

## Black Hills/Badlands bicycle trip—September 23 to 28, 2016



Bert, Judy, Robert, Linda, Di, and Pascal loaded up the truck and van with bicycles and headed south to do some biking on the Mickelson Trail and great highways of the Black Hills.

We had planned to spend the first day riding in Spearfish Canyon, but the weather wasn't looking amenable, so we headed farther south, stopping along the way to explore the Black Hills Caverns, and set up camp at Hill City. The weather forecast for the region looked pretty good, but we hadn't factored in the elevation of Hill City, so had some very cool nights with a blanket of frost on everything in the morning. The saving grace was the bathrooms—the best any of us had ever seen in a campground and better than many motels—which allowed some great warm-up showers. Daytime temperatures were perfect for spending the day on a bicycle.

The George S. Mickelson Trail is a 109 mile rail trail, running from Deadwood to Edgemont on the former Burlington Northern rail line, which was abandoned in 1983. The surface is crushed limestone and gravel, which our mountain and hybrid bike tires seemed to handle very well (but more about that later). Rest stops scattered along the trail provide shelters much needed in the heat of summer, although not so much for our ride. The campground was also right on the Mickelson Trail—in fact, the trail ran between our campsite and the afore mentioned bathrooms--so it was easy to head out on day one from the campsite to ride up to Crazy Horse, about 25 km away and back again.



During the late afternoon and evening we took a drive up the Needles Highway where Bert and Linda engaged in their favourite pass time while the rest of us clambered about on the rocks. The traffic and narrow roads (no shoulders)



convinced us that we didn't want to ride our bikes here). Then we did the obligatory trip to Mount Rushmore.

Robert had had enough of self-propulsion for the time being, and the next day, opted for a four-legged ride (albeit a bit plodding for his taste and skill) at a ranch down the road. The women enjoyed a leisurely coffee in Custer while Bert and Pascal moved the truck down to the end of the trail at Edgemont. And “down” is the right word—we greatly enjoyed the 72 km downhill jaunt. Highlights of



the trail included the prairie dog colonies, teeming with critters that dodged in and out of burrows, and the site of the Sheep Canyon trestle bridge. All that remains of the bridge now is a few pieces of scattered lumber in the canyon, but it was an awe-inspiring structure in its day. In fact, the engineers and brakemen were said to be so awe-inspired (or unnerved) by its height that they would jump off the train just before the trestle, cross on foot to the other end, then remount the train after it had

crossed the trestle. Eventually, it was deemed just too dangerous and the trestle was replaced by an earth berm.



A monument of dead bicycles near the rest stop in Pringle assured us that we were in bicycle country and on the right track. (We don't think any of them had fallen prey to the trestle, nor do we think they succumbed to the rigours of the trail—it's not that bad!)

Back at camp, the girls were busy enjoying the warm bathrooms and researching the trip

home, while the boys went out on the town. Robert had had a hankering for some night life the night before, and we had stopped for a drink at the Mangy Moose, the "best place in town". Not much action here except some very bad singing from one of the tables, but Robert as the "designated group.



There may not have been much interesting human company in Hill City, town, becoming acquainted with the local inhabitants, this horse



been much interesting human but as the boys wandered around acquainted with the local caught Robert's eye. An intricate

piece of "metal art" sculpture, it was constructed of



commonplace items including the teaspoon on its nose, and a crescent wrench in the horse's thigh.



Pascal wanted to see the badlands, so instead of heading back to Spearfish Canyon, we decided to make our way back to Brandon via the Badlands. Next day in the Badlands, just a couple of hundred km away, the temperatures soared up to 27 degrees C. The only riding to be done here was

on the "Badlands loop" which runs through the park (bicycles aren't allowed on the off road trails). But traffic here wasn't bad. The biggest challenges were the shuffling of vehicles, the flat tires, and the fact that the ride north (the way home) was uphill. Pascal, Di, and Linda all had flats (possibly sharp rock shards from the Mickelson Trail?). Pascal and Di got theirs changed in quick order, but Linda was sidelined after a short ride and stayed back to help move vehicles and take some photos. Judy, Bert, Pascal and Di continued uphill and into the wind—but had a great ride nevertheless.



This was a great event. The Black Hills have options for longer or shorter excursions, with miles of awesome bike trails, numerous hiking trails, great scenery and many other activities which will appeal to a wide array of interests.