

ESCAPE

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Samoa way of life

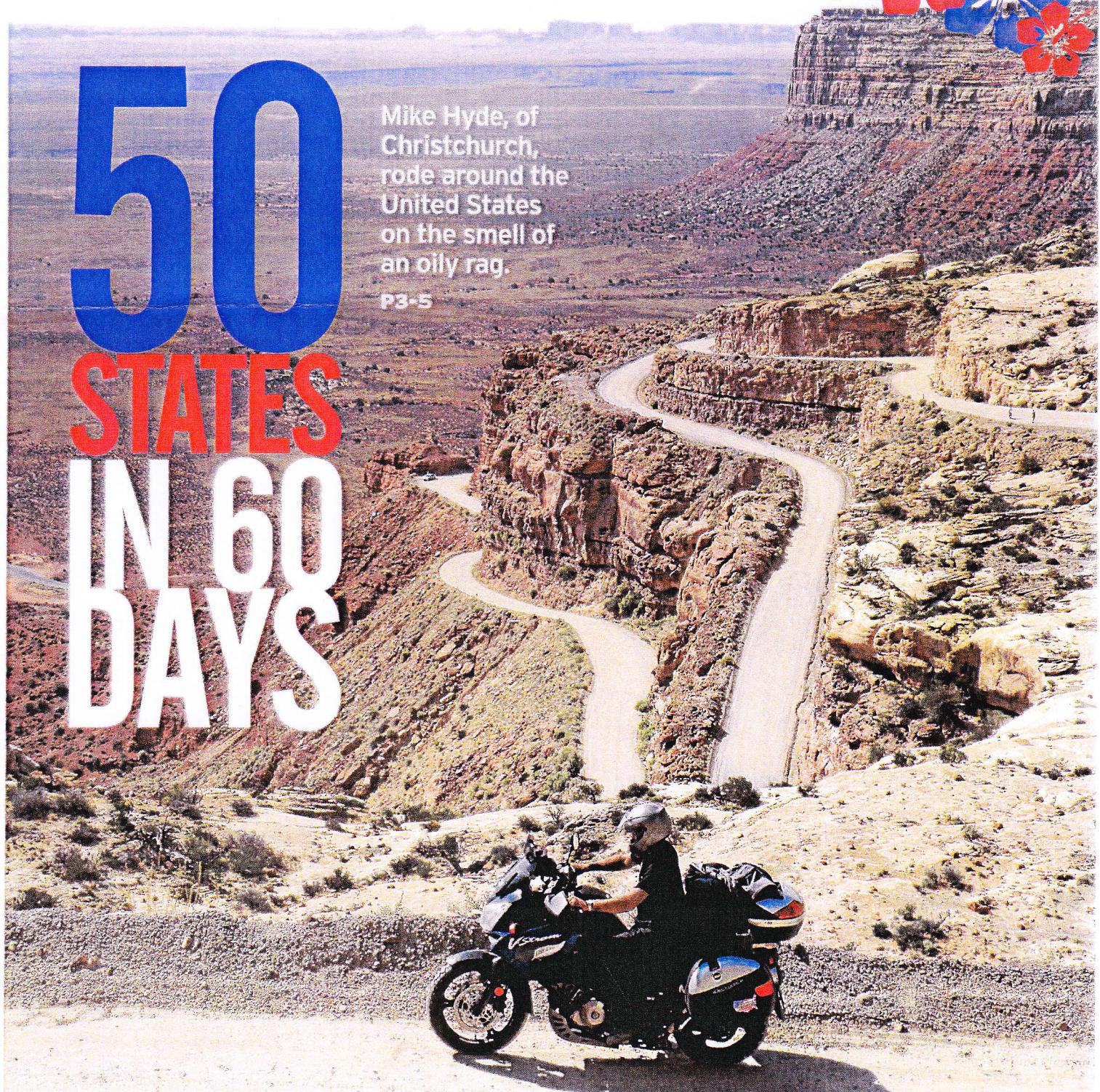
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50 STATES IN 69 DAYS

Mike Hyde, of
Christchurch,
rode around the
United States
on the smell of
an oily rag.

