

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Traveling America (VII)
The Berkeley Pit in Butte Montana, Little Big Horn, Mount Rushmore**

Traveling America (VII) Report One: The Berkeley Pit

August 10, 2009

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. I have branched-out from my residence in northern Idaho to explore nearby sights. In these reports, we visit one of the world's largest open mining pits, the Little Bighorn National Park, and Mount Rushmore. Figure 1 shows the locations of these sites and the route from my base in Idaho.

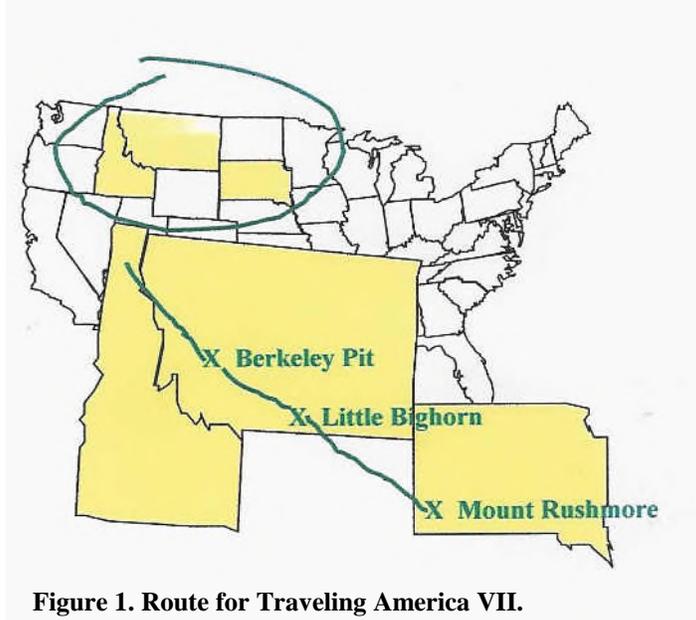


Figure 1. Route for Traveling America VII.

Butte and the Berkeley Pit

Butte, Montana, was established in the 1860s by gold-mining prospectors. Later, it became a silver-mining town, and made its fame and fortune from the late 1800s to the 1970s with copper mining. During Butte's early days, the town was a colorful, raucous place. Along with mining, the trades of gambling, drinking, and prostitution were profit-making industries.

In the early 1980s, declining copper prices forced most of the mines to close, but not before almost \$22 billion in metals had been extracted from Butte's terrain. And not before the operation created the Berkeley Pit, an open pit mine operated by the Anaconda Mining Company and later the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO).¹

Figure 2 shows the pit from a photo I snapped while taking a tour of the place. The view is from the top of the pit, looking toward its far side. The hole is 900 feet deep and a mile across. During its operation several years ago, water pumps at the bottom kept groundwater from flooding the pit. Later, the mining companies removed these pumps, thus allowing the surrounding aquifers to begin filling the hole with water.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berkeley_Pit



Figure 2. The Berkeley Pit.



To gain an idea of the size of the pit, look at the photo insert at the bottom of the figure. The red circle and arrow show several buildings at the shoreline of the lake, perhaps housing fishing and water skiing gear.

Not likely, as the acidic water in the pit contains so many dissolved metals that "mining" the waters has been proposed---a win-win situation for environmentalists and miners. Unfortunately for all, including unlucky birds passing by (see sidebar), the operation is not yet feasible.

Sidebar. You Were What You Ate²

In 1995, a large flock of migrating geese landed on the Berkeley Pit and was killed, most likely by the high concentration of acid. 342 carcasses were recovered. Their livers and kidneys were bloated, and many had eroded esophaguses. ARCO, the current custodian of the Pit, denied that the toxic water caused the death of the geese, instead blaming their deaths on their diet. They maintain the Pit is safe and environmentally sound.

The citizens of Butte continue to endure this pond, located a few miles from their historic downtown. Nearby residents have expressed concern about a fog emanating from the pit, shrouding their neighborhoods with a cloud of fume-filled aerosols. They are wondering what the fog might be doing to their health.

To the citizens of Butte, check the sidebar above for a hint. Just change the title of, "You Were What You Ate" to "You Are What You Breathe."

So What?

What's to make of the Berkeley Pit? What's to make of open mining? What's to make of creating a landscape---adjacent to a city---that is more toxic than downtown LA in August?

² Ibid.

I venture to say none of the miners was bent on creating an ore-laden fog for their grandchildren to inhale. None of them planned on the Pit's toxic emissions into the environment. They were just trying to get along, to make a buck, to feed their families.

