

you know my wife and her photos, then you know just how much trouble I was in for the next several days.

After returning to camp and eating what was probably the best spaghetti dinner I've ever had, we attended the nightly interpretive talk by one of the rangers. Afterwards, since the "night walk" was canceled due to a shortage of rangers, I took the group back into one of the large draws. It wasn't the same one rangers use, but we got back pretty far. I pointed out a few stars and constellations that I know, then we looked for satellites while dodging bats and trying to explain to Brian and Justin where the North Star is. This is probably a good place as any to say that the night sky out there is nothing like what it is here. The sky is so clear that you can easily see twice as many stars, and the Milky Way is so bright it actually looks like a cloud.

Even though we had tents set up, almost everyone slept under the stars again that night.

Day 3 - July 1, 2002

Departed Cedar Pass Campground and moved to Sage Creek Primitive Campground, still in Badlands National Park.

Tami left this morning, headed back to Kentucky on her own. Her

mother and I will both worry about her driving halfway across the country on her own. But I have faith in her.

This day was planned as a day of driving around the Badlands and just seeing the sights. It started out that way but on the spur of the moment, I decided we would hike along a series of marked trails that made a seven-mile loop. Jenny and I had hiked the majority of these trails during the past few years, and I knew they would get us out and away from other people, while letting the kids see some interesting sights. We were almost halfway through the loop when Jenny and a couple of others started slowing down due to the heat. We decided that the smart thing to do was to leave most of the group along a dirt road while some of us returned for the bus. Tim, Jay, John and Andy and I headed on back to the bus at a pretty good pace. Jenny and her group almost immediately found a cool culvert running under the road, where they waited for our return in relative comfort. The culvert was filled with sparrow nests made out of mud. Meanwhile, I found that I couldn't maintain the original pace I had set and was forced to slow down considerably. Since we were only about a mile out, I followed

the boys to get on ahead to the bus, as long as they maintained visual contact with me the whole way, which they did. By the time I arrived at the bus they had cold water out and were ready to go. We figured we covered three and a half miles in just a little under an hour, which is pretty fast for someone almost 50. Of course, the boys, who are all in great shape, could have run it in half the time.

After picking up the rest of the group, Jenny and I decided to get them (us) out of the heat and get liquids in them. So we made an unscheduled stop in the Cedar Lodge Restaurant where we bought everybody in the group a buffalo burger platter. Everyone decided it tasted like beef. While there, soaking up the air conditioning, John fell asleep. The whole restaurant full of people thought it was so cute that he didn't even wake up when we all got up and left. I knew his parents wouldn't like us leaving him there so I went back in and woke him up.

We then headed out to Sage Creek Primitive Campground, which as far as I'm concerned is the best kept secret of the park. It's about 20 miles out on a gravel road which has the best scenery in the park. It's on the edge of a 65,000 acre wilderness area that's home to 640 head of buffalo. Along the way to the campground we stopped several times at scenic overlooks, and a hundred acre prairie dot town. We also saw hundreds of buffalo along the way. Some solitary bulls, as well as several large herds of cows with calves. All the kids seemed impressed with the size of the bulls. Several thought it was strange that they ate buffalo before they saw any.

We set up camp at Sage Creek fairly fast. I showed the group how to set up a pup-tent as a lean-to, which most of them copied. That way they could see outside during the night and still have shelter from any bad weather. One group of five though chose to set up a shelter for five which was promptly named the "Og"-tagon. While setting up camp, a couple of buffalo wandered up to the campsite. One of them settled down right across the road from camp. In fact it looked like he was settled in for the night. Derrick has a slight tendency to sleep walk, which concerned his mother a bit. Just for a joke, we put Derrick alongside the road in his sleeping bag, and took his picture, with the buffalo laying down on the other side of the road. I don't know what his mom will say when she sees the photo, but I hope she has a sense of humor.

The kids all remarked on the contrast of how the prairie changes to the badlands, and the difference in the scenery. A-Team cooked stew tonight on their own. They won't tell us what they put in it, but it sure was good. Chris ended up cleaning out the pot with his spoon.

Day 6 - July 2, 2002

Stayed in Sage Creek again tonight.

After breakfast, we went about ten miles back up the road to a scenic overlook. There, we divided the students into two groups. After a detailed safety brief (a lot of threats involved) the groups were free to pick their own path to a prominent land feature in the distance where we would all meet. Jenny and I traveled along high ground, where we could keep an eye on each group the majority of the time. The reason we did this is so the kids could get out onto the prairie and experience it without the noise of thirteen other people around. This is an experience you have to have yourself before you can really appreciate it. Once we all met, we picked another rendezvous even further out onto the prairie. We continued this until we were probably two and a half or three miles away from the bus. The only trails were those made by a buffalo. After a final break, under some cedars, we split again to finally meet back at the

bus. For many, this was the high point of the trip up till now. Being able to pick their own path across what is essentially wilderness really appealed to their sense of adventure.