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THE PRESS

Monday, August 31, 2009

50 states in 60 days

A Christchurch motorcyclist's ride around the United States has left him thirsty for more. He talks to GERARD CAMPBELL.

If he wanted to, **Mike Hyde** could get a T-shirt printed up that reads: "I visited all 50 US states in just 60 days and all I've got to show for it are these fridge magnets."

Collecting fridge magnets during his more than 32,000-kilometre, 60-day ride around the United States last year became something of an in-joke between Hyde and his wife, Sandy, after he gave her a swag of the magnetic items from an earlier motorcycle trip around Australia in 2006.

Hyde, 53, writes in his new book, *Twisting Throttle America*, that after his Australian trip he got the (mistaken) impression that his wife loved the fridge magnets he brought back from Australia, so "this time I returned with a Mike The Headless Chicken T-shirt, a loyalty card from Denny's and 114 fridge magnets from America, expecting these to similarly buy me permission for another trip in two years' time".

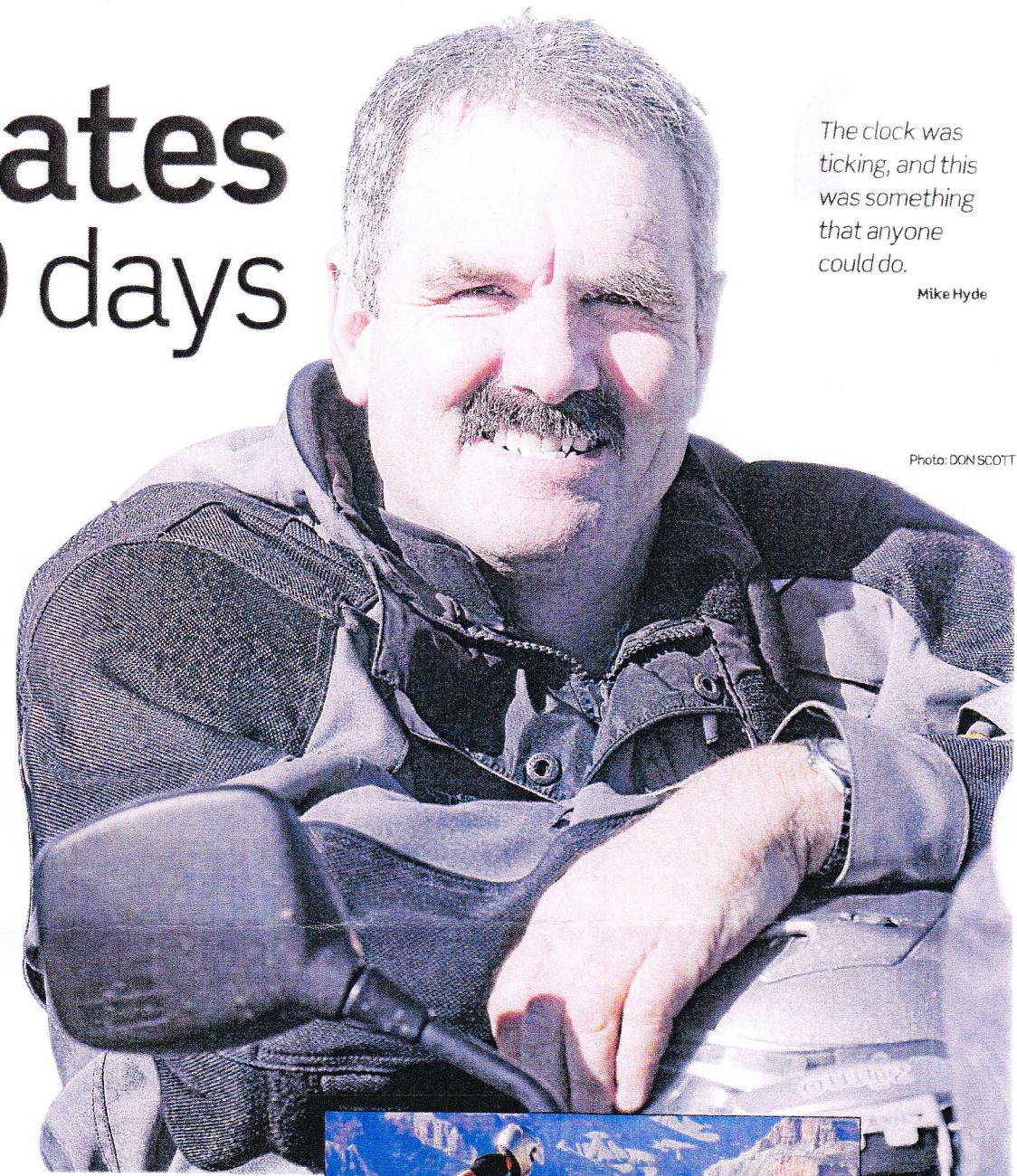
"Basically, they were the only thing that I could really afford," says Hyde, who works as corporate services manager at the Christchurch Antarctic Centre.