But what's to make of ARCO blaming the diets of the dead geese for their deaths? What's to make of their claim that the Pit is safe when the site is part of the Superfund program, which is a, "...federal program enacted to clean up hazardous waste sites around the United States."³ The last time I checked, "hazardous" meant *hazardous*.

We all make mistakes, but not many of us admit to them. And in America's lawsuit culture, one can't acknowledge the mistakes of one's predecessors, because that puts the confessor squarely in the crosshairs of massive lawsuits. ARCO, if you dare admit you and Anaconda screwed the goose (so to speak), your asses are grass, and class-action lawyers are the lawn mowers.

This is America, land of the litigious. The atmosphere is promoting increasing "cover your ass" self-interest to the point of perversity.

Sights to See

Besides the Berkeley Pit, Butte has other tourist attractions...more healthy than the Pit. Some of the old mining-days buildings have been restored and are a delight to behold. Reporterette and I stayed in the Finlen Hotel, which has been refurbished to resemble the boomtown days. The hotel staff informed me the restoration was done with painstaking accuracy. As seen in Figure 3, the end result was a success.



Figure 3. Lobby of the Finlen Hotel.

Ghost Town

³ "Superfund." Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005, 1993-2004, Microsoft Corporation.

If you are passing through Butte, be sure and pay a visit to Butte's Ghost Town. The town is laid-out with several streets and alleys connecting scores of reconstructed buildings. The left photo in Figure 4 shows a few of the building facades and a typical street scene.

Not all the facades are veneers for mock-up buildings. Many of them house artifacts of the past, as seen in the middle picture in Figure 4. Some of the exhibits highlight the history of mining. Hundreds of relics of an older time are on display. The tools and rails shown in the right photo of Figure 4 are remnants of the past, preserved for our reminiscences.



Figure 4. Scenes from the Old Town.

In the next report, Little Bighorn.

Traveling America (VII) Report Two: Little Bighorn

August 11, 2009

We continue our trip to places in America's northwest. This report has us located at the Little Bighorn National Monument. Figure 1 in Report One will refresh your memory about the locations of our visits.

In 1897, Little Bighorn was established as a national cemetery on the Crow Indian Reservation to preserve the graves of soldiers who were killed in the Battle of Little Bighorn (which occurred on June 25, 1876). Graves of WWI and WWII servicemen are also located at this site. The Crow *Indian* Reservation was not set aside for dead *Indians*. Only dead soldiers.

Your Land Is My Land

The battle of the Little Bighorn occurred because a couple years earlier, gold was discovered in the nearby Black Hills (1874). The centuries-long residents of the area did not take kindly to the incoming prospectors, who....

- "Oh, hello, Bob. How's your research going for your music?"
- Mr. Dylan, "Listen wise-ass, I've heard of your slanderous comments about my stealing lyrics from a dead poet. I'm thinking of suing."
- "Slanderous? Again, let's compare your lyrics to that dead poet's verse."
- "Never mind. Would you like to hear my angst-filled ballad about the Little Bighorn? You know, about those gold prospectors."
- "Fire it up, Robert!"

Strum, strum, strum ... 

Your land is my land.

Your gold is my gold.

From the Pryor Mountains.

To the Black Hill valleys.

Your land is my land.

Your ore is my ore.

Your land is meant for only me.

- "Thanks, Bob. You've probably seen one of those signs drawn by an American Indian artist about your subject?"
- "Yep. It shows a group of Indian warriors posing for a photo. Under the picture is the caption, 'Fighting terrorism since 1492.' Neocons love the slogan. They hang this sign on their office walls."

Ha! Good one. OK, Bob, we'll hear more from you later. Mr. Dylan is on target, as the incoming prospectors thought the Black Hills turf was fair game for everyone. This notion is in the spirit of the pioneer credo: What's yours is only yours if you can hold on to it by force.

⁴ Sung to the tune of *This Land is my Land*.

I am not voicing a political view. I am simply reciting a fact that many parts of our world were conquered and populated by European stock during the past six centuries. But there is no need for concern. Turn-about is fair play. The European invasion of America is now being countered with an invasion of Latinos. (Most of the Pakistanis and Indians have decided to remain in Asia to staff Internet call centers.)

Anyway, and back to the Little Big Horn Story: the Native Americans were not happy with the gold rush's rush hour. Before long, two tribal leaders, Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, joined forces to attempt to dislodge the white settlers. The stage was set for the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Custer's Last Stand, and subsequently, the demise of independent Indian tribes in this area.

