

July 14, 2015

WHAT I DID ON MY SUMMER VACATION

Hey Everybody, I just recently returned home from my latest motorcycle road trip. I had been wanting to get back down to the U.S. southwest and was lucky enough to get invited on a ride by a group of guys that call themselves the Old Bastards Motorcycle Club. (Of which I am now one of the newest members! I guess I can be a bit of an old "B" at times so apparently I fit right in.)

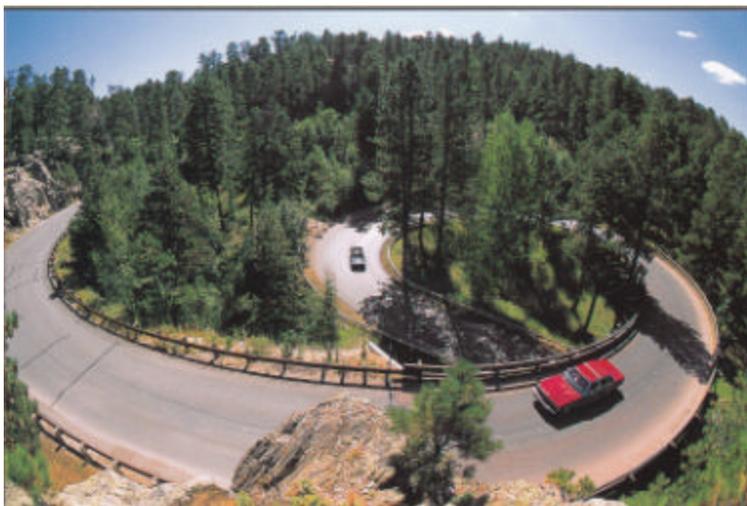
But anyway, George, the guy that runs this group, invited me, along with six other guys, to do a week-long tour of the Black Hills in southwestern South Dakota. Now I have ridden down through there a couple of times before but the riding there is amazing so I jumped at a chance to get down that way again. This year George rented a house outside of Custer, S.D. And we used that as a base to do a week of day-rides. And ride we did!



I think that we managed to cover just about every inch of black top in the Black Hills area. And did I mention the the riding down there is amazing? The roads are SO good and the scenery is so beautiful that every day that we were there turned into an adventure.

One possible unintended benefit of riding around the Black Hills for a week is the improvement in our basic riding skills. Riding all of the 10, 15 and 20 mile-per-hour hairpin and pig-tail curves through the Needles Highway and Iron Mountain Road gets one reacquainted with their bikes abilities really fast. If one isn't careful and attentive it can turn into a crash course in riding skills. But we were all careful and made it through unscathed.

The worse thing we came across was a close encounter with a herd of wild buffalo. We got our bikes out of the way just before these guys decided to cross the highway. And that's a good thing because apparently these animals have no problem with knocking down and walking over motorcycles. We were lucky to get out of their way.



Pigtail Bridge • Black Hills of South Dakota

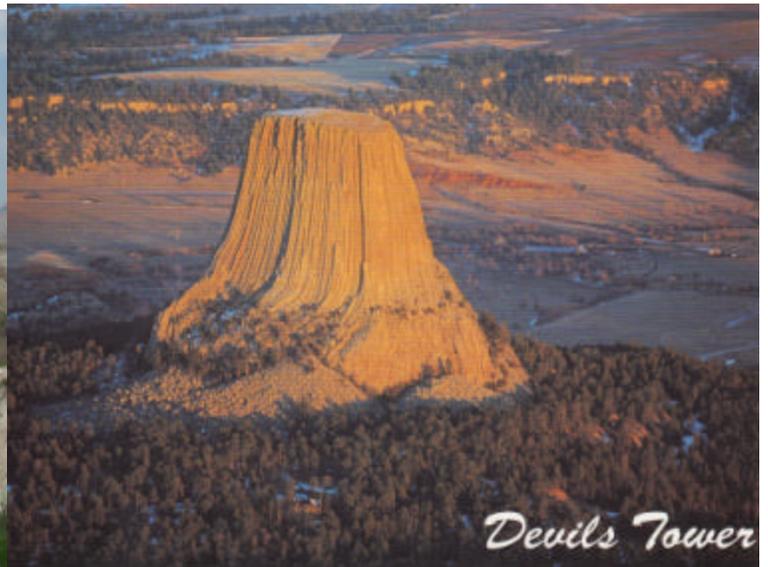


And of course we got to see all of the cool things around the Black Hills. We saw Mount Rushmore, the Crazy Horse Memorial, stopped at Wall Drug, rode through the Badlands, rode to Sturgis for lunch and a t-shirt, and rode to Devils Tower to see if E.T. had returned yet. (He hasn't, by the way, but they're still watching for him!)

One thing that was different this year was how lush and green everything was in South Dakota. I guess they've had lots of rain so all the hills, valleys and plains were green and lush and flowering. It was really nice to see.

What wasn't so nice to see was the continuing devastation of all the Ponderosa Pine by the infestation of Mountain Pine Beetle.

The state and the park services are working as fast as they can to clean up the dead trees and slow the spread but the beetles are doing a real number on the forests down in the Black Hills.



So at the end of our stay at the house our group sort of broke up as everybody had different commitments to get places so we said our farewells on the Saturday and headed back out on the road. I rode with two other guys, Dave and Duncan, and we took three days to ride back to Thunder Bay. Dave actually lives in southern Ontario but wanted to come through T.B. to visit family and get two new tires (and a couple of other shiny parts) for his bike before heading back out on the road. We had a great ride across South Dakota and Minnesota and managed to avoid all of the rain until we got pounded on for the final four hours of our ride home. But what's a bike trip without getting soaked at least once. That's what we carry the rain suits for....right?

So, all in all, I had a great summer vacation and I'd like to say a big Thank You to the Old Bastards for inviting me along for the ride. It was a hoot!

Now my next project is to clean about 2,805 miles (4,515 km) of road grime and bugs off of my bike. That might be a chore!

RW