After the prairie walk, we headed into the town of Wall, home of the famous Wall Drugstore, to do laundry and a little sight-seeing. If you want real excitement, take 12 teenagers to a laundromat where they do their own laundry. While at the laundromat, we took six at a time into the Buffalo Gap National Grasslands headquarters, to visit the small museum there. Jessica also got to have her hair washed at the hairdresser next to the laundromat.

After the laundry was done we went into Wall Drug for a short visit. Jenny gave each of the students money to get ice-cream. There is no way to explain what Wall Drug is like. The best I can do is tell you that about half the group wants to live there. Chris, for reasons only he can tell you, promptly bought a pelvic bone. The lady that sold it to him thinks it might be from a horse, but she wasn't sure. Chris didn't care, he just wanted the pelvic bone. I try not to think why, but I saw him wearing it on his head several times. John bought something even stranger. A horse dropping, with toothpicks and feathers sticking out of it resembling a bird. A "turd-bird" of course. Jacob bought a used lasso. I've got a feeling that our freshmen might be used for practice. After promising the kids we would be back the next morning, we finally pried them out of the store and got them back on the bus.

Back at camp, we took "prairie baths" and listened to a nearby horse trailer full of horses go berserk as three buffalo walked right by the trailer. The owner of the horse explained that horses are naturally afraid of buffalo.

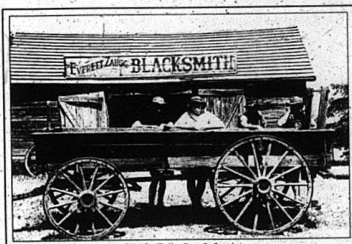
Another beautiful night under the stars.

Day 7 - July 2, 2002

Departed Sage Creek Campground to travel into the Blackhills. Busy day.

We broke camp this morning and departed without breakfast. When we arrived in Wall, we sent groups to replenish ice, buy milk and four dozen large cake donuts from the bakery in Wall Drug. We had breakfast there on the bus, passing around donuts, milk and orange juice. Yes we did have cups. Afterwards, we visited Wall Drug some more before heading into Rapid City.

Our first stop in Rapid City was a small Air Force museum. We didn't stay too long, but most of the kids seemed to enjoy it. From there, we took the students to a water park where they were able to play in the water and flirt with the lifeguards. Also was the first bath the kids had in four days. While they were at the water park, I took the bus to get a rear axle seal repaired. Mom and Dad showed up while I was gone and stayed with us for awhile.



Jacob, Erik, Joe & Justin



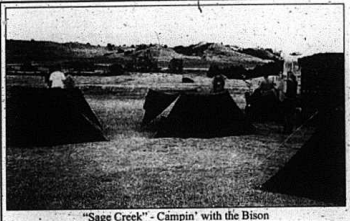
John, Chris, Andy & Derrick



Badlands Hike



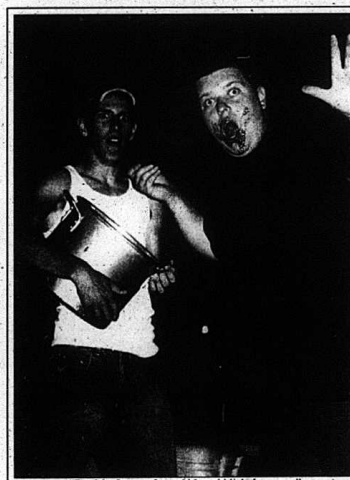
Tim and the Buffalo



"Sage Creek" - Campin' with the Bison



"Sage Creek Hike"



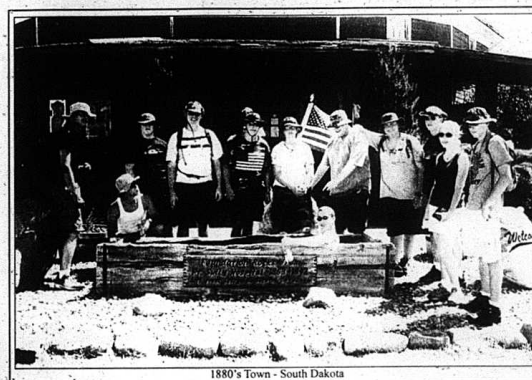
"But Mrs. Jenny, Joe said I could lick the pan..."



Andy Coffey and John Phelps on the Badlands Helicopter tour.



Lewis & Clark State Park, Iowa - Reproduction of the "Keel Boat"



1880's Town - South Dakota