

# Loose in the Foothills

by Bob Ring

## Special Fireworks Watching Place

Brer Rabbit had his Laughing Place and his Bramble Patch, but Pat and I have a special Fireworks Watching Place (FWP). It's high on a hill, with a complete view of the Catalina Foothills and the Tucson valley – and best of all, we're the only ones who know about it.

We (you too) almost missed the fireworks this year. Pat and I got back in town from a trip to hear that Tucson and Marana had cancelled their annual fireworks shows because of the current financial mess. Then we heard that private donations from businesses and local Native American tribes had restored the fireworks programs, amid lots of debate on what our spending priorities should be.

I remember when I lived in San Diego, raising three boys. We would go to a local park, sit on a blanket with throngs of eager people, look up in awe at the bursting fireworks overhead, and thoroughly enjoy the family event. I'll bet that many of you can recall similar traditions in your past.

Reportedly, 50 cities and towns across the U.S. did cancel their planned fireworks. What a shame that they missed an opportunity to celebrate our great country, on its birthday. So I, for one, am happy that the July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks shows around the Old Pueblo came off as originally scheduled.

Fireworks have been around for a long time. The Chinese made the first gunpowder around 850 AD and a few hundred years later invented exploding firecrackers. They stuffed bamboo shoots with gunpowder and used them to announce the New Year and scare away evil spirits. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Italians first developed aerial shells that launched upward and exploded into a fountain of colors. Since then fireworks have been lighting up the night sky to the enjoyment of onlookers around the world.

So there Pat and I were on the evening of July 4<sup>th</sup> – at our FWP. I had done my homework, studying all the newspaper and TV-channel lists of the schedule of fireworks programs around Tucson. I had plotted them on a map and determined that every one of the ten advertised extravaganzas should be visible from our FWP.

The sky was relatively clear. We had been worried about the start of the monsoon because every evening during the week approaching July 4<sup>th</sup> was cloudy and showery. But not this night – a three-quarter moon and lots of stars were the astronomical contribution to our celebration.

Pat and I carried folding lawn chairs to our FWP. Pat brought her camera and set it up on a tripod – eager to photograph the colorful fireworks. I brought the wine leftover from dinner, and pen and paper to take notes for this column.

We were caught off guard when the first fireworks display started at 8:30 pm. Our carefully researched listing had almost all the programs starting at 9:00 pm, none earlier. But it was La Paloma that jumped the gun; their show started with a bang at 8:30 pm and finished less than 10 minutes later. We were off and running!

By 8:45 pm we could see fireworks in the distance to the southeast, probably Tucson Raceway Park's show. Trees on the horizon interfered with our view, but we could see lots of color.

Two shows started at about 8:50 pm, Tucson Country Club and Marana. These were big shows with all kinds of bursting colorful shells and exploding noisemakers. Both of these major programs lasted about 15 minutes. We could imagine the joy that those stationed under the fireworks were feeling; our experience was different, but also very nice – seeing the shows at a distance.

During the same period, we saw what we think was the Star Pass Resort show way off to the southwest.

As far as I could tell, the only fireworks show to start at its advertised time was Tucson's A-Mountain program at 9:15 pm. And what a show it was – 30 minutes of fantastic aerial displays.

Somehow, from 8:30 to 9:30 pm, we saw more fireworks in more locations than we had on our master list. Some of you out there were fooling around weren't you?

In that hour Pat took 200 photos, experimenting with camera settings and exposure times. You can be the judge of her success; Pat took the photo that accompanies this article.

So after watching all the fireworks displays from our special FWP, we walked off the deck outside our upstairs bedroom and went to bed.

P.S. We missed the fireworks after the Toros baseball game and the Rillito Park show that started at 11:00 pm – maybe next year.



*This is the second 4<sup>th</sup> of July that we've taken photographs of the brilliant Tucson fireworks. (Photo by Pat Wood)*