

Dear Friends,

Greetings from **Rapid City, South Dakota**.

Our time in Rapid City is running short. Night time temperatures are dropping to around 45 degrees and today the expected afternoon high will be only 61. We've had some heavy rains and heavy winds. It seems clear that winter is on its way and time for the snowbirds to head south. Because we have an annuities training class in Denver October 6 and 7, we expect to leave Rapid City on October 2nd or 3rd at the latest.

But today we want to tell you more about **Medora, North Dakota**. In Great Escape #112 dated June 2, 2011, we gave you a Medora overview and said that we needed to go back again. We are happy to report that we packed up on September 6 and moved to the home of our friends, **Bruce and Mavis**, in **Belle Fourche, South Dakota**. We spent the night in Belle Fourche and in the morning headed out with our motorhome and Bruce and Mavis' motorhome pulling a Jeep. We left our car, trailer, and motorcycle at their home. It was quite pleasant to be traveling light. We got on Highway 85 going north out of Belle Fourche.



Chuck and Donna headed north on Hwy 85.

So we set the speed control on about 55 mph and relaxed as there isn't much to see on 85. By about 10 am, we rolled into the little town of **Buffalo** and had a pretty good breakfast at the local bar and grill. At the little town of Belfield, ND, we turned west on Interstate 94. By one in the afternoon we were checking in at the **Medora Campground**. We backed into our space and Bruce pulled in forward next to us, thus giving us a nice little private area between the motorhomes.



Bruce and Mavis on the left with their Jeep, and Chuck and Donna on the right.

Wow, did we go at the perfect time of year. Cool nights and warm days, no wind, and no crowds. We rested up, Bruce bar-b-qed steaks for dinner, and we socialized after dinner. A good time was had by all.

We hope you will remember a little bit about an entrepreneurial Frenchman by the name of Antoine Amedee Marie Vincent Manca de Vallambrosa, more often called by his title, the **Marquis de Mores**. The Marquis was a key player in the Dakota Badlands in the 1880s and founded the town of Medora. He named the town after his wife, **Medora von Hoffman**. Again, go back to travelogue #112 to refresh your memory.

Thursday, we toured the **Chateau de Mores** museum and the Chateau itself. The Marques' family was quite well to do and certainly in France, to call their home a chateau would be quite appropriate. However, his home in Medora was more of a hunting lodge than a real chateau. It was built in only three months in spite of its large size. It was two story and 26 rooms. The upstairs rooms were small and designed to accommodate his eastern friends during hunting trips. It was possible to reach Medora from New York in only four days by train and so he entertained many important guests. The chateau had many servants to ensure a luxury experience in the hunting lodge. Fine wines, good food, and even fresh oysters were brought in from the east via refrigerated rail cars.



Restored Chateau de Mores.

On Thursday night, we had tickets to the **Pitchfork Fondue**, the **Medora Musical**, and the **Behind the Scenes Tour** of the stage. It was a lovely warm night that didn't require a coat. The dinner was great, the Behind the Scenes Tour was great, and the musical was great. All three are definitely worth doing. See our Great Escape #112 for more about these events. But don't go to Medora now. The season is over.

Friday, we toured **Teddy Roosevelt National Park** in the Jeep. Lots to see on a loop through the park including lots of buffalo which were in and around one of the loop campgrounds. We wonder what it would be like to be sleeping in a tent with a herd of buffalo walking through. Yeah, we know they were in the campground because we saw rangers shoveling buffalo poop right next to the camping sites.



Buffalo in the road. See Jeep mirror on right.

Donna felt much safer in a Jeep than being on our motorcycle. Chuck was not so sure. A large buffalo could smash up the Jeep and roll it.



Buffalo walking by the Jeep.

We have never desired to be this close to a buffalo in an open Jeep. Hey, they don't smell good! They don't have great dispositions either. To make matters worse, this was the rutting season. The bulls were cruising around with lots of testosterone. Bruce thought this was a good thing. He theorized that the bulls would be solely interested in the cows. Chuck theorized that a bull might flatten us to impress a cow. We're still alive so perhaps Bruce was right.



Badlands Overlook on the loop through the park.

Well, Friday night we got back to the campground and Donna whipped up a rib dinner and we all went to bed early. The reason for retiring early was because we were getting up and on the road the next morning at 4:30 a.m. Why so early? Well to get into downtown Medora and see an early morning hot air balloon ascension. Seven hot air balloons were scheduled to take off around 5:30 a.m. and in addition, we wanted to see the rare treat of a cluster balloon flight.



A couple of hot air balloons getting ready to fly.



The first balloon is off and six more follow.

Chuck and Donna have crewed on and flown several times with a balloon named Aurora Borealis. Hot air balloons are always fun, but this wasn't new to us. But it was a first time experience for Bruce and Mavis to get up close and personal. Unfortunately, the morning was only 44 degrees so standing around got darn cold and chasing the balloons into the Badlands in an open Jeep was out of the question. But wait, there's more. A fellow by the name of **John Ninomiya** was supposed to fly under a colorful bouquet of helium filled weather balloons. This we had to see.

"With half a dozen pilots worldwide, cluster ballooning remains something between an extreme sport and a personal eccentricity. At present, I'm the only regularly active cluster balloonist in North America, and to my knowledge, have completed more cluster flights than anyone in the world." --John Ninomiya



John getting ready to fly.

John arrived with a very large trailer loaded with helium tanks. A two man crew was busy for about an hour blowing up balloons and attaching them to sand bags. After all the balloons were inflated, they started attaching them to John who wore a harness with a built in parachute seat. John also had attached to his harness many canvas bags of water. He carefully tuned his buoyancy so that he was about one pound positive buoyancy which he said would lift him off the earth at about 100 feet per minute. Chuck asked him how he would be able to descend, and without changing his inscrutable Oriental smile, he showed Chuck his small pocket knife on a string. Yeah, you got it. He goes up by pouring out water and comes down by breaking balloons. Rather crude control compared to turning on the burner of a hot air balloon. Bruce asked one of the hot air ballooners what he thought of John's cluster balloon flight. The answer was, "It looks like a suicide mission to me."



Oh my God, he did it. John is on his way.

John is actively attempting to make at least one flight in every state. We just got lucky and were in the right place at the right time. He chose the Medora hot air balloon festival as his North Dakota flight. He floated out over the Badlands with the hot air balloons and came back alive in the afternoon. North Dakota was the 47th state in his quest.

We came back to the RVs and got warmed up and decided that we were not ready to go back to South Dakota on Saturday as scheduled. So we extended our stay another day so we could get rested up for the trip back to Belle Fourche. So all in all, it was four nights in Medora. If you visit Medora during the season, which is roughly from June to September, there is certainly enough to see to keep you there five nights, maybe seven. The musical is on every night weather permitting. They shoot for about 90 performances per season. The entertainers get no days off and they have no understudies. Nevertheless, they are energetic and exciting every night. This was a great trip and we got to do it with great people.

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Until next time, home is where we park it.

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