

## **THE HEARTLAND TOUR—TEN STATES IN TEN DAYS**

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As always, we enjoy touring the country on our Gold Wings and this year was no exception. We had planned this trip for about two years and the day had finally arrived. We left Texarkana on June 16 and arrived back in Texarkana on June 25, 2006.

The Cornetts, Dosseys and the Morrisons met at the Arkansas Tourist Information Center that Friday morning for a fantastic adventure. We have traveled Highway 71 north so many times that we did not really want to spend a lot of time sight-seeing, so we spent the first day of our trip trying to get as far north as we could. We spent our first night in Platte City, Missouri, which is north of Kansas City. After checking into our motel room, we walked a couple of blocks to Ranch Grande Cantina and enjoyed some great Mexican food.

After a hard day's ride, we spent Saturday night in Wall, South Dakota, and were able to get three neat wooden cabins to spend the night. After we checked into our cabins, we took a tour of Wall and the world famous Wall Drug Store. We ate supper that evening at a local favorite and the nicest thing happened to us. We were waiting for a table that would accommodate the six of us and a gentleman saw that we were having to wait, so he got up and offered us his table and moved to a small table next to us. You always meet the nicest people when you ride a Honda. After we ate we told the server that we were taking care of the nice gentleman's ticket. One good deed deserves another.



Sunday morning we got up and rode through the Bad Lands National Park on our way to Keystone, South Dakota, where we would spend a couple of nights and do some site seeing and riding. We took the scenic route into Keystone and stopped at Mount Rushmore. Pictures do not do it justice; you have to see for yourself. After that we

went on into Keystone and found some more real nice cabins just on the edge of town. The cabins were within walking distance of downtown Keystone.



After unpacking we rode through a couple of state parks and over to the Crazy Horse Monument. You can tell that when it is finished, it will be much bigger than Mount Rushmore. Then it was a ride over to Custer to eat supper at Elk Canyon Pub & Grill. The menu offered several meals that consisted of elk, even offering an elk burger.



After we finished eating and did some shopping in Custer, we headed back to Mount Rushmore to watch the lighting ceremony that night. We watched a slide show that night at the open air theater and it was so cool we had to wear a jacket. After the entertainment was over and the monument was lit, all of the military veterans, active and inactive, were asked to go down on stage and help with the folding of the flag. I was one of the ones who got to take part. It was a very special moment.



Monday morning we got up and ate breakfast and headed for the Black Hills and the Bad Lands. We saw some awesome sites and wildlife. We rode upon a herd of buffalo and those critters are huge. As we wound our way through the curving roads and up and down the hills, we saw countless other types of animals, including prairie dogs, mountain goats and antelope. After that we decided to head over to Wyoming and Devil's Tower. I was hoping for a Close Encounter of the Third Kind but was not so lucky.



From there it was on to Sturgis and what a disappointment it was. It was nothing like we had expected. Then it was back to Keystone to make plans for the next day.

As we had planned in the beginning, on Tuesday Johnny and Diana were going to leave us and head to Colorado and work their way back to Texarkana. Rick and Vicki and Tommy and Aileen were headed to North Dakota and Minnesota. We all wished each other a safe trip as we parted. We would call each other every night and make sure everyone was OK.

The next morning we, the Morrisons, turned south for Colorado. We first made a second tour of Custer State Park

so that we could ride Needles Highway. The road winds between tall, slender rock formations. At one point you travel through a one-lane narrow passage that I don't believe a full-size car could go through. That was probably the best part of the trip. We left the park and traveled down Highway 18 to Lusk, Wyoming. The road is about 80 miles long, but it seemed like the longest road in the world. Picture a road that is nearly straight, through barren plains, with road construction every 10 miles. It took about 3 hours to go those 80 miles. Ride, then wait, ride, then wait. Man, what a day! Finally, we made it to I-25 and turned south toward Cheyenne. I was hoping to make it to Estes Park, Colorado, for the night. But the closer we got to Cheyenne the windier it got. At 4pm we made Cheyenne with dark clouds all around and over us. At a fuel stop, it was all I could do to stand up and fill the gas tank. The wind was at least a solid 50 mph. So, we decide it was time to get off the road for the night. Colorado would have to wait till tomorrow.

