

KawaNOW Needles/Iron Mountain Road Ride

Meet at the Bavarian parking lot at 1:00pm with KSU at 1:30pm.

Leave Custer northbound on 385 for 11 miles. There are some pull offs so people can take a picture or two of Crazy Horse Memorial. Will not go into the memorial outbound, it would take too much time. Individuals can decide to split off on the way back if they are so inclined.

Turn right on 87 going six miles to the start of the Needles. There is a parking lot just after the toll gate in the Sylvan Lake area to let everyone regroup. Fourteen miles through the Needles and there are pull outs at every tunnel for picture taking. Also several places in between each of the tunnels.

(Depending on the comfort level and experience of the group, deviate about five miles to the south at the 87 / 16A junction and go to the Mt. Coolidge Lookout. The road is hard packed dirt with some light gravel. It is an easy run of 1.5 miles to the lookout tower, obviously slow and in no hurry. Absolutely gorgeous 360 degree view of the Black Hills and surrounding area. This is one of those talk it over with the riders, look at the road, and decide. I will try and ride that section in advance before bringing it up as an option. I never slipped a tire on it last year when I took it.)

Continue east on 16A for ten miles to Iron Mountain Road. There is a Visitor Center, Game Lodge, and other things in that area that will probably be worth stopping at for a break.

Turn northbound for 17 miles on 16A Iron Mountain Road towards Keystone. There are pullouts the first few miles in the middle of nowhere that at first glance many people will bypass. We will stop to take pictures of Mt. Rushmore in the distance.

When leaving Custer State Park if we are lucky there will be burros in a couple of areas. They beg well and usually ignore the ones of us that obviously do not have any food. I took some nice pictures of them last year. If we do encounter buffalo, they have the right of way regardless and I will take precautions to avoid any problems. There will be plenty of opportunities to stop along the tunnel and pigtail section of the Iron Mountain Road. Everything is lined up to frame Mt. Rushmore.

Keystone will be a good place to stop. There are several shops, etc. to keep people happy. The choices for the group will be which way to go back to Custer. Taking 16 towards Sheridan Lake a couple of miles north of Hill City is pretty nice. There is a winery and a Christmas shop just outside Hill City. Also some interesting shops and stuff in Hill City itself. Or take 244 past Mt. Rushmore going back to Custer. From this point it may be decided by the individuals. Some might want to do Mt. Rushmore at night, or they might want to do other things. I'll play tour guide and help them decide what they might want to do. Then lead the majority of the group back to Custer.

Safety information: The Needles and Iron Mountain runs have sharp corners and narrow roads. Tourists have a tendency to cross the double lines so be aware of it. Unlike the Sturgis rally, the sweepers have not cleaned the roads. This is the beginning of the season so expect pea sized gravel, sand, water, or anything else to be on the road especially in the corners. Yellow road signs mean what they say. Unless you are a local, follow the speeds listed on the signs. 5 mph really is 5 mph. Every year riders go into the ditch or off the corner because it was sharper than expected.

Please do not look at the scenery going through the corners. Look at the scenery while going straight

ahead or stopped. There are too many things like cars on the wrong side, animals, rocks, gravel, water, and anything else that can be in the way going through the corners. Cars stop instantly to look at the deer, squirrel, chipmunk, etc. Stay back several car lengths to allow for these unexpected stops.

The Black Hills has an abundance of wildlife. Much of the area is open range for cattle and sheep. The entire area is overrun with deer and turkey. Regardless of the posted speed there are areas where 50 mph is too fast. Be prepared to come to a complete stop or pull off the road and let the car behind go around rather than tangle with the wildlife. Buffalo, always, always have the right of way. Greyhound buses are disabled every year after an altercation with a buffalo. Bikers usually do not survive.

Using the horn is not always the best option. If there is a cow along side the road with their head down eating peacefully, don't use the horn. Startling an animal is not a good thing. Give them room, keep an eye on them and go around easy. It is better for all concerned. Yes there is a time to use a horn just be aware that many of the wildlife will not pay any attention.

When riding at night use extra caution. I have a single headlight that stays on bright, I never dim the light. I prefer to stay at 50 mph or below at night because of the wildlife in the Black Hills and surrounding areas.

The Needles / Iron Mountain Road loop is approximately 100 miles. Time estimate is most of the afternoon. As always; "Ride your own ride" and "Ride safe."



The really adventurous might wish to go to the Sugar Shack (really good burgers and cheap) a little ways north of Pactola Dam before going back to Custer. That would add 50 miles to the trip. If they are bored and not tired, what the heck. That will be one of the ad-hoc suggestions that might come up if anybody was interested.