

Dear Friends,

Greetings once again from **Hart Ranch, Rapid City, South Dakota.**

A year ago we wrote about going on a motorcycle ride with our friend, **Nullet**, through the buffalo herd in **Custer State Park**. (Great Escape #84.) Well, friends, that ride can vary anywhere between interesting and terrifying. It depends on the luck of the draw and the time of year. But let's back up a little. Custer State Park is a big place with multiple roads. There is, however, a special loop called, "the Wildlife Loop Road." The loop has multiple locations of prairie dog towns, a large group of very tame wild burros, and a large herd of buffalo. This time of year there are lots of calves and a mother buffalo with a calf is a particularly dangerous critter. The big bulls are also part of the herd and they don't fear anybody or anything. Can they hurt you? You had better believe it. They can throw you and your motorcycle 15 feet up in the air. If they charge your car, they can spin it around like a top. Have they killed people? Yes! If this park were in California, nobody would be allowed to drive through it. They would probably take you through in special buses. But this is South Dakota where personal freedoms take priority. You want to kill yourself here, go ahead, but try not to make a mess.

Well here is the problem. If the buffalo are on the road, the cars can't get through and they form a traffic jam. In such a traffic jam, the motorcycles can't get through either. It's one thing to be in your car or truck right next to a buffalo, but it's a whole 'nuther experience to be sitting on your motorcycle with no protection at all and no escape route. Our experience last year wasn't too bad so this year we thought we would take the risk and introduce our friend, **Tim**, to the Wildlife Loop and the buffalo herd. Writing about the experience doesn't really cut it, so let's try to describe it with pictures.



This is how it started.

In the photo above, you can see buffalo on both sides of the road and a few on the road, but no traffic jam and only minimal threat.



Mama, Papa, and Baby just off the road.

Well, it was nice to see the buffalo this close, but a little threatening. A buffalo can easily run 30 miles per hour so this was a little too close for comfort.



A couple of big males in the road blocking oncoming traffic.

In the photo above all traffic has stopped as a couple of big males block the oncoming traffic. Our friend, Tim, is ahead of us riding without a helmet. He looks pretty vulnerable to us.



More and more of the herd is coming on to the road.

A short time after we took this picture we see Tim getting off his motorcycle and we're thinking that he's an idiot who wants to get better pictures. No, far from it, Tim had a pickup truck next to him and he has decided to sacrifice his motorcycle. He put the bike between him and a big bull and is prepared to dive into the back of the pickup truck. Good thinking on his part.



A juvenile problem.

Three young juveniles who have been shoving each other around, came down on the road directly in front of our motorcycle. This doesn't look good. Actually, these three have been pacing our pathetic progress from the side of the road. But it gets worse.



A juvenile who doesn't like us.

The biggest bully of the three juveniles has stopped shoving his pals around and is now thinking about taking us on. Yep, that's our windshield and he's staring right at us. He's obviously thinking about punching our lights out. Chuck's first thought was, "oh golly, we're going to lose a \$20,000 motorcycle." Chuck's second thought was, "it won't matter, we'll probably be dead." The situation is looking extremely serious.

About this time, a young man and his girlfriend on a "crotch rocket" motorcycle decided to gas it by a mother and her calf. Mama buffalo went after him. We don't know whether he realizes he's being chased by a buffalo. If he slows up, she will smash him into the next county. Fortunately, he doesn't slow up and gets away, but it rattled our cage. We could have very easily seen him and his girlfriend die.

And then it happened. A huge, really, really huge, tow truck began working his way around the cars. This tow truck could easily tow a 45 foot motorhome. He is only going about 5 miles an hour, but, lo and behold, the buffalo are actually moving out of his way. This was our chance. We dropped in behind the tow truck and got through the herd. Tim saw what we were doing and did the same.

Well we got to a grocery store inside the park, got some sandwiches, found an outside table and tried to calm down. For about two hours, Tim's eyes were big as saucers and his vocabulary was reduced to, "Holy Shit." He just kept saying the same phrase over and over and I must say, it pretty well summarized our emotions. Then the crotch rocket couple stopped for lunch and we asked them if they knew they were being chased. He said, "yes," he saw it in his rearview mirror and knew they were in trouble. He too, looked like he needed to sit on a bench and calm down.

So why even go on the Wildlife Loop? Well, to get a photo and to see a magnificent beast like this one.



Magnificent bull in Custer State Park.

We got out without a scratch, but I'll tell you what, we are never riding that loop again on a motorcycle. Death by buffalo is just not a good way to go.

Until next time, home is where park it.

Chuck & Donna Cole

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