Wednesday morning was beautiful. We were on the road by 7am and made Estes Park around 9:30. If you haven't been to Estes Park, it is very similar to Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Lots of tourist shops, great food and easy strolling. We bought shirts to remember our visit but began to see the afternoon clouds forming. Well, if we were going to get over the mountains and up to Rocky Mountain Visitor Center before nightfall, it was time to leave. The ride up to the visitor center was great, as usual. The clear mountain air and the scenic views were breathtaking. We took some pictures from "on top of the world," and then started our way down. As we traveled down I looked behind me and saw a sport bike behind me. We were pulling a trailer, but that did not seem to be an issue. Winding down the mountain, I got into the road and curves. Well, I left him in my dust. At the bottom in Grand Lake, we stopped for a break. Five minutes later the sport bike came up and stopped beside us. The biker was wearing all the protective clothing and a full helmet. When the helmet came off, I saw it was a man in his early 60s. He paid me one of my greatest compliments. "You really handle that big bike well in the curves," he said. What more needs to be said about a Gold Wing? We traveled on through Winter Park and down to I-70. I had hoped to spend the night in Vail, Colorado. At the foot of the mountain they have built a German village with many shops and restaurants. But once we arrived, we could not find a motel. The travel guide said there were 2 in town and I knew they had a lot of condos. But we could not find them. We stopped for gas and paid \$3.18 per gallon. Does that give you any indication as to the attitude in town? So we opted to travel back up to the interstate to Frisco and spend the night. As we were riding, there was the normal afternoon thunderstorm and shower. I was concerned but knew if we could get through these 30 miles, we would be at our hotel. As we checked into our room and relaxed before dinner, we decided to watch the local evening news. The main story was how only minutes before in Dillon, Colorado (10 miles up the road), and a motorcyclist was

struck by lightning and killed instantly. The news crew had live pictures from the scene. At the location that the lightning struck the biker, a one foot diameter hole 2 inches deep had been blown into the asphalt. I took a deep breath. That could have been Diana and me. Thank you, Lord, for your hand of protection.

Thursday was another great day. We made our way winding along the mountain roads and abandoned mines to Leadville. That is a great town to spend some time in. We turned west on Highway 23 to Aspen. My goal was to stop at Independence Pass. The ride up was beautiful and clear. And once there the sites were awesome. And the look on Diana's face was memorable. We stopped also and snacked on some sausage and cheese at 12,093 feet of elevation. It was a great time together.



We stopped in Salida for lunch. In the cafe we saw notes on the table for "Ride the Rockies." We found out this was a bicycling event and 4000 bikers were going to be in town that night. Looked like a good time for us to leave. We traveled on to "The Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park." This is a "big o'hole" in the ground. The canyon is narrow and deep. The walls go straight down and it is difficult to gauge the depth in 3 dimensions. Pictures do not do it justice. You can walk down but it is nearly an all-day trek. And, of course, then you have to come up. We passed on that experience. We pulled into Montrose for fuel and I asked a police officer about motels in Ouray. He said there were only one or two "mom and pop" motels in Ouray. He suggested we stay in Montrose for the night. Duh!—he is an officer from Montrose. Well, we did spend the night there and started out the next morning.

We headed south Friday morning with the intent of having breakfast in Silverton. One of the great sights of the trip was as we approached Ouray. Riding down to Ouray we saw a large hot air balloon slowly rising out of the valley set against the backdrop of the mountains on the horizon. Then as we passed through Ouray, I was surprised. I must have counted 14 or 15 motels, not huge, but average sized, including some chain motels. Most looked clean and

acceptable. So much for advice from the locals. Again, the town is quaint with several tourist shops, but Silverton and food were on my mind.

In Silverton we stopped at the Black Bear Bar. I have eaten there several times and the food and service is outstanding. The atmosphere is 1880's with a mahogany bar and wooden tables and chairs. The food is great with plenty to eat. I like history and there are many old photographs on the walls of the early mining days. I spent my time between ordering and the serving of our meals looking and reading. It set the tone for the day. Black Bear Bar is a must anytime you are in Silverton.