The battlefield is just off Interstate 90. The only way to visit the sites where fighting took place is by car. The park consists of 765 acres and the battles between the soldiers and the Indians took place over many parts of this area. The photo in Figure 5 gives you an idea of the terrain, mostly rolling hills and a few creeks. Notice the small sign in the middle of the picture (red circle). They are placed at locations to describe an interesting event that occurred during the battles.



Figure 5. The Little Bighorn terrain.

For the major fights, the battleground is marked with larger signs, maps, and pictures. One is shown in Figure 6. The park also has exhibits where Custer and 264 men from the Seventh U.S. Cavalry were killed because of Custer's brazen actions:

Custer's regiment of 655 men formed the advance guard of a force under General Alfred Howe Terry. On June 25, Custer's scouts located the Sioux on the Little Bighorn River. Unaware of the Native American strength, between 2500 and 4000 men, Custer disregarded arrangements to join Terry at the junction of the Bighorn and Little Bighorn rivers and prepared to attack at once. In the hope of surrounding the Native Americans, he formed his troops into a frontal-assault force of about 260 men under his personal command and two flanking columns. The center column encountered the numerically superior Sioux and Cheyenne. Cut off from the flanking columns and completely surrounded, Custer and his men fought

desperately but all were killed. Later Terry's troops relieved the remainder of the regiment.⁵



Figure 6. Markers for major fights.

If you take the time to read about Custer's career as a soldier, you will learn he was a disaster waiting to happen. Vainglorious and reckless throughout most of his career, he finally got his comeuppance at Little Bighorn.

Getting there is Half the Fun

As you can see from the map in Figure 1, the Little Bighorn battlefield is not located next to our daily commute to our office. If you like to travel by car, try motoring across this part of America. As noted shortly, Mount Rushmore is nearby (relatively speaking), as is Yellowstone National Park and the Grand Teton National Park. And the Berkeley Pit is a half-day drive up Interstate 90.

- "Eh, Reporter, I'm not finished with my famous song about the Little Bighorn."
- "Sorry, Robert, I'd forgotten you were waiting off-stage."
- "I'm branching into limericks. Here's one on Custer:"

Strum, strum, strum♪♪♪♪

*There once was a man named Custer,
who lived his life with much luster.*

*He took his men in,
what became a hell's den,
where Crazy Horse gave him a duster.*

- "Maybe you should stick with free verse Bob."
- "Naw, just wait until you visit Mount Rushmore. I've an epic limerick about that place."

⁵ "Battle of Little Bighorn," Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005, 1993-2004, Microsoft Corporation.

- "I can't wait."

Traveling America (VII) Report Three: Mount Rushmore

August 12, 2009

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Reporterette and I traveled across Northeast Wyoming into South Dakota, where we visited Mount Rushmore (see Figure 7). Thus far in *Traveling America (VII)*, we visited a couple of interesting places, not grand, but worthwhile sights to see. For this last report, I claim that Mount Rushmore is a spectacular sight. In terms of a breathtaking view, I would put it on my top ten list (Number one so far is Niagara Falls).

