

HeartCycle Bicycle Touring Club

Black Hills 2027: The Mickelson Trail and Mt. Rushmore

- Dates:** Orientation meeting Monday, September 6, 2027. Riding Tuesday, Sept 7–Friday, Sept 10, with departure on Saturday, Sept 11 (lodging last night included).
- Leaders:** Mark and Greg Lestikow
- SAGs:** Mayoma Pendergast, Kathleen Schindler
- Rating:** Intermediate (moderate mileage with some steep climbs); 55 miles of well-maintained gravel
heartcycle.org/tour-ratings
- Distance/gain:** Approximately 170 miles with 13,000 feet of elevation gain over 4 days
- Riders:** 30 (not including leaders)
- Price:** \$1,650 (double occupancy). \$400 due at registration. Balance due by June 8, 2027. Single supplement +\$800.
- Cancellation:** [Standard cancellation policy](#)

Travel insurance is strongly recommended.

OVERVIEW

HeartCycle returns to the beautiful and historic Black Hills of South Dakota. This year's routes take us in part on the spectacular Mickelson Trail, a 109-mile rails-to-trails system with gentle grades, no traffic, and great scenery. On three of our four days of cycling, we'll spend time in Custer State Park, which encompasses 71,000 acres of spectacular terrain and an abundance of wildlife. While the mileage isn't high, be prepared for a good amount of climbing!

This is a semi-fixed base tour. We'll spend four nights in the town of Custer and one night in Hill City, just off the Mickelson Trail. This provides us with a shorter day of riding when we pass by Mt. Rushmore, giving us time to relax and enjoy the view. Both hotels feature outdoor patios, breakfasts, and indoor hot tubs to massage your legs after each day's route. Our home base of Custer is easily reached through Rapid City Airport, just an hour's drive away.



Credit: Wikipedia

ITINERARY

Day 0: Monday, September 6

Orientation meeting at the [Custer Holiday Inn Express](#) (time TBD, good times guaranteed).

Day 1: Tuesday, September 7

The Sylvan Lake and Needles Highway Loop

31 miles and 2,700 feet of elevation gain

We start the ride off right with a gentle easterly downhill before a stiff 10-mile, 1,500-foot climb up the famed Needles Highway, which wanders through tall, thin rock formations and one-lane tunnels hewn into the mountainside. Each vista is more spectacular than the last as the road twists and turns around these unusual formations. So many pullouts and stops along the route for photographs or just to marvel at the scenery. We will have lunch at Sylvan Lake before a fun descent back to Custer.



Credit: Rapid City

Day 2: Wednesday, September 8

Custer to Hill City via the Mickelson Trail (mostly gravel)

43 miles and 2,400 feet of elevation gain

Today, we hit the Mickelson Trail, which takes us all the way up to the ghost town of Mystic for an idyllic lunch. After that, we'll retrace our route to the town of Hill City, where we'll stay for the night. This is the most mellow day of riding with gentle rolling hills and bucolic forests and waterways throughout.

Day 3: Thursday, September 9

Mt. Rushmore back to Custer

35 miles and 4,100 feet of elevation gain

The "Queen Stage" ride to Mt. Rushmore, Custer State Park, and the scenic Iron Mountain Road. Take time to explore Mt. Rushmore National Monument during the morning SAG stop, ideally before the crowds get there. After that, a hilly road through the area's famous pig-tailed bridges and more one-lane tunnels before lunch and a final ride back into Custer.

Day 4: Friday, September 10

The Wildlife Loop and Wind Cave National Park

50 miles and 4,000 feet of elevation gain

For our last day, we've arranged for a short shuttle ride to start at the historic State Game Lodge, summer White House for Calvin Coolidge. We'll then get onto Custer State Park's Wildlife Loop, where we're sure to see bison, antelope, and other creatures. A jog to the south takes us to lunch at Wind Cave National Park. From there, it's a 20-mile ride back into Custer, including 13 miles on the less-explored southern portion of the Mickelson Trail and a ride by the South Dakota-famous bike sculpture (prepare to be wowed).



Credit: Judy Siel

SPECIAL NOTES:

- 28-mm or wider tires are recommended. About 55 miles of this ride are on the Mickelson Trail, a well-graded and maintained gravel trail. The \$5 daily trail pass is included in the registration cost.
- For those traveling from the Denver metro area, the Sprinter will be available to transport bicycles (\$150 roundtrip).
- Electric bicycles and tandems, please read the answer to the FAQ: *Are e-bikes and tandems allowed on HeartCycle tours?*

<https://www.heartcycle.org/frequently-asked-questions>

For more information contact:

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