

Our 8,000 Mile Great Northwest Miata Tour

By Norm Arbuckle

Susie and I both had a dream to go out west and see Montana and Idaho. Neither one of us had ever been there, so we started planing this trip three years ago. We had some great roads outlined and toured a minimum of 1000 miles in each of South Dakota, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana and Alberta, Canada in our 1999 white Miata.

We got underway at 3:30 Friday afternoon and about two hours and 140 miles away from home my good neighbor across the street called us and wished us a happy trip. He then asked "By the way, would you like me to close your garage door?" Well, Yeah.

We started with resolution to stay on our diet and a butt rest plan of stopping at least every 120 miles, or longer if our butts could take it. Our first goal was to get to the Badlands National Park in South Dakota as quickly as possible via Interstate roads so we would have more valuable touring time in the mountains. We toured the Badlands via route 240 and then onto the Black Hills of South Dakota. Temperatures reached 107 our first day and 95 the next two days. We had an unusual problem at altitude and with that 95 degree-plus heat which made gas vapors back up into the cock pit. I had to stop several times to let excess pressure and vapors out of the gas tank. Only those three days that the heat was high did we have this problem.

We visited the Crazy Horse Memorial, Mount Rushmore, and drove the famous Needles Highway (89). What a drive! We toured routes 16A and 87 and toured Custer State Park where we saw pronghorn antelope, buffalo and deer with wild burros and big horn sheep right next to us on the road. This is beautiful country and be sure to drive all the roads you can when you're in the area.

Then we were off to Devil's Tower in Wyoming. What a sight. From there into Buffalo where we caught Route 16 to 20N to 14E (Greybull to Burgess Jct.) It's a great Miata road. Then onto 14W into Cody, Wyoming where we visited the incredible Buffalo Bill museum. Don't miss this if you are in the area. Onto the famous Bear Tooth highway via route 120 to Belfry and then we went west on 30 to Red Lodge where the beautiful highway 212 begins.

We took that fabulous road to Mammoth Springs, the North entrance to Yellowstone Park. We toured the whole area and made most all of the sightseeing stops. Yellowstone with its beauty is a must see adventure. We saw moose in two different spots along our route. There were fires often and lots of acres were burnt, but there was still an abundant supply of beautiful sights. We ate at the cafeteria that overlooked the Old Faithful site and finished just in time to see it erupt. We then left the park and headed down to visit the Grand Teton Mountains. A lot of smoke from fires was in that area and it was the only day we had with light rain, but luckily for our top down driving, it was just in the morning.

We left Jackson Hole to tour all the scenic roads we could in Idaho. It's hats off to Route 89 from Garden City, Idaho to Logan, Utah. What a good Miata road! We toured through the famous Ketchum and Sun Valley areas and stayed overnight in Stanley, Idaho. We washed clothes and stayed in a great little cabin for only \$59 and took a white water rafting trip the following day. Idaho had a lot of beautiful scenery including the Craters of the Moon and its cone lava domes on Routes 26 and 93.



Norm and Susie in the path of a glacier.

We drove Route 13 from Grangeville to Kooskia, Idaho which was fun. I was never passed on any mountain road and ran the roads hard till about five miles out of Grangeville when a state trooper corrected my touring ways. Onward to Montana while being passed several times due to my slower driving speeds! We headed to Glacier National Park and its famous Highway to the Sun Road. Here we were met with smoke so thick the first 20 miles into the park we could only see about 60 feet in front of the car. Massive forest fires were burning all over Montana. Within a half-mile of the top (Logan Pass), we could see mountain tops and breathe again. Still, the mountains were hazy from the smoke. We are sure it must be beautiful but did not see as much as we wanted. The locals said this was the fifth straight week with that amount of smoke. Fire camps were everywhere. We then went around to the Canadian side of Glacier Park and stayed at a quaint little tourist town called Waterton Park. Alberta. There, the smoke was not as thick, but still hid a lot of the great views.

While polishing our Miata and waiting for Susie to get ready, (a routine done every morning) a Kentucky man noticed my Indiana license plate and told me how beautiful it was four hours north in Banff National Park, the start of the Canadian Rockies. So we headed that way on the spur of the moment, and WOW is all we can say! While gassing up in Banff, another Kentucky man visited with us and said what a great drive it was to