

Ordinary Man ~ Extraordinary Vision



Governor Peter Norbeck



Norbeck with Mt. Rushmore architect, Gutzon Borglum.

Many of the outstanding features of the Black Hills have a common thread - they are the legacy of Peter Norbeck.

Burly and unpretentious, Norbeck was a man of common origin but uncommon destiny. Born in 1870 in a tiny dugout shelter in eastern South Dakota, Norbeck eventually moved to the Black Hills, where he would become a steward of the land and a nationally prominent conservationist legislator.

Despite having the worst attendance record at his one-room schoolhouse, Norbeck eventually made it to the University of South Dakota. His three terms cost him \$25 and helped guide his future in business and politics.

Norbeck's successful well-drilling business eventually gave way to his interest in politics. Beginning in 1908 as a State Senator, Norbeck went on to become Lieutenant Governor and then Governor. In 1920, the road led him to a U.S. Senate seat in Washington, D.C. where he served three terms.

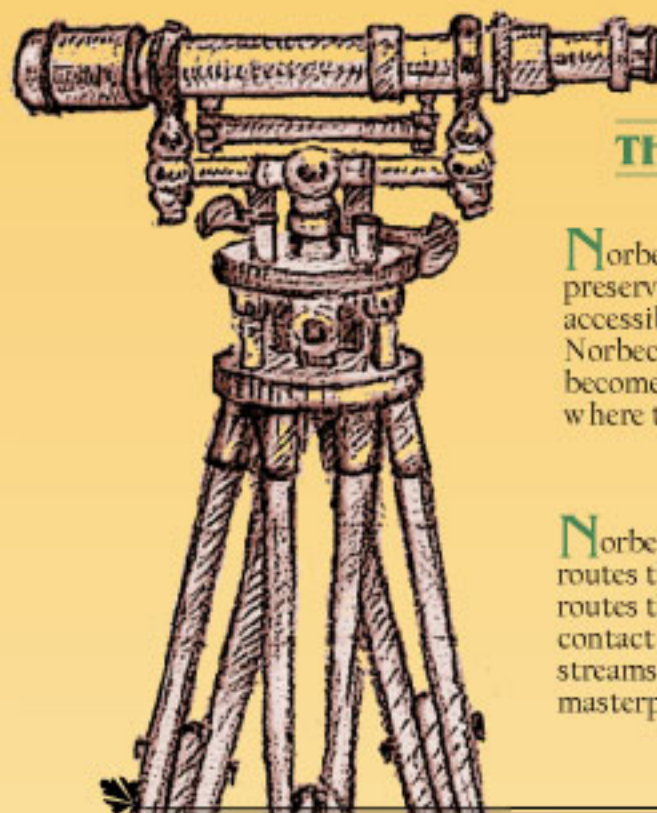
Custer State Park, Norbeck Wildlife Preserve, and Mt. Rushmore National Memorial exist today because of Norbeck's tireless efforts. He also helped establish the Federal Duck Stamp Program, Badlands National Monument and Grand Teton National Park. National Park Service Director Horace Albright said:

'We are not likely to see another leader arise who will have such a broad knowledge of the conservation problems of the country and the courage, power, and the legislative skill in guiding through Congress the laws necessary to provide permanent solutions to these problems.'

Peter Norbeck continued to be politically active until he died quietly at his home in 1936.

A Masterpiece of Art & Engineering

'I would rather be remembered as an artist than as a United States Senator.'
- Peter Norbeck



THE NEEDLES HIGHWAY

Norbeck was guided by a persistent desire to preserve natural beauty while making special areas accessible to as many people as possible. To that end, Norbeck assembled teams of engineers who would become leaders in a new form of road building - where the road itself was a work of art.

Norbeck searched through the Harney Range for routes that would provide 'the grandest views' - routes that would bring the visitor in intimate contact with the forest, the rocks, and the streams. His road would engage the senses, in a masterpiece of engineering.

