

Nature, Patriotism, and Ham Radio! Our Cross-Country Journey!

By John N9oL

On May 26 2023, my wife and I jumped in our Ford Expedition and set our course due west. Destination – Rapid City South Dakota. Mt. Rushmore and the Badlands have been bucket list items of ours for a long time, and we finally got the opportunity to go. It is approx. 1,700 miles out there, so we broke the trip out and the trip back into 3 legs. We stopped in Kansas City MO, then Sioux Falls SD, then Rapid City. Coming back we did those in reverse! We had a blast!

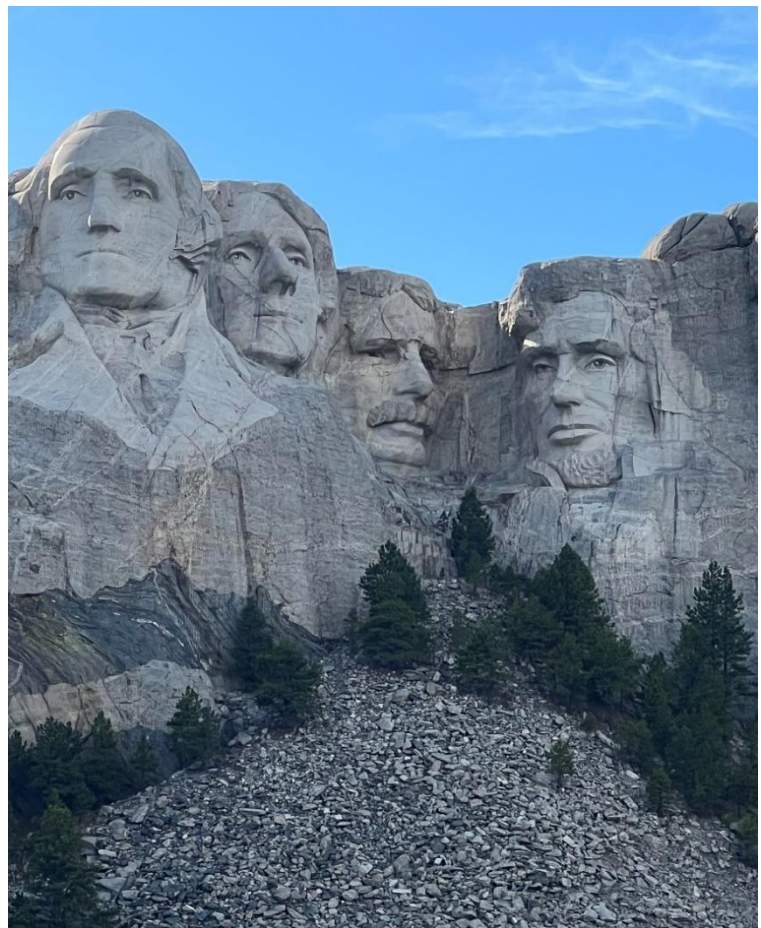
We are big Kansas City Chiefs fans, so our first fabulous stop that first morning before leaving Kansas City was a visit to ArrowHead Stadium, and to the Chiefs Pro Shop. That was lots of fun. A little expensive, but fun Hi Hi. Then we headed north toward Sioux Falls, stopping in Omaha NE for lunch.

After a night in Sioux Falls we set course due west on I90 toward Rapid City. I enjoyed the 80 MPH speed limit through South Dakota plus the interstate was the best quality interstate I have ever seen. Easy driving!

Of course, I had my mobile radios on much of the time. My mobile HF radio is the FT-891 with a Heil Pro Lite single-sided headset. I use a very small push to talk button that is Velcro attached to the side of my gear shift lever. So operating mobile is easy and safe. With the CW key strapped to my leg, there is no fumbling if operating CW either.



Once in Rapid City over the next 6 days, we visited the sites and destinations that we were wanting to see- Devil's Tower was a short drive into Wyoming, then Crazy Horse Monument, Mount Rushmore, Custer State Park, Wind Cave National Park, Badlands National Park, and a few famous towns like Tombstone, Hill City, Deadwood and Lead. Those towns were not the rustic towns of yesteryear, as today they have been overrun with casinos and bars. We didn't stay long there.



In addition to my mobile radio fun, I did a few Parks On The Air activations. In Custer State Park we found a nice little shelter house and we stopped for an hour or two. I set up my portable rig with a Wolf River Coil vertical antenna. So that was a 2-fer- Custer State Park and Black Hills National Forest. I made 61 contacts there before some rain moved in.

Here are pics of my POTA ops at Custer State Park, and the antenna I used. The picture doesn't show it very well, but I am using a metal screen as counterpoise under the vertical antenna. This was my first time with that set up, and it definitely worked!



Badlands National Park was a beautiful place. We drove the scenic drive through the Badlands, and at one of the scenic outlook stops along the way we lingered a while and I managed to get a POTA activation from there using the mobile. After 58 contacts in the log we continued our journey. Below is a pic of the view we enjoyed while playing POTA!



On the way back to Evansville, we stopped at the riverfront in Omaha NE where we found the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail! So, needing a break from the drive anyway, you guessed it, a POTA activation! We were parked very close to the trail and visitor center so I did the activation from the mobile.

This was a great trip and we saw some awesome sights we have long-anticipated seeing and visiting. And adding in a little ham radio is always a plus! My wife was a trooper about that and found plenty to do while I played radio a little while. But I kept the activations brief- there were too many other things to do and see. If you ever get a chance to visit this region of our awesome and beautiful country, I urge you to do it. Mount Rushmore was a moving experience, as was learning more about the Indian tribes who occupied those lands long before the U.S. was here. I can't wait until our next adventure, but this one will be hard to beat!

73!

John N9oL