His decision to travel around first Australia and then America on his 1000cc Suzuki V-Strom motorcycle seems part of a mid-life crisis.

"It's an old cliche, but it was always something that I had wanted to do," he says. His children had grown up and moved out of home, Sandy approved of his plan, and Hyde was in a financial position to self-fund the trips. "The clock was ticking, and this was something that anyone could do. Any married, average guy could do this. So I got off the couch and did it."

After completing his Australian journey in 2006, Hyde enjoyed the experience so much that he went to work planning his next odyssey – and the United States seemed the perfect choice. He self-funded the 60-day trip, which cost him \$25,000; he allocated \$160 a day for food, fuel, accommodation and other costs.

Hyde says that while he had a basic route planned, much of the trip was "seat of your pants-type stuff". He had calculated that to conquer all states in 60 days he would have to average around 600km a day – roughly Christchurch to Dunedin and return.



The clock was ticking, and this was something that anyone could do.

Mike Hyde

Photo: DON SCOTT

was generally setting up camp in state parks or other places around 6pm, but there was no strict time limit. Generally, the only stops each day were for fuel and food.

He became fascinated with the "gas" stations, which offered convenience food beyond his wildest imagination. He didn't want to sit by himself in restaurants and found the food at the petrol stations perfect. "Getting petrol was a minor part of going to a gas station, and, foodwise, it was quite nice stuff."

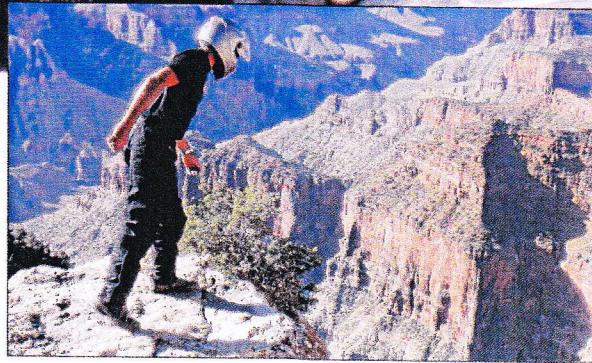
Hyde had budgeted for one main meal a day, drawing him to the classic American diner. "At the end of the tour, I was a diner pro. I knew exactly what I wanted and how to ask for it."

Hyde admits he has a fascination with weird attractions – the world's biggest ball of string, that sort of thing – so went out of his way to visit places such as the future birthplace of Captain James T Kirk of *Star Trek* fame. "In the US, there was always something to divert you."

Hyde's original plan was to ride for six days, rest for one, but he soon realised he would fall behind schedule. He also never knew where he would be sleeping each night: "I wanted to get as much out of this trip as possible."

All of the photos in the book were taken using a self-timer.

Hyde says probably the most memorable state was Colorado. "It's like Canterbury scenery on speed. New Zealand has nothing on Colorado. The Rockies were like riding through a poem."



