

July 22, 2010 - Custer to Hot Springs, and back...  
...all in the same day!

The first place that comes to mind when I hear of “Hot Springs” is the one in Arkansas, which is almost 900 miles from Custer. Secondly is the one in Virginia which is 1,300 miles away. By the way I had flown my single engine Comanche to both those. However, today’s flight was to the [Hot Springs in South Dakota](#), which is just 25 miles away. On a clear, crisp mid-July morning I lifted off from Custer’s 5,600 foot elevation airport with a temperature of 67 degrees. However, I had not taken into account that Hot Springs is a full 1/2 mile lower, and temperatures there 20 degrees warmer, making my long sleeved shirt unwarranted. I used the airports loaner car for the short drive into town.



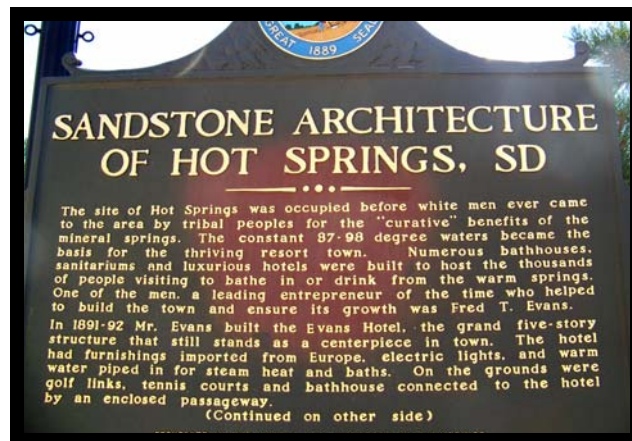
Aerial view of downtown Hot Springs, SD

There are several attractions to see in this little town of 4,200 people. Much of the late 1800’s era historic downtown River St. will have one stroll amongst beautiful old buildings constructed from a local sandstone quarry. The luxurious Evans Hotel, which is still operational as a high end resort Spa some 120 years later, is a perfect example of the longevity of this type of construction. Just up the hill from downtown is the [Pioneer Heritage Museum](#) which will allow you to wander through 4 floors of historical displays capturing the times and hardships of pioneer families from the mid 1800’s. It is well worth the \$4.00 admission fee and will take a couple of hours to tour in depth.



Me & my plane at the Hot Springs airport ramp

However the biggest “must see” attraction in town is the large [“Mammoth Site”](#) which features an indoor excavation which was first discovered in 1974 when a piece of construction machinery unearthed an “ice age” skeletal remains. It turns out that this was once a large “sinkhole” which filled with water. When such prehistoric animals as woolly mammoths, bears, wolves and others wandered too close while feeding or drinking, they would often slip down the embankment and could not climb out, thus becoming the fossil remains being uncovered today. During our 30 minute guided tour of the facilities, I watched a college aged paleontologist volunteer sweep her excavation site for over 10 minutes with a small paint brush, only to have removed less than an ounce of sand. When I asked her about the progress her reply was that it was like “trying to cut the grass on a football field one blade at a time”. I give these people a lot of credit since, in the 35 years since excavation began, they are down only 20 of the 65 feet that this sinkhole encompasses.



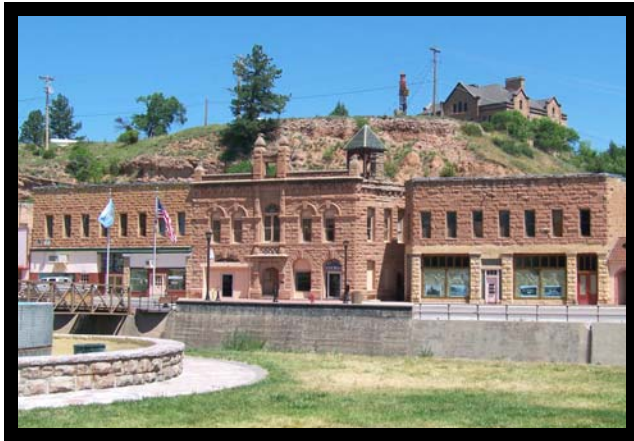
Sign describing the H.S. sandstone architecture

After exploring this excavation and the 35,000 square foot visitor center I drove over to nearby [Evan’s Plunge](#), an indoor pool of spring feed therapeutic mineral waters which is a constant 87 degree temperature. This pool, which is the size of a football field, is a popular attraction for both young and old alike. The kids love the water slides, the aqua jets and the swing ropes, while the adults enjoy the “healing” waters, the health club, exercise and weight rooms, along with sauna and steam rooms.



The 1891 Evans Hotel was the 1st Sandstone Bldg.

My 20 minute return flight got me back to Custer just before a series of intense lightening storms thundered through the Black Hills. This was my first experience in dealing with severe turbulence in my Highlander and I will say that it handled the intense updrafts and down drafts, along with violent attitudinal changes, exceptionally well. But it was good being back on the ground!



Old historic downtown Sandstone buildings



The Pioneer Heritage Museum was a 1892 school



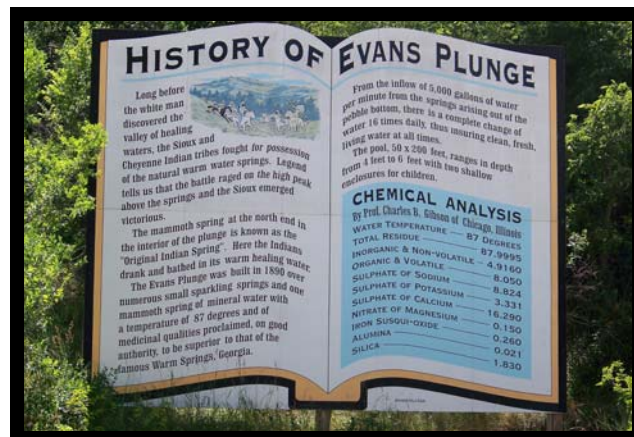
A full sized model replica of an Ice Age Mammouth



A short faced bear bones were also found on site



Indoor excavation site with just a few bones discovered here, along with some of their working volunteers



Evans Plunge is an indoor hot springs pool the size of a football field. Can you find "Waldo" (me) in here?