

EDDIE AND JEAN'S BLACK HILLS ADVENTURES

The following are diary excerpts and photos sent to us by our friends from the UK, Eddie and Jean Clarke, about their Black Hills trip – thanks for sharing! - Visitor Magazine Staff

...The flight from England [to Denver] was as long as ever and of course we lose around seven hours with the time difference; It had been a very long day, most of mine are, but some days just seem to be laughing at you.

... **a new adventure begins...** we set off for Custer in South Dakota a six hour journey or so the GPS said... I looked at it as seeing something I have never seen before. Doing a journey that would have taken pioneers days and weeks and we were doing it in six hours ... modern roads are pretty open the settlers wouldn't have known what was to come over the next hill.

Next morning the first of April and you would have thought someone was playing a trick on us. We awoke to the town [Custer] being covered in snow, It was a picture postcard view from the Penthouse. But before too long the sun was out and the snow was gone. It was a boon to see the place with a winter coat.

After our walk we set off on our first drive around the area. Heading off on the road to Mt. Rushmore we came upon the Crazy Horse site...and decided to go and have a look. It was certainly worth the admission price. This monument to one of the Lakota's famous chieftains is an amazing project and those working on it are unlikely to see it finished in their lifetimes. It is so much bigger than Mt. Rushmore (the head of Crazy Horse is bigger than the Mt. Rushmore memorial. It is something the US government should think of sponsoring as long as they leave it to the people running it and not try to take it over. They owe the native Americans that much at least. It has some amazing exhibits here too... with artists making traditional items and offering them for sale.

The 2nd of April and we set off for the drive around Custer State Park hoping to catch a glimpse of the wildlife. After having a laugh with the ranger at the entrance and paying for a weeks admission to the park (very cheap price) we slowly progressed into the park. We later came across a herd of about 50 bison just graz-



ing fairly close to the road... they were joined by approximately another 25 or so which crossed the road around us. It was fantastic to be in this position with these magnificent beasts wandering at their own pace around us. We felt privileged to have been able to see a glimpse into the life of the Bison.

The third... We went to the Museum of American Woodcarving... don't be put off by the name it is a hidden gem. It contained wood carved animated scenes well worth seeing (some life size). We had been given a ticket for free return to Crazy Horse and had lunch. They gave us a 5 minute warning to the blast and again at one minute to go. The expectation was enormous and we weren't disappointed. They called "fire in the hole" and we waited... then the ground in front of us erupted... followed by the sound of the explosion... followed by the earth shaking... WOW. The blast had removed 3,000 tons from the mountainside and the next job was to clear it all away. We then set off for Mt. Rushmore and had a look at the very impressive site.

The fourth... Jean got to do her shopping at some of her favourite American stores in Rapid City. On the return journey we stopped at Bear Country animal park. On entry we saw Elk in the trees on a hillside... we moved on to an enclosure with Arctic Wolves they looked fascinating with their white coats. After that came Bighorn Sheep I was

getting to know the names of the animals now. We slowly approached the next enclosure as there were Bears patrolling the entrance... like the guards at Buckingham Palace. We slowly moved through them and there were around 20 bears in all if not more. Looked like wall to wall bears for a while.



Now it was the turn of the Bison (or Buffalo as you guys call them). But to our surprise there was a white Buffalo and that made my day it was something I had never expected to see at all. They were the last animals on the drive through and I would have paid the entry fee just to see the white Buffalo. We went and parked and took a walk round the Babyland section and of course Jean invaded the Gift shop which is quite natural for a predatory female and she enjoyed that too.

able to get out because of their bone structure. So over thousands of years it had become a veritable pile of Mammoth. Friendly staff... like chatting with old pals... This is something that no one should miss well worth a visit.