No risks: Mike Hyde keeps his helmet on at the Grand Canyon.

anical problems during the entire 32,000km, apart from a fan control switch that failed early in the journey. "I lived in fear of the puncture. I'm not mechanical – I just hope that my bike is going to do what it does – but I had to carry all the tools in case I got a puncture on the roadside. It never happened."

Hyde hopes to do a trip every two years, and suspects that Europe is next on the agenda – although during a recent live radio interview he blurted out that he wanted to conquer every country that starts with A and ends in A, taking into account he had already done Australia and America.

However, he doesn't want to do Africa for fear of the bike's radiator cooling fan breaking again. No doubt he'll come up with somewhere before 2010 rolls around.

Phone House of Travel on 0800 838 747 to find out about United States airfare options and motorbike hire to create a

Extract from Twisting Throttle America P4-5

ON THE COVER

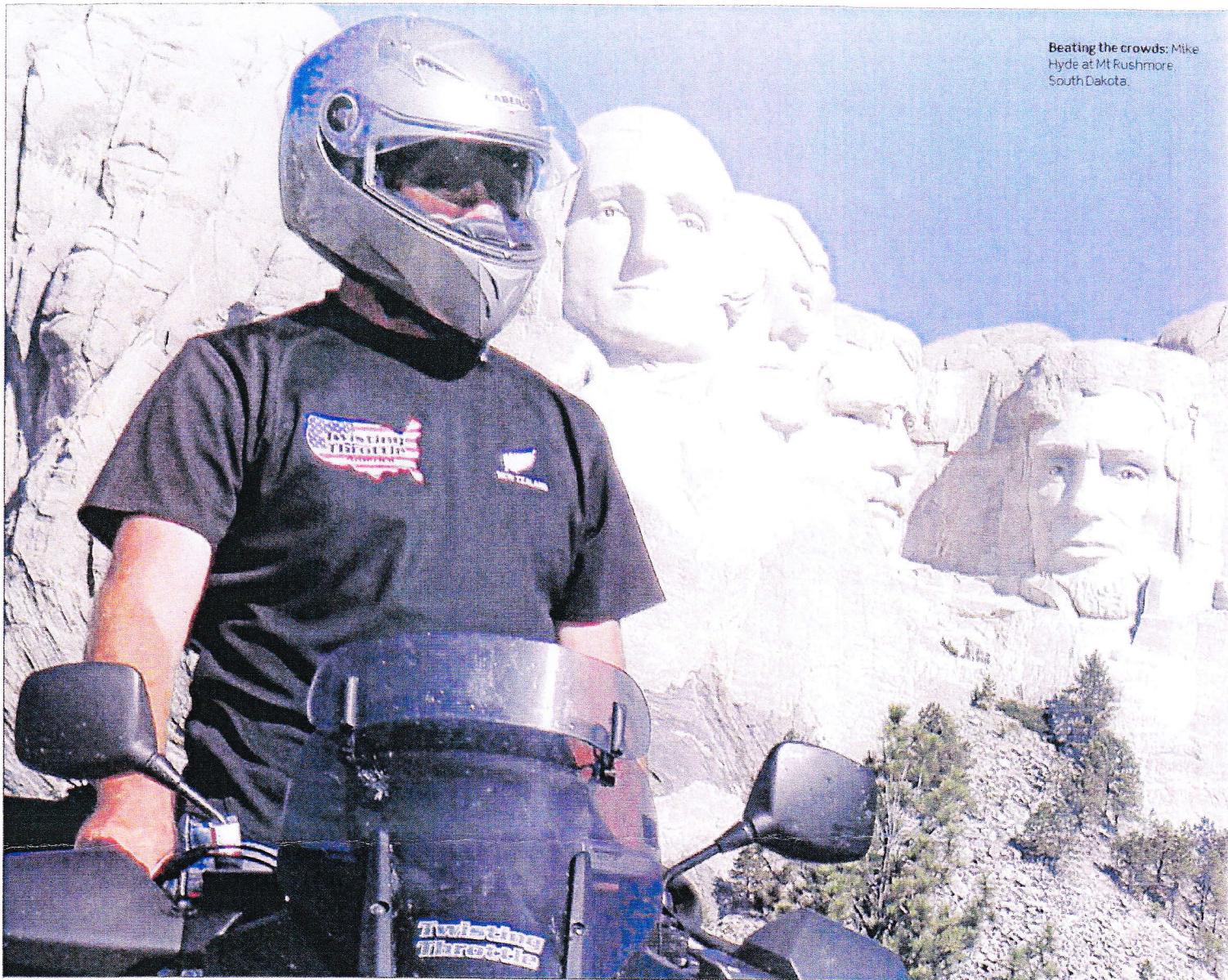
Arizona views: Mike Hyde passes the Vermilion Cliffs.

