

# Fillin' Their Heads

**Bi-annual trip delivered good times, showcased clean coal technology, and provided insight into the future of energy production.**

**by Russell Gall**

Every two years, in the hot days of August, "Chuck" and "Doug" (Charles Mix and Douglas Electric) ask our members to join us on a wild, winding, whirlwind wandering to the great black north. The "black", of course, is North Dakota coal. It's used to power the generators that bring electricity to thousands of homes in the Great Plains. You see, coal is a clean and ample source electricity . . . and it's all ours! (wringing of hands) Here's a quick overview of what this elite and lucky group saw on our trip.

## **Hitchin' a Ride**

Our tour started out on July 31<sup>st</sup> with an exclusive group of hand-picked members hopping aboard our luxury

coach bus, complete with seats and everything. Barely underway, it was necessary to make a brief stop near Kimball to pick up a couple of hitch-hikers. Oddly enough, they told jokes, sang a couple of songs, and then one stood on her head in our moving bus! Weird. Overall, I guess they're just common folk wearing orange jump-suits and looking for a ride.

## **Everyone Knows it's Windy**

After dumping off the hitch-hikers in Chamberlain, we continued northward to grab a glimpse of the Hyde County Wind Energy Center. What appeared to be the world's largest group of ornamental lawn windmills turned out to be one cog in the gears of the Basin Electric green machine.



# With Coal

These white giants stood quietly as they rotated in the breeze, generating electricity. Full of wonder, the group jumped back in the people-hauler with renewed vigor and a new topic to discuss.

## Cool, Clear Water

Venturing to the Oahe Dam, the group got to see how falling water is harnessed to make electricity. During the dam tour, the group learned about the dam's construction, its purpose, and the benefits it provides. The dam tour guide answered many dam questions from a very curious group. Built back in the late 1940's, the Oahe Dam is still a marvel to behold, as it continues to provide flood control, recreation, water reserves, and squeaky-clean electricity.

Back on the bus, the group hunkered down for a long haul to Mandan, ND, where we stayed at the Seven Seas Hotel and water park. Though the day grew long, the group was not quite washed up yet. Everyone made it for a good meal, some fun, and a little lively conversation. Many even managed to grab a few winks of sleep, preparing them for the day to come.

## Workin' in the Coal Mines

Back on the bus early the next morning, the group meandered further north to the Coteau Freedom Mine near Beulah, ND. Here, machines of unimaginable size removed soil and extracted lignite coal from the ground. The tourists watched in awe as the coal was uncovered, loaded, hauled, crushed, and sent over to the Antelope Valley Station (AVS), in a methodical and efficient manner.

Of course, our next stop was the Antelope Valley Station, just a stone's throw from the coal mine. This walking tour gave the group an up-close look at the workings of a coal-fired power plant, with its 300' tall boilers, roaring generators, and all the environmental controls that make it one of the cleanest power plants in the world.

## Homeward Bound

Adequately impressed with the day's adventure, the group again boarded our chariot for the long drive home. Several jokes, a few naps, and one movie later, the tourists landed back in South Dakota, each going their separate way with a new appreciation for what happens when they flip the light switch.

So why did we take this little trip? To fill their heads with coal, of course! Well, maybe not coal itself, but rather with knowledge of coal. As always, we had a good time showing off clean coal technology and providing a better understanding of our energy future.

Bottom right: During the drive through tour of the coal mine, the group watched the behemoth loader fill a monstrous hauler. (Love those adjectives!)



The bus made a screeching stop at the mouth of the dragline bucket, enabling the group to get out and say, "Wow!"



After touring the Oahe Dam, the group had lunch at the SD State Capitol and took time to look at the monuments on the Capitol grounds.