The fifth... We set off to visit Hot Springs. After arriving we [went to] the Mammoth Site. Located just outside Hot Springs the actual site is indoors... a building has been built over an ancient sinkhole caused by volcanic activity in the area. The sinkhole was a great trap for the Mammoth as they would slide in and not be

We drove back towards Custer through the State Park again. This as always cheered us up as we spent some time watching a field of Prairie Dogs. It was great to watch them popping in and out of holes and zipping across the ground and dodging into the next hole. Again we saw Bison, Pronghorn and Mule Deer (obvious from their large ears).

The sixth... another glorious day dawns. Our aim was Deadwood the infamous cowboy town. A pleasant [drive] as all the local trips had been so far. We parked in a lot behind the Bullock Hotel and went in to pay the parking charge. After that we wandered through and got our first real impression of old Deadwood a quaint mixture of Victorian hotel and a Las Vegas style gambling den. This was a theme repeated throughout Deadwood.

We exited the hotel to find ourselves on the main street... Deadwood is a fascinating place, a mini Las Vegas with people playing all the time and seeming to be having fun. Although we did not indulge we liked the look of the place. Gift shops abound... you could easily end up spending a lot here. We had an excellent buffet in the Silverado (recommended by the people in the gas station in Custer). Food tends to be good in gambling establishments as they would rather the punters didn't go somewhere else. On our drive back we stopped at a few different places just to admire the views... the whole of the Black Hills region has amazing sights to see.



The seventh... today we have a long drive planned. Our aim was Wall and the Badlands [National] Park. Once again well worth the trip. Wall is a small western town just off the main I90... to attract customers of the I90 and into Wall they offered free iced water to travellers. The ploy worked and the town began to prosper. It still looks the part and the main attraction these days is Wall Drug where it all started.

We had lunch there and I finally decided to try Buffalo burger and it was great.

Wall has a little something for everyone... you should give it a try.

The Badlands... a place of more incredible views. It seemed the Badlands had been gouged out of the earth rather than thrust up by the earth moving. The multi-coloured layers of the mountains clearly show the age and the stages of when it was a shallow sea or a dense jungle. The colours are striking and well worth seeing.

The eighth... We decided to return to Custer State Park and drive through to Keystone. As always driving through CSP was an amazing trip always something new to see. We arrived in Keystone emerging from a back road... we parked near to the Holy Terror (the owners wife wanted it named after her – careful what you wish for).

We got some items to bring home and then went for lunch at the Ruby House. A very nice meal and the only place we have had a good cup of tea in the entire trip. Okay guys, this is a heads up on English tea. We use boiling water and it is nearly always taken with milk and some of us have sugar too. But if the water isn't boiling you cannot make a good tea... it ends up tasteless. Get it right and the English will love you.

Later we decided to drive some of the back roads just to see what we could find. We love this place as we have all the places we have been in America. I propose you make us honorary citizens and then we could come and go as we please instead of just the annual holiday. But Saturday is our last day here and we weren't looking forward to leaving.

The ninth... Another dawn but this one is tinged with a little sadness we know it is our last full day in the Black Hills. Sunday we head for Denver before going back to the UK.



We took our final run through CSP something I could do on a daily basis forever. We saw all the animals we wanted to Bison, Pronghorn, Elk, and Marmots. We were heading for the Blue Bell stables... we were hoping to get an hours ride in the park. They were happy to take us out with just us two.

Riding the back trails around the park makes it even more interesting than ever. The animals don't flee when you approach and the scenery is always changing. The hour just flew by and I would have loved to stay all day - I love western riding. Afterwards we had lunch in the Lodge.

We then drove on through the park taking Iron Mountain Road and eventually returning to Keystone as Jean had seen something she wanted to go back for. With our little bit of shopping done we decided to have an old western style photograph taken. We may look silly, but we were happy and you can't ask for more than that.

The tenth ... we headed off on our long return journey to Denver and it was a very tiring day. But we went back by a different route. So again we saw many differing sites.

*Thanks again, Eddie—and since you're looking very much like our great grandparents do in the family photos, we won't say you look silly in yours.
(Though they never looked so happy as you do!)*

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