

Corps of Discovery travel out West

Day 15 - July 11, 2002

Depart Bighorn Mountains, heading back to the Black Hills. Slept in a little this morning. We were finally woken up by a road grader working on the access road at around 7:15. We broke camp and headed down the mountain, where we stopped at McDonald's for breakfast. From there, we got back on the interstate and headed towards South Dakota again.

Traveling on the interstate, not a building in sight, no cattle, horses or wildlife anywhere. As we top a rise, I see a calf in the distance on the other side of the highway running out of a draw and heading towards the highway. About the time I realize what it is and where it's heading, I see a man or a horse trying to cut the calf off. As we draw closer, the horse gets around the calf and leads it back into the draw. The horse and the calf are kicking up dust, and running flat out, dodging and turning. The man on the other hand is sitting up straight, like he's glued to the saddle. Jeans, western shirt, straw cowboy hat and all he's (no kidding) twirling a lasso. Just as well pull even with them, he throws that lasso and jerks up the calf by the hind feet. Talk about neat. This is no tourist show or rodeo arena. It's

just some guy out doing his job in the middle of nowhere in northern Wyoming. It makes my whole day have witnessed the event.

We finally arrived at Crazy Horse Monument. After a quick sandwich, we head on into the visitor's center/museum. If you don't know already, Crazy Horse Monument is a totally private venture, attempting to carve a huge statue of Chief Crazy Horse out of a mountain. If they ever get it completed (probably not in my lifetime) the statue will be fantastic. Many of the kids have stated that this was the place they were looking forward to visiting the most. Some are disappointed that there doesn't seem to be much progress being made on the statue. However, there is a great museum on the grounds to tour. We also got to watch several native dances, performed by a family of Lakota Sioux. I've got to admit, most of us were really impressed with the moves that one of the dancers showed. His father told us that his son held several National Championship Awards for his dancing. We treated everybody to Indian Fry-Bread, which Jenny and I both liked. The others weren't impressed.

We spent the night at one of the campgrounds in Custer State Park.

Jenny took some of the kids swimming while I stayed with the others at camp. Jacob showed us how much better he was doing with his lasso. Eric made a fine calf.

We set up a field shower that Justin brought, behind some ponchos we strung up. We couldn't get the shower high enough, so you had to squat. Felt good though.

After a supper of soft tacos, we settled down for the night.

Day 16 - July 12, 2002

Depart Custer State Park, heading towards Wind Cave National Park.

After a great breakfast and breaking camp, we board the bus and head out again. Busy schedule today.

Our first stop is at a campground general store. It's special though. For one thing, the roof is made from the hull of a huge boat. In fact the whole store used to be referred to as the Western White House. President Calvin Coolidge used it to get out of Washington, D.C. when he was in office. Personally, I don't know why anyone, even the President, would want to go back to Washington after spending any time here. Jenny bought everyone a T-shirt before we moved on.

We then traveled out Custer State Park's wildlife loop road. At first we didn't see anything, but soon came upon a couple of fairly large groups of buffalo. In fact, we stopped at a prairie-dog town and watched a herd pass through the area. I think we all had more fun watching the prairie dogs. Further down the road, we spent quite a bit of time feeding the so called "wild burros" that roam the area. The kids and Jenny had a ball feeding our last remaining apples to the pests. They almost had one on the bus, but not quite.

We next drove on to Wind Cave National Park, where we staked out our campsite and checked out the schedule for the cave tours. Then we headed into Hot Springs, South Dakota to restock ice and supplies. We ate sandwiches out in the parking lot before heading to our next scheduled stop.

Our next stop was an educational one. We stopped in a working archeological dig at Hot Springs, where they are digging up the bones of several types of mammoths, wolves and short-face bears. I, for one, found the stop really interesting. Afterwards, we stopped at a Dairy Queen for ice cream.

Then we headed back to Wind Cave, where Jenny and the kids took about a ninety-minute guided cave tour. After a short film on the cave and the park, the whole group went underground to a chilly fifty degrees. As usual, she was worried about Andy wanting to go off into the unknown to explore but he ended up

being asked (by the park ranger) to stay back with his flashlight and bring up the rear of the whole entire group.

Afterwards, we head back for camp for supper and setting up tents. Once the kitchen was cleaned up, the kids and I sat around and discussed the trip. We took each day, one at a time, talking about what they liked and disliked, and what they found interesting or boring from excerpts from their journals. Jenny was so tired by then, she just threw down her sleeping mat on the ground and fell asleep under the stars. That's where I found her about an hour later. She hadn't been able to find her sleeping bag, so she was just shivering there under a sheet.

Day 17 - July 12, 2002

Depart Wind Cave National Park, heading home.

Woke up this morning around 4:30. The camp was quiet of course, so we were careful breaking camp. From now on, we'll eat most of our meals in restaurants to save time and make better mileage each day.

As always, the scenery is beautiful, if a little flat. Cattle and farm land stretching as far as you can see, with small towns few and far between. Our only interesting stop today is Cabela's. If you've never been to one of their stores, it's hard to describe. Just imagine a sporting goods store (hunting, fishing and camping) the size of Wal-Mart in Beres. We gave each of the kids \$50 and around an hour and a half to look around. Personally, I'd like to have spent the entire day, but we need to get down the road.