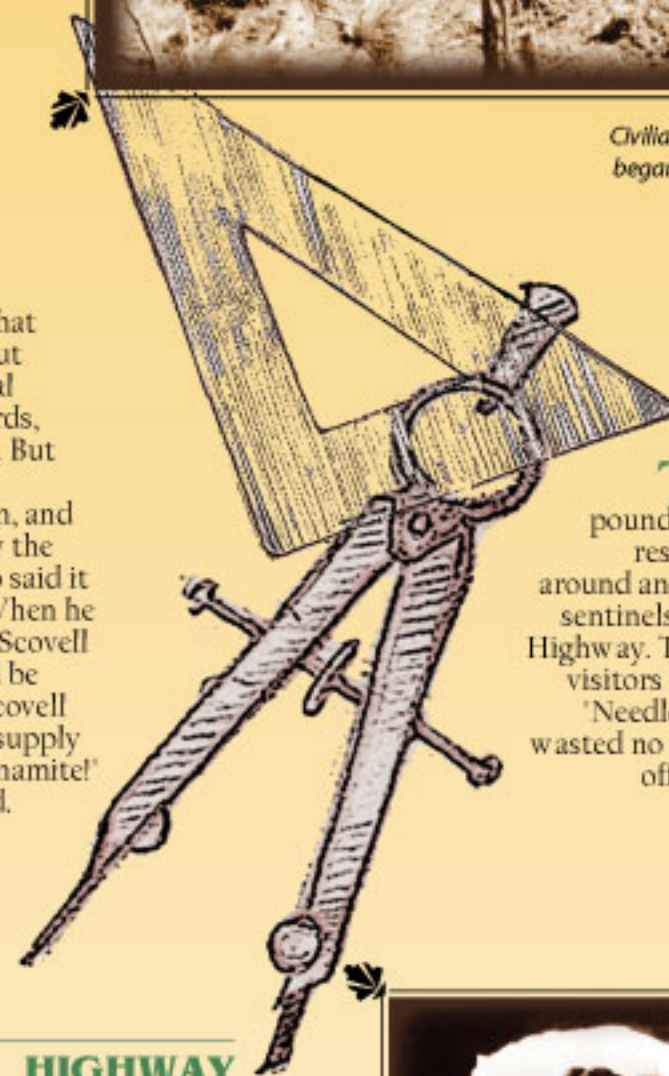


Early motorists on the Needles Highway.

In 1919, the route that Norbeck mapped out was, to conventional engineering standards, impossible to build. But Norbeck was an unconventional man, and was not deterred by the 'diploma boys' who said it couldn't be done. When he asked his engineer, Scovell Johnson, if it would be possible to build, Scovell replied, 'If you can supply me with enough dynamite!' And so Norbeck did.



Civilian Conservation Corps crews began road building in the 1930s.



Two years and 150,000 pounds of dynamite later, the result was a winding road around and through the upthrust sentinels of stone - The Needles Highway. The new signs directing visitors to this work of art read 'Needles Highway.' Johnson wasted no time in scraping off the offending last 's' with his pocketknife.

Wildlife Along the Byway

Keep your eyes open for marmots, antelope, coyotes, mule and white-tailed deer. If you are observant (and maybe a bit lucky) you may see bobcats, mountain lions, bald eagles, badgers, and porcupines.

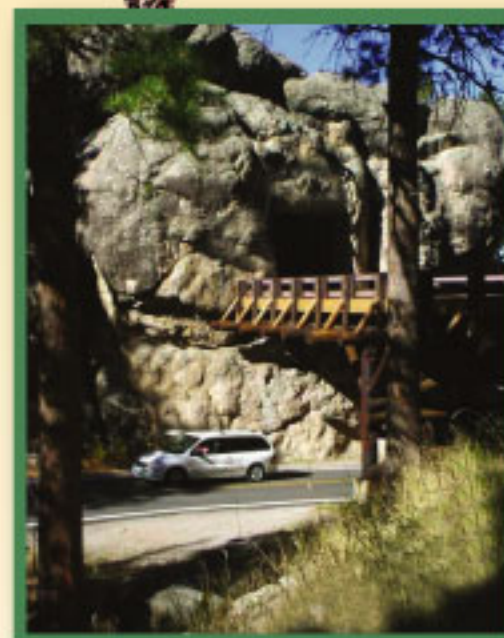


Although not native to the area, Rocky Mountain elk, bighorn sheep, and mountain goats now make their home here. Watch for shy rattlesnakes on your walks - they don't like to be startled.



Along the Peter Norbeck Scenic Byway, our traffic jams are a little different. Because of the abundance and visibility of wildlife, you may occasionally find yourself in a 'Goat Jam,' a 'Bison Jam,' or a 'Tourist Jam.'

Please drive carefully!



An Iron Mountain bridge disappears into a tunnel.

