was barely able to walk for about three days due to the blisters. In addition, the tops of my feet started swelling on Monday night following the race. For about two days until the swelling went down, if I didn't keep my feet elevated, I would experience a stinging, burning pain on the tops of my feet. I couldn't stand still for more than a few minutes. Wisely, I had prepared for a repeat of the 2012 nightmare by leaving enough food in the house before going to Oklahoma City. That way, I wouldn't have to go grocery shopping until my feet allowed it.

After going through this same nightmare twice, I don't want to go through it again. There's no doubt in my mind that the blisters were caused by walking almost all of the marathon. (I don't think it was my shoes, since I've run marathons in these same shoes without problems.) Walking, I'm convinced, creates far more friction on the bottom of your feet than does running.



Even my blisters looked the same: 2012 (left) and 2014 (above).



My feet swelled up again. That's 2012 on the left, and 2014 on the right. I think the swelling is due to the consumption of lots of sodium (from Gatorade and electrolyte tablets) on race day to prevent cramping and dehydration. If I stood too long in one place, my feet would suddenly feel like they were being crushed under a car tire.

Plans for 2015

This report is being written four months after the race, in January 2015. Earlier this month, I signed up for the 2015 Redman. I'm hoping to do much, much better at this year's race, and realize that will only happen with a significant improvement in bike training. That primarily means a lot more miles ridden on the bike outdoors instead of indoors. Better bike fitness should enable me to run more of the marathon, finish faster, and avoid a repeat of those horrible blisters.

Final Thoughts

There's actually a positive side to having two, nearly identical, bad experiences at Redman: I'll be motivated to do everything I can not to let it happen a third time. The mere thought of going through those nightmares again should be enough to scare me into being better prepared for 2015.

Thanks for reading!

Jim Glickert
Osage Beach, Missouri
January 31, 2015

