

Sept. 1-3, 2008 - South Dakota

The Badlands, Black Hills, Mt. Rushmore, Devil's Tower, Deadwood and the Spearfish Canyon

Labor Day, 9/1 was overcast and rainy during my all day 500 mile drive between Bozeman, MT and Spearfish, SD. Once the cold front passed temperatures dropped dramatically with Tuesday's high only in the low 60's and with very gusty winds. Instead of fighting those winds, I decided to take the Vespa on a 25 mile drive down through the scenic Spearfish Canyon for a late lunch at the Lodge and its [Latchstring Restaurant](#). After a 30 minute scooter trip with wind chills that had to be in the low 40's, a hot bowl of Bison stew and the stroll around the resort's grounds gave me a chance to warm up a bit before my chilly return ride. As the afternoon wore on, and by early evening winds had decreased enough to allow me to get into the air.

I chose [Eagle Aviation](#) to base out of while at the Black Hills-Clyde Ice Airport, an airfield that is located mid-way between the areas that I wanted to see. My afternoon take-off was into 18-20 m.p.h. winds that were directly down runway 30. Yet, once aloft, it was smooth and clear for the 50 mile flight over to the [Devil's Tower](#) National Monument. On the way I flew alongside South Dakota's [Black Hills](#). In actuality these hills are a very dark green in color. Made up mostly of Ponderosa Pines and Spruce, they appear almost black in color ...especially when viewed through overcast clouds. Today the sun was finally shining, but they still appeared dark in color.

After leaving the hills, the [Badlands](#) began to come into view. Here the land becomes barren with little in the way of vegetation other than some scrub grass. There are cracks, crevices and shallow canyons as well as sharply eroded pinnacles and spires here, but from 2,000 feet above the terrain it does not look all that "bad". Because of the headwinds, it took almost 40 minutes to reach "Devil's Tower". However, this tall butte could be seen from more than 25 miles away.

The Tower is actually located in Wyoming, some 30 miles from its border with S.D. There are several theories as to what caused this unusual rock structure, ranging from a volcano eruption, which then became a large "plug", to more normal wind, rain and ice erosion of a certain type of sedimentary rock, which took millions of years to complete. Whatever its cause, it certainly is an impressive structure and definitely stands out from the adjacent relatively flat landscape.

Because of FAA regulations, I could get no closer than 2,000 feet horizontally from the monument. However, as I flew alongside, I could not help but recall that plate of mounded mashed potatoes that Richard Dryfus pushed together on his dinner plate halfway through the 1980's movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind". However, unlike the movie's depiction, there is no large "bowl" located near this structure, and I definitely did not see any UFO's while circling the impressive edifice. After traversing the monument a couple of times, I returned to the Black-Hills airport. Before landing, I took a couple of pictures of my campground, which was only a couple of miles away. As has been my custom, whenever I receive stellar service from my selected RV park, I present them with an 8 x 10 photo as a gift.



It was cold on the ride thru Spearfish Canyon



Dressed for the walk thru Canyon Lodge grounds



The "Black Hills" are really just dark, dark green



The "Badlands" don't look so bad from 2,000 feet

On Wednesday, 9/3 I returned to the airport in the morning for another flight...this time over to nearby **Mount Rushmore**, via the historic old town of Deadwood. Although only 50 miles away, it took almost an hour to get there. The headwinds at 7,500 feet were horrendous and the turbulence over the 6,000+ foot mountains was, at times, teeth jarring. However, once there the view of Mt. Rushmore was simply spectacular. It strikes me as an almost impossible accomplishment to have carved these features out of the shear stone which serves as the monument's backdrop, and I will have to read up on the artist and his work. Again federal regulations kept me almost a half mile distant, but I did get a couple of good photos. On the plus side, my return to the Black Hills airport took less than 25 minutes and saw ground speeds in excess of 125 m.p.h.



Devil's Tower stands out against stark landscape

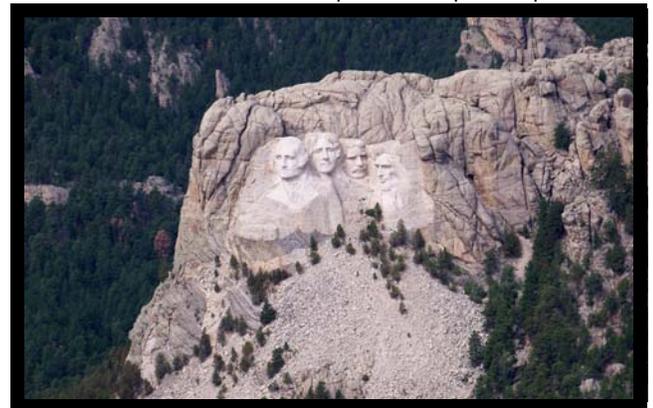
And speaking of artists, my dinner the evening before was at an upscale "artsie" restaurant in Spearfish called **The Bay Leaf Cafe**, where I saw a unique global sphere "painting". It was of the same "miracle staircase" that I had viewed first hand at the **Loretto Chapel** just a few week previously, while I was in Santa Fe, NM. This peaked my interest, and I found out that it's artist lived right there in town. After my flight, I made the short drive over from my campground and spent an interesting hour with its artist, Dick Termes, touring his studio and learning of his craft and painting style. Dick has been doing this spherical art for over four decades and has developed a technique for placing well known landmarks on what will eventually become a rotating globe. As the art work slowly spins, its perspective is ever changing and the revolving scene takes on a special dimension all its own as it encompasses a full 360 degree view of the artist's subject. It becomes almost hypnotic, and during my dinner I could not take my eyes off of this turning sphere. I would certainly recommend that you visit Dick's website www.termespheres.com for an informative look at the man and his art. I know that one of his pieces is something that I would eventually like to own and enjoy ...perhaps in an airplane/flying motif.



The "tower" seen from up close-up and personal



The actual "miracle staircase" I photographed at Santa Fe's Loretto Chapel, along with Dick Termes' Spherical painting.



The Presidents on Mt. Rushmore's monument



Sphere artist Dick Termes and his globes