

July 26, 2010 -Sheridan, WY - "Where the West Begins"

Now any day that I am able to fly is a good day. Whether it is a short 15 or 50 mile trip to one of the nearby airports, or just 30 minutes of take off and landing practice, it is always enjoyable. However, every once and a while I get the hankering to really go somewhere different and distant. This was the case a month or so ago when I flew the 400 miles down to visit fellow Highlander builder, Roger Stout, in Denver, Colorado. Well, it was time to make another trip. On an absolutely beautiful late summer morning, with 7 AM temperatures in the mid-fifties, I decided to make a 400 mile round trip day trip to Sheridan, Wyoming.

I was first told of Sheridan by that aforementioned friend, Roger, when I passed through his town of Parker, CO. during my 2008 trip around the US. He told me that it was well worth a stopover on my travels north into Montana. However time and circumstances prevented my visit at that time. It seemed that today would be a good day to rectify that oversight.

Billed as "The town where the West begins", Sheridan is nestled in a valley located within the shadows of the Big Horn Mountains...precursors to the Rockies. With terrain reaching to 12,000 feet, it is quite a contrast to the 4,000 foot elevation of the town. My flight out from Custer took 2 hours 10 minutes to complete, with almost neutral winds. Once at this friendly County run airport, I elected to utilize the green courtesy trolley for my local travel into town. With its \$1 per day fare, you have the option of jumping on and off throughout the day. The only downside was that the last run was at 2:15, which would get me back to the airport at 3:00. Since my arrival was 10:30 AM this would not allow me a whole lot of time to see what was to be very interesting "Wild West" town. And I was right. I had to forego what would have been the highlight of my tour, the 14,000 sq. ft. "Trail's End" Flemish Revival style mansion, which was constructed in the early part of the 20th Century by millionaire cattleman and rancher, John Kendrick. Given a "do over" I would have re-scheduled my trolley stops more carefully so as to have been able to tour through this truly impressive home, which has been restored to its early grandeur by the State's Historical Society.

Instead, my first point of exploration was the quaint and historic Main Street area, which still has many of the early 1900 era buildings standing in tact. A stroll down this wide and airy walkway presented a large variety of these brick and granite edifices which played such an important part in the development of Sheridan as a modern and vibrant city in the early days of the far West growth. The town itself was first drawn out on a piece of wrapping paper, in the late 1880's, by John Loucks, who named it after his Union General hero Philip Sheridan. It quickly grew to a population of 1,600 people by 1900, and today boasts over 10 times that number. As I wandered along its main street, which in 1982 was enrolled in the National Register of Historical Places, I soon came across the original courthouse. Completed in 1905, at a cost of \$55,500, it is, even today, a stately and imposing structure. So is the WYO theater, which opened its doors in 1923 as a vaudevillian venue. Originally called the Lotus theater, its name was changed in the the early 40's, and a new Art Deco look was adopted with that major renovation.



The nearby Bighorn Mountains rise to 12,000 feet



The sightseeing trolley was my "ride" for the day



Main St., with its typical old western storefronts



Early 20th Century buildings add to the charm

Another place on my “to see” list was the Don King Saddlery Shop and Museum. Now I never like to be rushed while going through museums. I enjoy taking my time to review and study all of the interesting things there to see. However, today I was on a definite time constraint, so I took only an hour to peruse this fine museum which has a comprehensive collection of old firearms, indian memorabilia and early western artifacts. There is a full size Conestoga Wagon, a luxury enclosed “town buggy” which had to be the “Cadillac” of its day, as well as a horse drawn funeral hearse. And of course, saddles...literally over 500 custom made saddles displayed here. I soon learned that today a custom made working saddle will cost a cowboy from \$2,500 to over \$5,000 each! And I was told that many cowboys have 2 or 3 to draw upon, depending on the task on hand and the horse that would be performing same. And, when you consider that an average cowboy will spend from 6 to 8 hours each day astride that saddle, it is no wonder that you would want one to fit both your butt as well as the horse “that you rode in on”.

It was now lunchtime and I chose the historic “Sheridan Inn” for my meal of buffalo stew and a Cuban sandwich. First I had a “brew” (actually, since I was flying later that afternoon, it was a diet Coke), at the 1884 “Buffalo Bill Bar” in the Inn’s saloon. The original building was constructed in 1892 by the Burlington & Missouri Railroad with its design based on a Scottish Hunting Lodge. Its original cost was \$24,000. During its heyday, it was considered to be the finest hotel between Chicago and San Francisco, with its 64 sleeping rooms. Its past guests included Ernest Hemingway, Calamity Jane, Will Rogers, Bob Hope, President Herbert Hoover, and, of course, the aforementioned “Buffalo Bill” Cody. Today it is being renovated to accommodate only 24 upscale suites and has a budget of \$4 million. Of course, it is also listed on the Historical Register.

It was finally time for me to catch the last trolley of the day back to the airport for my 2 hour return flight to Custer. By now the Sheridan temperatures had “warmed” up to over 100 degrees, but my flight back allowed me to savor the 68 degree cool air that my 9,500 foot en route altitude provided. Back in Custer it was a pleasant 78 degrees with 16% humidity when I landed! I just love this part of the country!



The historic Sheridan County courthouse



The art deco Wyo Theater still attracts class acts



The Don King Saddle Shop has a free museum



Here I “belly up to the bar” ...Buffalo Bill’s bar... which is located in the historic Sheridan Inn where I had lunch