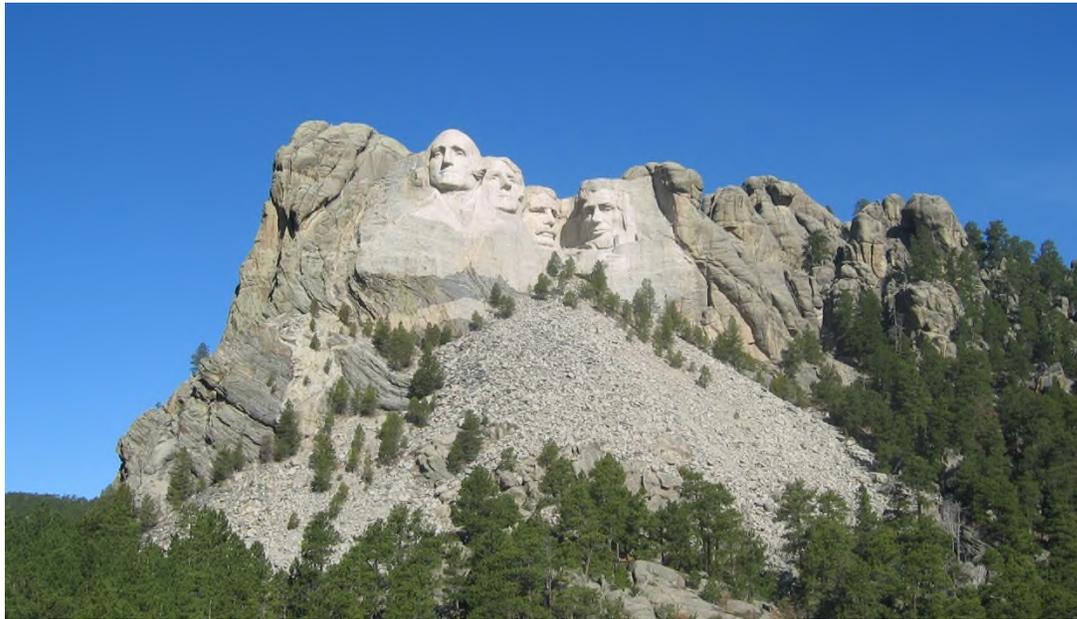


Figure 7. An impressive sculpture of impressive people.

Mount Rushmore National Memorial features the heads of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. The sculpture is carved into a granite bluff on the rim of Mount Rushmore. The faces are 60 feet tall and rise 500 feet from the valley floor---where this picture was taken.

The idea for creating the sculpture came from South Dakota historian Doane Robinson in the early 1920s. American sculptor Gutzon Borglum designed the memorial and supervised its construction. Borglum envisioned a monument to the growth of the United States and its most important leaders and chose Mount Rushmore as the site.

Construction of the memorial began in 1927. The head of Washington was completed first, followed by Jefferson and Lincoln. Roosevelt's head was unfinished when Borglum died in 1941, and his son Lincoln completed the work later that year.⁶

⁶ "Mount Rushmore," Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005, 1993-2004, Microsoft Corporation.

Be sure to allot at least a couple hours to visit this site. You may be thinking, *I only need a minute or so to take-in the sculpture.* True, but an on-site museum and movie theater provide many fine stories of how the work was created. You can also tour Borglum's studio, which contains an assortment of tools and plaster models of the faces.

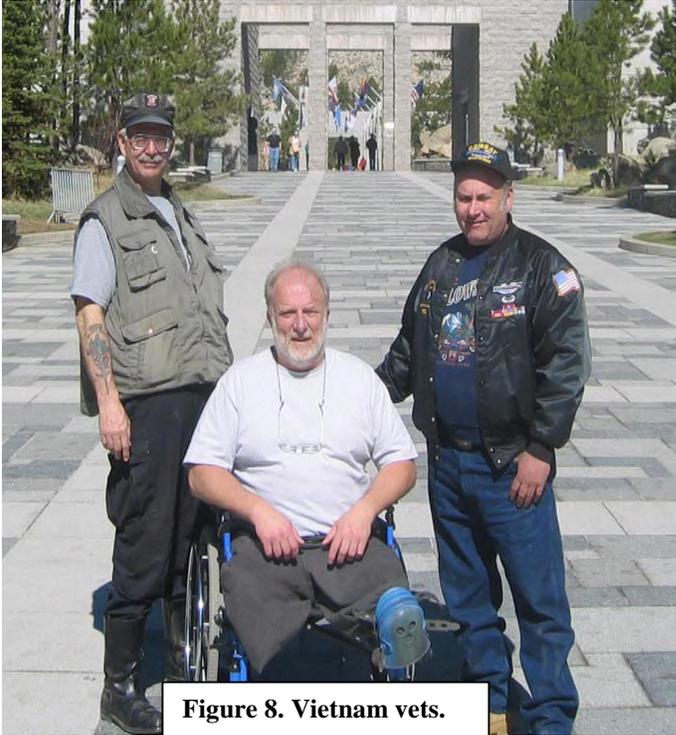


Figure 8. Vietnam vets.

As we were leaving the site, I came across three gentlemen who asked me to use their cameras to take pictures of them in front of the sculpture. I also snapped a shot with my camera, as seen in Figure 8. I noticed their caps and shirts were decorated with Vietnam veteran insignias. We spent a few minutes recounting where we were stationed over there and telling some stories of our service.

The man in the wheelchair told me he lost his legs during a battle near Hue. I mentioned I had been in Hue, accompanying the first US who entered the city (for recon operations). After a while, the conversation came to the time when the US troops pulled out of Vietnam, when our leaders declared victory and left.

We talked about the fact that Vietnam was the only domino that fell in Southeast Asia.