

# Our Favorite Memories

## Mt. Rushmore & Badlands National Parks

By Tour Leader Lynn O'Connell

**“What a wonderful group of women this is!** We’ve been on the same page for the whole week,” said WTT-er Emily on the last morning of our South Dakota trip. We all nodded in agreement!

Our first day began with a visit to the Crazy Horse Memorial. We went to the very base of the sculpture which the workmen are still carving today. Then, it was on to a unique lunch—Tatonka stew (made with buffalo) or Indian fried taco for many of us. We spent the afternoon at Mt. Rushmore. During a brief thunderstorm, some of us gathered in the sculptor’s studio as a park ranger explained the creation and artistry involved in the making of Mt. Rushmore.

That night, we had dinner at Desperadoes, an authentic “out West” dining spot where even the lampshades looked like cowboy hats. Then, back to Mt. Rushmore for the dramatic evening lighting ceremony which highlighted the four presidents featured in the monument and the principles upon which America is founded. There was a very moving moment when more than 100 former military attendees in the audience were asked to come on



Crazy Horse Memorial. The white statue in the foreground is the model for the truly huge sculpture in the process of being carved from the mountain in the background.



Relaxing on the porch of the Sylvan Lake Lodge.

stage. Everyone in the crowd stood and applauded their service to America.

Day two found us in the van and on our way to the Dakota Badlands. The vast expanse of prairie brought up thoughts of *Little House on the Prairie* and Western movies we had seen. The various pastel and fluorescent colors found on the formations throughout the park amazed us all!

As we reached mid-week, we left Hill City and moved on to Custer State Park. There, our first adventure was a Jeep Tour of the park. We saw herds and herds of buffalo! We also

met numerous curious and energetic prairie dogs! In the afternoon, we worked off many of the delicious meals we'd had with a one-mile hike around Sylvan Lake. While proving a bit more difficult than its description in the park brochure as "easy," the hike was well worth it for the spectacular views.

Breakfasts at Sylvan Lake Lodge are not to be forgotten—made-to-order omelets and homemade donuts. Yum! On our last full day, we began with a tour of Wind Cave, a unique experience because of its boxwork rather than the standard stalagmites and stalactites. Our last stop was the Mammoth

Site, where paleontologists are now excavating the 59<sup>th</sup> prehistoric mammoth skeleton discovered there. Interestingly enough, we were fascinated (but not surprised) to learn that all mammoths who drowned in the drinking hole were male—obviously they did not follow their mother's directions! As our group prepared to depart, several of us began to dream about returning someday to volunteer on a dig at the site while all of us began to look forward to our next WTT adventure! ❖



Looking out at the amazing shapes and colors of the Badlands.



Above: The trail around Sylvan Lake--the easier portion.

Right: With a model of a baby mammoth at the Mammoth Dig Site museum. Interestingly, all of the 59 mammoth skeletons discovered thus far at the site are male—all of whom apparently drowned in a drinking hole.