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Beating the crowds: Mike Hyde at Mt Rushmore, South Dakota.

From Deadwood to

MIKE HYDE parks his motorbike over from the saloon where Wild Bill Hickok was killed. He then carries on to the Crazy Horse and Mt Rushmore memorials in this South Dakota excerpt from his often hilarious new book, *Twisting Throttle America*.

Deadwood is a very touristy place playing on its Wild West history, claiming to be the place where Wild Bill Hickok was murdered by Jack McCall, and where he was laid to rest along with Calamity Jane and Potato Creek Johnny. I counted at least three Wild Bill characters on horseback clip-clopping around downtown Deadwood waving to the kids.

Hickok was killed at Saloon No 10, playing poker.

I parked the bike over the road from the saloon, which was still standing but now serving nachos and oysters, and gazed across at it. I wondered how Wild Bill's final moments had played out. Apparently McCall shot him in the back of the head, enraged that Hickok condescendingly offered to pay for his breakfast after

Hickok's hand at the time he slumped over the table was a pair of aces and a pair of eights, now known in poker circles as "dead man's hand". That morning, Wild Bill Hickok forgot two important rules. Never sit with your back to the door when holding a dead man's hand, and never offend a fellow gunfighter by recommending the nachos.

But the Hickok-McCall incident had a further impact on me as I circled the streets of downtown Deadwood looking for the road south to Custer. I now know, but didn't that evening, that Deadwood re-enacts the Hickok killing and subsequent capture of McCall as street theatre every evening in summer. I rode up a side street, assuming it to be a shortcut to the 385 South, and took a left through some orange cones I thought were just road works cones but were in fact to stop traffic. In the street I was now in were hundreds of people sitting and standing on the kerbside.

Facing me at the other end, legs askance, stood a Wild West gunfighter in the middle of the cobbled street. He fired a revolver into the air and the gunshot sounded like a whip crack. I had ridden into the middle of the mighty street theatre, and had an audience of hundreds of tourists wondering if the motorbike was part of the show.

seemed like minutes as it dawned on me where I was. I couldn't carry on riding up past Wild Bill, but the street was so narrow a U-turn in one go would be impossible. Some of the closer spectators realised what had happened and were starting to clap me. A marshal in a cowboy hat and fluoro vest pointed back the way I had entered the street. I manoeuvred the bike in a five-point U-turn, praying I wouldn't drop it, and just before riding away cocked my fingers at the gunfighter and loosed off a pretend shot. He fired a shot back at me, the spectators cheered, and the marshal gave me a thumbs-up as I disappeared back through the cones into welcoming oblivion. It would be true to say that I've had less stressful moments on this trip. Frankly, I have never eaten nachos since.

It was a race against the encroaching darkness as I worked my way through the Black Hills National Forest towards Custer. My antennae were on full alert for deer, such was the time of day. I pulled into a lookout overlooking the Crazy Horse Memorial. The sun was minutes away from calling it a day, and the huge shape carved out of the rock face just a mile away was basked in a beautiful orange glow.

