

June 1, 2010 - Custer, South Dakota

Well, yesterday I arrived in Custer, SD where I have committed to 2 months of volunteer work at the local county airport. This was something that was offered to me as a result of my 2008 trip around the US with my home built airplane. At that time I made a stopover at Spearfish, SD to do some flying around Mt. Rushmore and Wyoming's Devil's Tower. Apparently my "fame" from my web photo blog article on South Dakota brought an inquiry from the Custer airport manager asking if I would be interested in offering my services for 3 days each week in turn for a free hook up at a RV site located right there on the field.

I was going to pass on the offer, but several circumstances that befell me this year made me realize that none of us are getting any younger, and if I didn't take advantage of opportunities when they made themselves available that they might not come my way again. So, at almost the last minute I packed up my plane in its trailer, drove the motor home up to the Knoxville area to pick up my Vespa, and began the 2,200 mile drive West. Once you get past Chicago, it is a while different world out there. It is miles and miles between towns, and each one, it seems, has its own "special attraction". They vary from a Museum of Farm Implements, a "50's and 60's memorabilia museum, a "Corn Palace", and, of course the famous "Wall Drug Store", to name just a few. I will write more about some of these in the future.

The town of Custer has about 1,800 inhabitants and a main street that reminds me a lot of the little towns in NJ where I grew up in, but with lot older buildings. There is only one small grocery store, 3 gas stations, two fine restaurants, and a number of saloons fast food places, gift shops, boutiques and, of course, the local grange and a high school. Custer is also the county seat, so there is the sheriffs office, a courthouse and jail... none of which I wish to learn any more about.

Today I unpacked my airplane from its trailer, took my first flight over the "city" and made a half dozen landings on the 5,500 foot runway which is located a bit over a mile high in elevation. Every airport has its own personality and challenges, and it is always a good idea to get the feel of it. From this airstrip I intend to make flights over to several of the interesting attractions in the area. These include Mt. Rushmore, the Badlands, the National Grasslands and Black Hills as well as over to the Hot Springs area near the South Dakota, Nebraska state line. By scooter I want to make the drive up to Deadwood, Sturgis and the town of Lead which are located a bit north of Mt. Rushmore. Since I will have 4 days off each week, I hope to get to see many of the sights during the two months that I am here in "God's country",... where the air is clear, the sky's are blue and the visibility seems to go on forever.



Me on the Custer Airport ramp- Note the Cathedral Spires at the far right arrow



This is a tele-photo shot of those Spires



Aerial view of Custer and its distant hills



View of Custer's downtown "Main St." (Mount Rushmore Drive)