



STURGIS 2026 GROUP RIDE



THE BLACK HILLS SCENIC LOOP

A Gray Beard Biker Group Ride
Thursday, August 13th — Sturgis Bike Week 2026
Sponsored by Camp Easy Ride

Meet up	Staging 7:40 AM at Camp Easy Ride, inside the Buffalo Chip — kickstands up 8:00 AM SHARP
The day	~200 miles, zero interstate — this is the LONG day: back at the Chip around 7:15 PM, in daylight. Keep Thursday evening flexible.
Bring	About \$30 in fees (below), water, and a FULL tank from the Chip's fuel station — first fuel on the route is Hill City, almost 60 miles and about two hours in, and there is NO gas in Nemo
Fees	\$20 per motorcycle at the Custer State Park gate (license, good all week) + \$10 to park at Mount Rushmore (\$5 if you're 62+; active military free; national park passes NOT accepted for parking)
Lunch plan	EAT BREAKFAST BEFORE STAGING — there is no breakfast stop on this ride, and lunch comes at about 3:00 PM at Mount Rushmore. Grab a snack mid-day at the Blue Bell or Legion Lake stores if you run hungry.
Pace	This is a photo ride, not a race — park roads run 25 mph and we stop a lot, on purpose. The stops ARE the ride.

SIX ONE-LANE TUNNELS — THE DRILL

Every tunnel today is single lane, blasted through solid granite, and blind on at least one end. The drill, every time: SINGLE FILE on the signal, the leader honks before entering, and nobody enters until it's clear and you get the wave through. At Needle's Eye there will be a line midday — patience is the toll, and the wait is the photo op.

BISON PROTOCOL — THE SERIOUS ONE

If the herd is on or near the road: we STOP, engines OFF, and we wait. No revving, no creeping through the herd, no walking toward them for a photo — bison outrun horses and will charge a motorcycle. The begging burros will walk right up to your bike: don't feed them, and never let one stand between you and moving traffic. The herd owns that road; we're guests.

FLYING A DRONE?

Mount Rushmore: absolutely not — federal land, zero tolerance, real fines. Custer State Park: allowed under state policy, but never at or over the wildlife. The forest stretches (Vanocker, Pactola, the Rochford leg): recreational flying is fine under 400 ft, clear of people.

RIDE NOTES

Fill up at the Chip before staging — Hill City is the first pump, about two hours in. Eat breakfast before staging too; the first food stop is Rushmore, mid-afternoon. The first curves of the day come fast on cold tires in Vanocker Canyon, so we run single file at an easy pace until everything's warm. We regroup at every named stop — if you get separated, don't panic-chase: ride your pace to the next stop in this guide and we'll be there. And always: ride your own ride.

THE MORNING — CANYON AND LAKES

Roll-out: Buffalo Chip through Sturgis to Vanocker Canyon

ETA: 8:00 AM | Time here: —

Seventeen miles of forested sweepers before most of the rally is awake — the best warm-up road in the Hills, rolling through the old logging town of Nemo at the bottom. Cold tires: single file, easy pace, let everything come up to temperature.

Pactola Reservoir Overlook

ETA: 9:15 AM | Time here: 15 min

The biggest lake in the Black Hills, deep blue in a pine bowl — the overlook sits right on Highway 385 at the dam.

The shot: Wide from the overlook wall; the island is the anchor point.

FUEL — Hill City

ETA: 9:55 AM | Time here: 15 min

The fill-up for the park — the next 60-plus miles are park roads with no fuel.

Good to know: Pumps in town are tight; we'll stage the group in waves. Top off even if you're above half.

MID-DAY — NEEDLES HIGHWAY AND THE WILDLIFE LOOP

Through the Custer State Park gate (\$20/bike license, good all week), then it's 25-mph granite country all the way to Iron Mountain — rangers enforce it during the rally.

Sylvan Lake

ETA: 10:25 AM | Time here: 35 min

The crown jewel of Custer State Park — a small lake ringed by granite domes, with a flat one-mile shoreline loop. The first of today's tunnels (Hood Tunnel) sneaks up just before the lake.

The shot: Walk the shoreline counterclockwise; the northeast corner, where the trail squeezes between house-sized boulders, is the signature frame.

Good to know: Water refill and restrooms here — the busiest lot of the day, but bikes fit where cars don't.

Needle's Eye

ETA: 11:10 AM | Time here: 15 min

The formation that named the highway — a granite spire split by an eroded slot, beside the tightest tunnel on the route: eight feet wide, cut through solid rock.

The shot: Your bike at the tunnel mouth with the Eye above it. Then the ride-through itself — one of the day's best clips.

Good to know: One lane, blind both ends, midday rally traffic. Honk, wait for the wave, expect a short line.

Cathedral Spires Overlook

ETA: 11:30 AM | Time here: 15 min

A cluster of granite towers designated a National Natural Landmark — the best spire panorama in South Dakota, right from the pull-off. Iron Creek Tunnel, the day's third one-laner, waits on the descent below.

The shot: The long shot across the valley to the full spire rank — late-morning light gives them relief.