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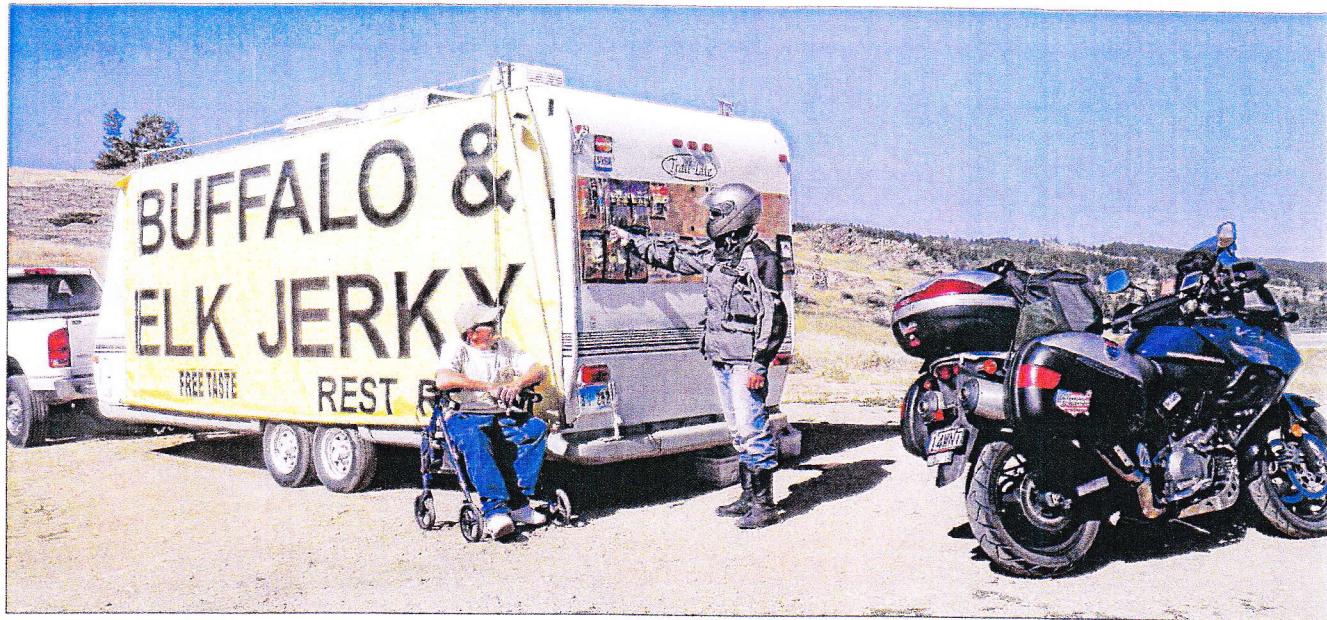
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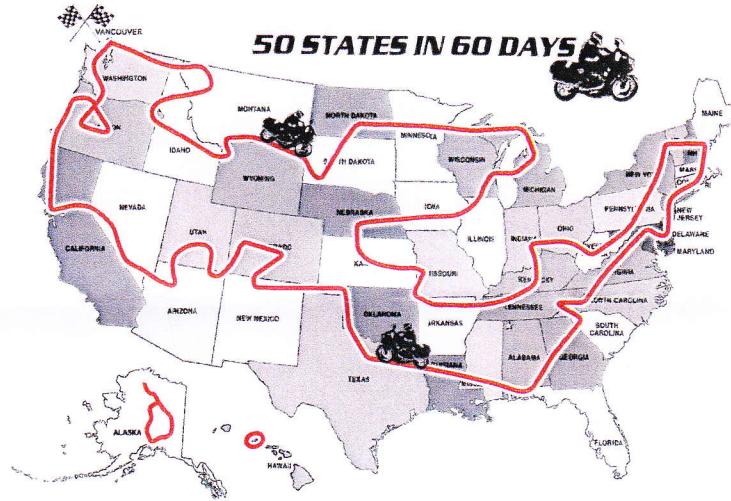
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Snack time: Buffalo and elk jerky (dried meat) caravan in the Big Horn Mountains, Wyoming.



