

July 28 , 2010 - Wall Revisited, and onto the Badlands

You may remember, from my previous article about the town of Wall and its famous drug store, that I joked about it being another 47 years before I would be returning to see what was new. Well, here it is just a bit over a month later, and, to quote the infamous General Douglas McArthur, "I have returned". This time it was to pick up a vehicle, graciously loaned to me by the town's Mayor, David Hahn. Wall is the jumping point to the Badlands National Park, located 50 miles to the south. However, before I go on explaining about the Badlands, I wish to mention that the same evening that I had visited the city's airport back in mid-June, a tornado touched down and devastated the Mayor's hangar, and destroying all 3 of his airplanes, throwing one onto a fence more than 100 feet away. It was a bittersweet moment, having returned to this charming community, and seeing first hand some of the major damages caused by this F-1 (100 mph winds) tornado.

The Badland's National Park is a protected quarter million acres of sharply eroded buttes, pinnacles, and spires which are immediately adjacent to the largest protected mixed grass prairie in the United States and which produces a stark contrast. My flight from Custer County Airport took me directly over both of these land masses. My thought, while traversing the Badlands, was "Boy, I wouldn't want my engine to quit now". There are very few places that I would feel comfortable in setting down my airplane here. But that 120 HP Jabiru kept on ticking and before I knew it I was floating above the smooth and flat grasslands, enroute to the Wall Municipal Airport. Once there I picked up my loaner vehicle and made the hour drive south to the colorful bad lands.

The loop road takes a couple of hours to traverse and around each and every turn in the road is another dramatic image of this barren yet beautiful wasteland waiting to be photographed. Upon completion of my tour I returned the fully refueled vehicle, with thanks, and walked over to the Drug Store for a late lunch. Then I flew back to the Custer County Airport to relish in my final few days before having to leave this unique corner of our country. In just a week or so I will be heading back to the heat and humidity of a typical South Carolina August. This will be quite a change from the daytime 70's and evening 50's temperatures that I have been enjoying here in the Black Hills of South Dakota.



Arriving over the small town of Wall, S.D.



One of 3 Wall Apt. tornado damaged planes



The Badlands with the Grasslands beyond



The stark beauty of a Hoodoo (chimney) rock formation



The bleak but colorful Badlands Natl. Park