

# Hidden Treasures

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by Brenda Kleinjan

**T**RAVELERS VENTURING BETWEEN THE WORLD'S only Corn Palace and the state's tourism mecca of Mount Rushmore might miss one of the region's newest – and arguably one-of-a-kind – attractions: the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site.

Part of the federal National Park Service, the site doesn't have a fancy visitor's center yet – the humble, beige modular buildings that house the historic site's visitor's area and offices meld into the earth-toned backdrop of the Badlands.

But, for those who have done their planning and take the time to stop, an adventure awaits them. This museum takes visitors back to the days of the Cold War, a time where the threat of nuclear war was ever-present. It is the only National Park site dedicated to interpreting the Cold War.

The visit starts at the Project Office at Exit 131 of Interstate 90. Twice a day, groups of six individuals will venture to Delta-01 Launch Control Facility. Here, visitors look at the lodgings of the U.S. Air Force personnel who worked at the facility. While at the facility, visitors then venture below ground to see the capsule that was staffed 24-hours-a-day by missiliers trained to launch nuclear

weapons against a target half the globe away.

Inside this capsule, visitors can only ponder what the 24-hour shifts of the missiliers might have been like. The space is preserved to look as it did when the last crew left the facility.

Throughout the tour, Chris Wilkinson, the park ranger interpreter, gives clues about the workings of the facility based on research and anecdotal information from past Air Force personnel: "Hours and hours of boredom, punctuated by seconds of panic."

To illustrate the comment, Wilkinson relates the day-to-day activities of the facility's staff: eight personnel above ground and two below. The above-ground crew worked a three-day on, three-day off rotation while the missiliers had rotating 24-hour shifts.

The day-to-day activities involved calling in the weather report to Ellsworth AFB, patrolling the 10 launch sites (Delta-02 through Delta-11) assigned to the control facility, preparing meals and other daily military duties.

Occasionally the mundane was punctuated by the unusual.

"In 1965, a security police team was called out for a zone alarm near Spearfish," Wilkinson



explains, (Delta-01 and Delta-09 were part of a missile field of 150 missiles that spread across southwestern South Dakota) relating an experience of another launch facility.

The alarm was triggered by two camels – escapees of the nearby Passion Play.

Another example Wilkinson uses is a late 1970s incident where a warbling alarm in the capsule – used to alert the missiliers that an important message was incoming – sounded. The alarm was followed by the message, “Standby for a message from the President.” As Wilkinson relates, it was a phrase that meant the missiliers may be putting to use their training. After a few agonizing seconds, the President’s voice is heard – he was visiting the air force base in charge of the missile program and wanted to see if the communications system was working.

Delta-01 and Delta-09 are the only remaining intact facilities of a nuclear missile field that consisted of 150 Minuteman II missiles and 15 launch control centers across 13,500 square miles of southwestern South Dakota.

In 1961, the U.S. Air Force began constructing the Minuteman ICBM missile sites, including those in South Dakota. The Delta Facility was completed in 1963. As a result of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) signed in 1991, the missiles were deactivated.

The Minuteman Missile National Historic Site was designated on Nov. 29, 1999. Work was then done to locate a trainer missile to create a static display that is now housed in the silo of Delta-09.

A Soviet inspection team traveled to South Dakota in 2002 to verify that the site complied with the START Treaty’s specifications for static displays. In September of that year, Delta-01 and Delta-09 were officially turned over to the National Park Service from the U.S. Air Force.

The historic site is entering its third year of giving tours to the public. More than 2,000 people visited in 2005 and when the site is fully operational, the park service expects more than a quarter of a million people will visit annually.

Reservations are a must if you’re planning on visiting. For more information on the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, visit [www.nps.gov/mimi](http://www.nps.gov/mimi).



A view inside the underground launch control center at Delta-01.

**Opposite Page:** National Park Service interpreter Chris Wilkinson explains the characteristics of the Delta-09 Launch Facility. *Photo By: Brenda Kleinjan*

**Inset:** Dane Folk School, one of the area’s unique attractions, is located in Tyler, Minn. **Cover:** Visitors can look down into a missile silo from the Delta-09 Launch Facility observation area. *Photo By: South Dakota Department of Tourism*

## Uniquely Here

### Pioneer Auto Show

For 52 years, travelers heading west along Interstate 90 (and the former U.S. Highway 16) have stopped in at Murdo’s Pioneer Auto Show. Today, more than 250 collectible cars, motorcycles, tractors, music boxes, toys and nostalgic items await visitors as does a collection of the Zeitner rocks, gems and fossils.

For more information, visit [www.pioneerautoshow.com](http://www.pioneerautoshow.com).

### Danebod Folk School

Located in Tyler, Minn., the Danebod Folk School was once a high school to teach Danish-Americans. Today, the Folk School is a retreat center. A museum is also located on the grounds. Once common among Danish immigrant communities, the Danebod Folk School is the last Danish Folk School.

For more information, visit <http://mail.mnns.com/~danebod/folk.htm>.



[HTTP://MAIL.MNNS.COM/~DANEBOOD/FCBK.HTM](http://mail.mnns.com/~danebod/folk.htm)

### The International Vinegar Museum

Located on Main Street in Roslyn, S.D., the International Vinegar Museum showcases vinegars from around the world. Visitors are able to taste vinegars made from a variety of plants as well as see paper made from vinegar. For more information, visit [www.vinegarman.com](http://www.vinegarman.com).

### The Campbell Straw Bale Built Museum

Located in Carthage, S.D., the Campbell Straw Bale Built Museum is the only original straw bale built museum in the United States. Construction of the building began in 2001 and was completed in 2004. More than 40,000 volunteer hours went into the construction of the 6,000-plus square-foot building. The 1,300 straw bales used to insulate the walls give the building an R-50 insulation factor.

For more information, visit [www.strawbalemuseum.com](http://www.strawbalemuseum.com).

### Crazy Horse Memorial

Crazy Horse Memorial, the world’s largest sculpture, now in progress, is located in the Black Hills of South Dakota on U.S. Highway 16/385 just 17 miles southwest of Mount Rushmore. The work was begun in 1948 by sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski at the request of Native Americans. Korczak died in 1982. His wife, Ruth, and their family continue the project working with the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation.

The Memorial includes the Indian Museum of North America, the Native American Cultural Center which was dedicated at the 1996 Native American Day celebration, the sculptor’s studio, as well as a new 40,000-square-foot Orientation Center and theaters opened in May 2000. Many Native American artists and crafts people create their artwork and visit with guests at the Memorial during the summer season.

For more information, visit [www.crazyhorse.org](http://www.crazyhorse.org).