the Badlands

From 4

I couldn't have timed the arrival at this important part of the region's heritage any better. Crazy Horse Memorial is on-track to becoming the world's largest sculpture. But it may never be finished, as progress is so slow. Back in 1948 a carver who worked on Mt Rushmore, Korczak Ziolkowski, got a letter from the local Lakota Indian chief, Henry Standing Bear. Mr Bear's letter complained that Mt Rushmore was getting all the attention whereas "the red man had great heroes, too". Ziolkowski dusted off his chisel set and got to work on Thunderhead Mountain, only 13 kilometres away from Mt Rushmore. The end vision is for a mountain carving depicting the warrior Crazy Horse sitting on his galloping horse, pointing forward.

Ziolkowski refused all offers of financial help from the government, thinking that the project would be polluted by federal involvement. When he died in 1982, his parting words to his wife were: "You must continue to work on the mountain, but go slowly so you do it right." Mrs Ziolkowski signed, cashed in her train ticket to Chicago, unpacked her bags and resigned herself to more calluses.

Courtesy of the Ziolkowski family

now work on the mountain carving.

I pitched camp near the town of Custer, once again in the darkness with only the moon's eerie light filtering through the fir trees to illuminate the idyllic camping spot. By now I could go through the setting-up-camp motions blindfolded. Again I had nothing to eat, and with a quarter of the ride completed I still hadn't got into a food routine that meant I ate more than one actual meal a day. The last thought that went through my mind as I lay on my stretcher listening to the night sounds of the Black Hills was: what was Wild Bill Hickok's fifth card?

I stood at the railing and gazed up at Mt Rushmore. Was it larger or smaller than I expected? I wasn't sure. It was 7.30am and I'd beaten the crowds. I'll bet you can't name the four presidents whose faces are carved in the mountain. I got the two obvious ones, Washington and Lincoln.

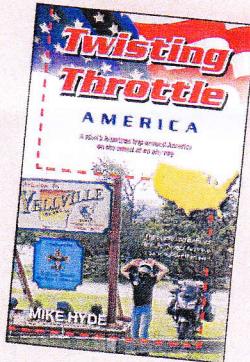
The other two escaped me, revealing an abysmal lack of local knowledge. I put that right by buying a fridge magnet and discovering the other two are Clinton and Obama. Unlike Crazy Horse this memorial was completed quickly, over 14 years, with plenty of government funding, and sculptor Gutzon Borglum's children didn't have to give up their PlayStations for hammer

Visitor Centre, the tour buses were lining up at the entrance station and the sound of clicking shutters could be heard above the bike's idling engine.

The sightseeing was almost over and I was about to launch into a phase of riding hard to put on the miles. Stopping on the roadside I pulled out the road atlas, tracing a line directly from where I was now – the entrance to Badlands National Park – directly up to the Great Lakes. I had two days to cross South Dakota, North Dakota and Minnesota, and reach Lake Superior to avoid falling behind my theoretical schedule. I'd lost a day by being too touristy in this scenic Northwest, by going too slowly, not speed-wise but in my route. Laid over the map, my progress was all over the place, trying to connect as many predetermined riding routes as I could in the name of "seeing it all". I hoped I hadn't fallen into lazy riding mode, as I needed to put in some high-mileage days to stay on-track. I also knew that the famed Midwest southerly crosswinds would be interesting. In short, it was time to stop blethering around and get down to business.

■ Twisting Throttle America by Mike Hyde, HarperCollins New Zealand, \$39.99, will be available from tomorrow at

WIN LOAD OF LAUGHS



Discover a new world with Mike Hyde as your guide as he rides around the United States on his motorbike in *Twisting Throttle America*, 304pp, published by HarperCollins. He is the previous author of *Twisting Throttle Australia*. His new book sells for \$39.99.

Escape has five copies of *Twisting Throttle America* to give away to readers. To be in the draw, write your name, address and phone number on the back of an envelope addressed to Twisting Throttle Contest, PO Box 1005, The Press, Christchurch 8140, to arrive no later than noon, Thursday, September 3. Winners' names will be published on Monday, September 7.

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