The campground we usually stay at outside of Grand Island, Nebraska was full by the time we got there, so we were forced to go down the highway a little further and stay at a KOA. They were full also, but they put us out in their overflow area next to a corn field. It was perfect, we had the best site in the camp. Showers and a swimming pool. Life sure is tough, but we managed.

Day 18 - July 14, 2002

Departed Grand Island, Nebraska, heading for Graham Cave, Missouri.

Long day on the road today. Lots of farmland out here. The kids have been playing a lot of charades the past few days to pass the time on the bus. Jenny has been working on her books and reading the journals that the kids have been keeping during the entire trip. I'm just keeping the bus pointed in the right direction.

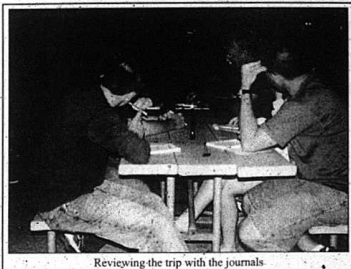
We finally reach the Graham Cave exit, but none of us want to camp back in thick woods on our last night. We've been used to camping in wide open areas. So, we end up in a campground on the edge of the woods. Showers and a pool again tonight.

Day 19 - July 15, 2002

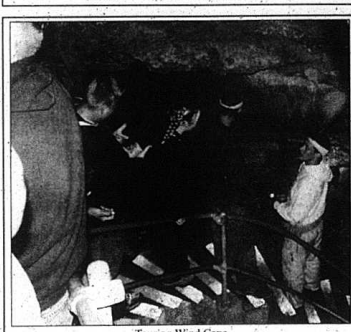
Depart Graham Cave, next stop, home.

Broke camp early this morning. All of the tents are down, and most of them are rolled up, when somebody pointed out Tim and Jay's tent is still standing back behind some kind trees. Of course you know some kind friends helped them out by collapsing it on them.

We're soon on the road again. Again, a long boring day. I've got



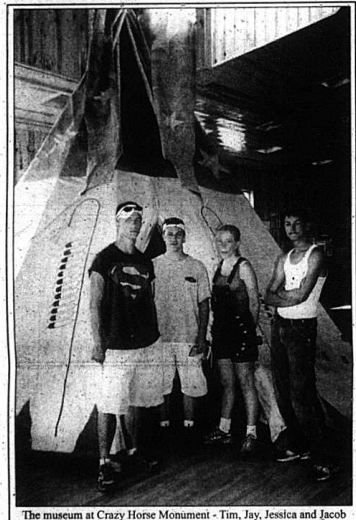
Reviewing the trip with the journals



Touring Wind Cave



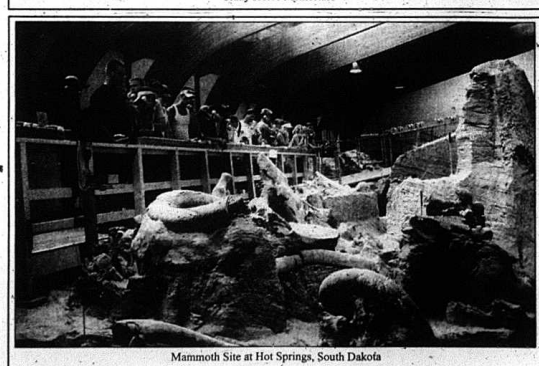
John, Andy and Brian posing at Cabela's in Sydney, Nebraska



The museum at Crazy Horse Monument - Tim, Jay, Jessica and Jacob



Crazy Horse Memorial



Mammoth Site at Hot Springs, South Dakota



We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all our sponsors and to all those who supported us and believed in us, because without all of you this trip would not have been such a success.

There aren't enough words to say "Thank You!" Rockcastle County Kiwanis Club, Wild Turkey Federation, Jim & Martha Cox (Cox Hardware), Mt. Vernon, Plastics, Citizens Bank, Wal-Mart/Berea, Janice Miller, Janet and John Wells, Ada Noe, John G. Hamm Auto Sales, Mr. Buzz Carloffs, Teresa Vanzant, James Miller, Mt. Vernon Drug, Community Trust Bank, Taylor Produce, Pepsi Co., 21st Century, RCHS Youth Services, Migrant Program, Melissa Albright, Williamette French, Mt. Vernon Signal for their support as always, and especially to Mr. John Hale, Mr. Larry Hammond, Rockcastle County Board of Education, RCHS SRDM Council, for without their support from day one, this trip would not have been possible.

Our appreciation also to Wendys of Mt. Vernon and KFC for displaying the Welcome Home signs upon our return and for the many families and friends who sent us off in their prayers early morning of June 27th and were there to welcome us home July 15th, especially Josh Whicker. And last but not least, the parents, grandparents and families of the "Corps of Discovery '02" who supported us, believed in us, and treated us with their children for 19 days. We thank you all!!!