We traveled on through Durango, Pagosa Springs, and Chama, New Mexico, and headed for a night's stay in Taos. When last I was through Taos, the main drag through town had been remodeled in a Spanish Adobe style. I looked forward to strolling the street in the evening light with Diana but as we entered the outskirts of town, I knew my plans were going to be changed. We saw signs that this weekend they were having a Solar Music Festival. People were everywhere. It took us an hour to travel 10 blocks. The bike was getting real hot and so were we. Diana figured that any motels would be pretty well booked up. So as soon as we got to the intersection for the highway east, we made a left-hand turn and headed out of town. Highway 64 is a great ride. It is a tight, two-lane road that follows a river through a canyon. Turns are tight and the road is good. There were a lot of remote unmanaged camping areas and picnic tables along the way. But what bothered me were the signs along the road that said "Don't pick up any hitch hikers in this area." The normal times I've seen those signs are around a state or federal prison. Then why are these camp sites out there? I checked my fuel gauge and prayed that we did not break down. We stopped that night in Raton, New Mexico. We found some great deals on motels away from the interstate.

Saturday we woke up with our sights set on Texarkana and sleeping in our own bed that night. It was about 850 miles and 14 hours. West Texas is long, dry, hot, boring, and smelly. But you can't get home unless you cross it. So off we went and stuck to the plan. We pulled in about 8:30pm and were glad to be home with our family. We saw a lot of great sights. I can't tell the story well enough to do it justice. The company and riding with friends was awesome. But the most enjoyment was spending some special time with the one person I love the most—my wife. This will be one of many trips we can reminisce about as time goes by.

While Johnny and Diana rode south and west we, the Cornetts and Dosseys, took off for North Dakota, a state that we will never return to again. Several times we thought we were in the Twilight Zone. You can ride for hours on the interstate highway and never see another vehicle or person and the wind blows all of the time. Needless to say, we crossed North Dakota as fast as we

could and the speed limit was 75 mph. That afternoon we arrived at Bismarck where we spent the night.

Wednesday morning we started our long trek across North Dakota and Minnesota toward the Mississippi River. We had planned to take a loop into northern Minnesota and Canada, but time did not allow for that excursion (an excuse for another ride). We saw some beautiful scenery while traveling across Minnesota. It's known as the land of ten thousand lakes, and we believe it. That afternoon found us at Bloomington, Minnesota, the home of the Mall of America. This is reported to be the largest mall in North America. This place was a city in itself. We spent several hours there and let the wives do some shopping. After we ate supper it was off to find a motel room. We spent the night in River Falls, Wisconsin.

Thursday morning we were back on the road again heading south. We got on the Great River Road (GRR) and we are making plans to ride that road again. The Great River Road follows the Mississippi River and from beginning to end is 3000 miles long. There is a tremendous amount of history along the Mississippi River. It would take weeks to see it all. We traveled through Minnesota, Wisconsin, and into Iowa, following the Mighty Mississippi. Minnesota is a beautiful state, rolling green hills and lakes everywhere. That afternoon we checked into a motel in Davenport, Iowa. We ate at a very neat lodge-type restaurant that night. After our meal, it was off to the Super Target for items to re-stock the ice chest



Saturday morning we rode to the Arch in downtown St. Louis and experienced that well-known landmark. Then it was back to riding again as we headed to Arkansas. Near Popular Bluff, Missouri, we got to experience an exploding trailer tire on an eighteen wheeler. Fortunately he was just ahead of us so we were able to dodge the debris and the tire cap that came rolling down the road. We arrived in Mountain View, Arkansas, that afternoon and checked into our room and then went to the Town Square to enjoy the live bluegrass music.

After another restful night and a great breakfast at the Rainbow Café we started heading back to Texarkana. We traveled State Highway 9 from Mountain View that morning. If you have never been on that highway, you have missed one of the best motorcycle roads in the state. It has lots of hills and lots and lots and lots—did I say lots and lots?—of curves. We pulled into Hot Springs just in time for lunch where we ate at on the border. We arrived back in Texarkana mid-afternoon Sunday.

As always all good things must end, as this trip did for us. As we rode into Texarkana, we reflected on all of the great sights, awesome roads, people we met along the way, and the great group of friends that we were able to do all of this with. What a great time it was—ten states, 10 days, and 4,300 miles.



After a good night's sleep we continued our route along the Mississippi again. We pulled into Hannibal, Missouri, about mid-morning and spent most of the day there reliving some of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn's adventures, according to Mark Twain. We were able to take a tour of the Mississippi River on board the *Mark Twain*, a riverboat docked at Hannibal. The tour was worth the time spent. Then it was back on the GRR again as we headed for St. Louis. We spent the night near an outlet mall (shopped at the Big Dog store) just outside St. Louis.