Wildlife Loop Road + the Bison Center

ETA: 12:15 PM | Time here: ~75 min including the riding

Eighteen miles through open prairie holding one of the largest publicly owned bison herds in the country — plus pronghorn, prairie dog towns, and the famous begging burros. We stop at the Bison Center (exhibits, restrooms, and staff who know where the herd is grazing today) and again at the Wildlife Station Visitor Center on the east leg if nature calls.

The shot: Shoot long from the bike, stopped on the shoulder. When the burros come begging, that's your easy close-up.

Good to know: Bison protocol from page one applies start to finish. Ride slow — the animals appear out of nowhere over rises.

THE MAIN EVENT — IRON MOUNTAIN ROAD, SOUTH TO NORTH

Seventeen miles, 314 curves, three pigtail bridges, three tunnels — ridden SOUTH TO NORTH, the direction its designer intended, which puts Mount Rushmore framed dead-center inside the tunnels as you ride through. This stretch is the whole reason today exists.

Norbeck Overlook

ETA: 1:35 PM | Time here: 15 min

Near the Iron Mountain summit — a full, unobstructed panorama of Mount Rushmore across the valley. Many call it the best free view of the monument anywhere.

The shot: The wide 'monument in the landscape' shot — zoom compresses the faces against the forest beautifully.

Tunnel 1 — Scovel Johnson Tunnel

ETA: 1:55 PM | Time here: 10 min

First tunnel northbound. Mount Rushmore appears framed AHEAD of you through the bore — your first glimpse of the faces all day, and it comes through a tunnel.

The shot: From the roadway centerline in traffic gaps — the faces are distant, so the tiny-faces-big-tunnel composition tells the story.

Good to know: Use the pull-offs and watch for oncoming — this is an active lane.

Tunnel 2 — C.C. Gideon Tunnel

ETA: 2:10 PM | Time here: 10 min

The trick tunnel: the road has looped, so heading north the mountain is framed BEHIND you here. We ride through, pull off past the exit, and shoot back through the bore.

The shot: Southward through the tunnel from past the exit — and check your mirrors on the approach; the faces show up there first.

Tunnel 3 — Doane Robinson Tunnel

ETA: 2:25 PM | Time here: 15 min

The closest tunnel to the monument and THE definitive Rushmore tunnel view — all four faces filling the far end of the bore.

The shot: Stills first from the small lot at the tunnel, then a slow ride-through with the faces growing in the opening.

Good to know: The only tunnel with its own parking — a handful of spaces, so we'll rotate.

The Pig Tails

ETA: 2:40 PM | Time here: 10 min

Just past the last tunnel, the road corkscrews 360 degrees and crosses OVER ITSELF on a timber bridge — built so the road could shed elevation without gouging the mountain.

The shot: From the pull-off below: the timber bridge with bikes crossing overhead.

Good to know: Downhill corkscrews with decreasing radius — single file, easy entries, sightsee at the pull-offs, not mid-spiral.

MOUNT RUSHMORE — late lunch

ETA: 3:00 PM | Time here: ~90 min

The memorial itself: Avenue of Flags, Grand View Terrace, and a late lunch at Carvers' Marketplace — plus the famous vanilla ice cream made from Thomas Jefferson's own recipe. Riders make this trip for that cone.

The shot: The faces from Grand View Terrace; the Avenue of Flags leading-lines shot.

Good to know: Carvers' serves until 4:30, so food first, monument second. Parking: \$10 a bike, \$5 if you're 62+, free for active military — and the pass is good for a full YEAR, so keep the ticket. Drones stay packed — federal land.

THE EVENING — THE PAVED BACK WAY HOME

Hill City, then Deerfield Road and South Rochford Road

ETA: 4:55 PM | Time here: rolling

Optional fuel top-off in Hill City, then the quiet way north: fresh backcountry pavement along Castle Creek that most of the rally doesn't know exists — golden-hour riding at its best.

The shot: This stretch IS the shot — low sun, open sweepers, empty road.

Good to know: It rides like a racetrack and it's a 50-mph zone that gets PATROLLED during the rally. We ride it like adults.

Optional — Moonshine Gulch Saloon, Rochford

ETA: 5:45 PM | Time here: 20 min

A century-old saloon in a town of about twenty-five people — ceiling papered in signed dollar bills and hats, and a cult following among Black Hills riders. Ice cream next door at the Happy Dog Cafe.

The shot: The porch lined with bikes, and that dollar-bill ceiling.

Good to know: Cash is smart out here.

Lead, Deadwood, and Boulder Canyon home

ETA: 6:45 PM | Time here: rolling

Highway 385 climbs through the old mining country into Lead, drops into Deadwood, and then Boulder Canyon runs 14 miles of smooth dusk sweepers back into Sturgis.

The shot: Boulder Canyon at golden hour closes the day.

Good to know: Deadwood's Main Street is a zoo during the rally — we ride through and save it for another night. Back at the Chip around 7:15, in daylight.

Questions on ride day? Find Zachary or the sweep rider at staging. Route map and GPX download:

graybeardbiker.com/rides — if you run your own GPS, remember different route readers calculate differently: stay with the group, and if we're separated, meet at the next stop in this guide. Fees verified July 2026 and subject to change.

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