

July 12, 2010 - Mount Rushmore and Its Presidents

The Mount Rushmore national memorial is located a scant 8 nautical miles northeast of the Custer County Airport, and takes just minutes to reach by my airplane. Flying in and around the monument is controlled by FAA flight restrictions with regard to noise levels and distance. However, one can get close enough to obtain some nice aerial photos of the mountain.

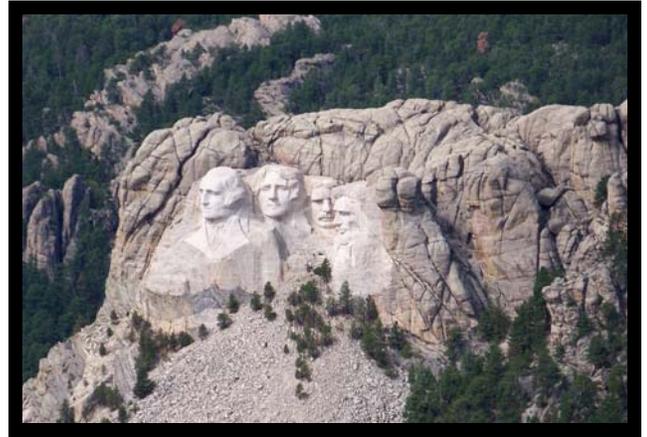
A few days ago, I received a telephone call while I was working at the airport. "Frank, this is Earl West, from Seymour Airpark" the voice on the other end of the phone said. However, he was not calling from one of my home base fields, the one in East Tennessee. It turns out that he and his wife were traveling by car, and were spending the night in Custer. He wanted to know if I would be interested in going over to the Rushmore expo that evening to view the nighttime floodlight show on the mountain.

Earl, who flies a Cessna Skyhawk and who owns a house right there on the grounds of Seymour airpark, and I had last seen each other while I was loading up my Vespa in mid-May as I was getting ready for my trip to S.D. This was a surprise visit, and it was good to get with him again. We all enjoyed the patriotic and inspiring evening performance at this national exhibition. This included a historic film about the "carving" of the mountainside by its sculptor, Gutzon Borglum. The next day the Wests were off and on their way onto Yellowstone and points further West.

Back in 1924 the sculptor Gutzon Borglum was busy on his Confederate Memorial carving on Stone Mountain, Ga. He was invited to come visit South Dakota to discuss a similar project idea in order to bring tourists to that state. When the Stone Mtn. work reached an impasse due to a dispute between the artist and the memorial's patrons, Borglum was relieved from the project, and made his way out to South Dakota. It took several visits and 3 years before he decided to begin this new commission, at which time he was 60 years old. During his first year he lived very primitively out of an army type tent at the base of the mountain. He worked tirelessly on this single task until his death some 14 years later. At that time his son, Lincoln Borglum, who had worked with his father for much of that time, took over and completed the sculpture.

Over in the nearby town of Keystone, there is a very informative and highly interesting Borglum Museum which contains many of the artistic works and artifacts from the sculptor's life. As you wander along on the audio assisted self-conducted tour, you will see dozens of tableaus depicting the life and times of the artist. You will view his early paintings, sketches and bronze sculptures. You will see his earlier "mountain carving" attempt on the Stone Mountain edifice, and follow along as he embarked on his greatest undertaking....Mount Rushmore. Most of the work was accomplished using dynamite and pneumatic jack hammers and the eventual cost topped \$1.5 million.

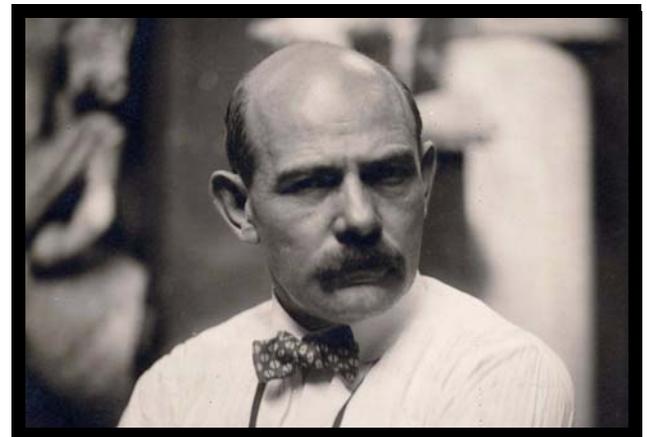
While photography is NOT allowed inside of the museum, it is allowed in the foyer. At the end of the tour, you will be treated to a 10 minute film, narrated by the previous South Dakota senator, Tom Dashle, which encapsulates the life and works of this great artist.



President's Heads photographed from my plane



Evening picture while attending with the Wests



Sculptor Gutzon Borglum photographed in 1919



The seated Lincoln, his most noted bronze work