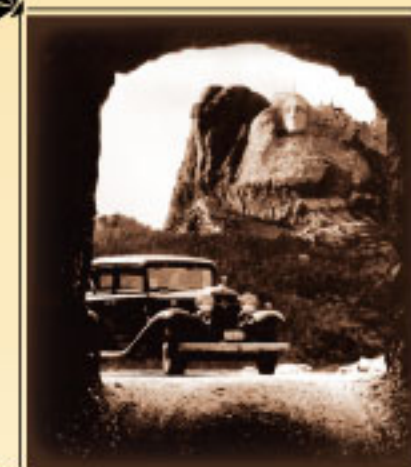
THE IRON MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY

The Needles Highway was good training ground for Norbeck's next venture - the Iron Mountain Road. Norbeck mapped out a route that required three tunnels to be blasted through the mountains. In addition, the tunnels were to frame the four faces emerging from Mt. Rushmore in the distance. But that was the easy part.

Norbeck asked the Superintendent of Custer State Park, C.C. Gideon, to design the road that would connect the tunnels. Gideon devised a remarkable corkscrew spiral road connecting the tunnels to lift the traveler from one level to another without adding miles of road. Gideon (who quit school at age 13) referred to them as 'spiral-jumpoffs.' Norbeck called them 'whirly jigs.' Today they are known as the Pigtail Bridges.



Pigtail bridge



Washington's face emerges at Mt. Rushmore through the newly constructed tunnel.



Today's view through a tunnel.

Custer State Park Superintendent Owen Mann built the road in about a year and a half with the help of 16 men, finishing in 1933.

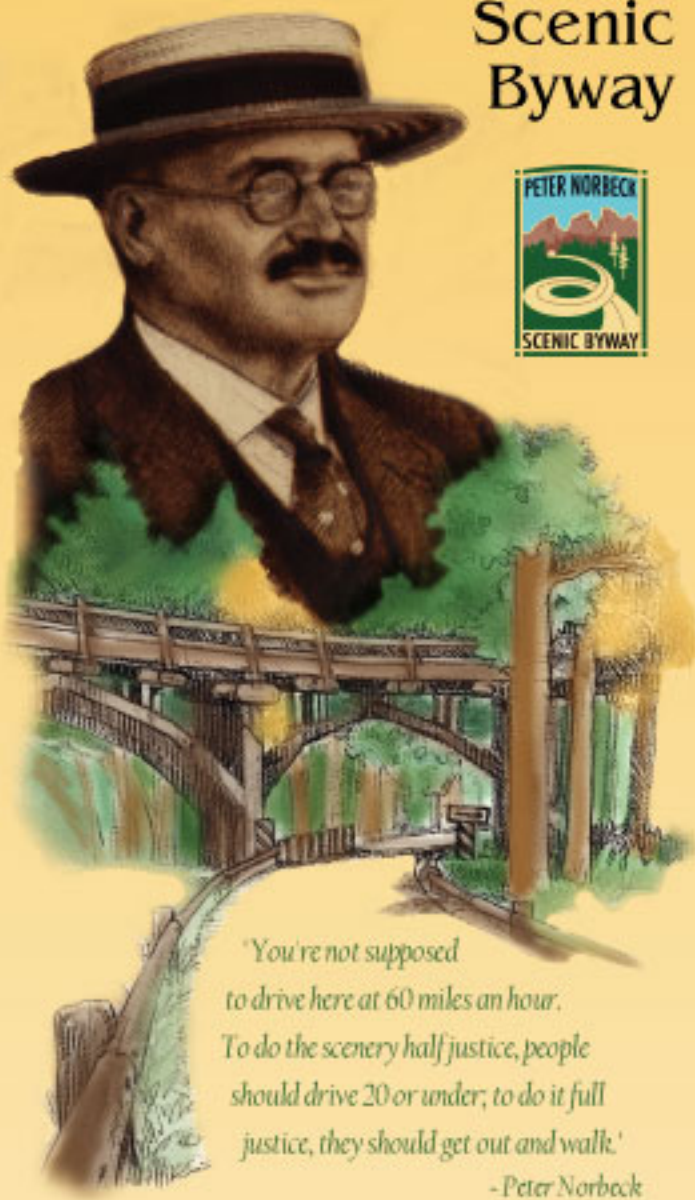
'He found great pictures in nature and gave them to the world.'

- From a newspaper editorial at the time of Norbeck's death

Welcome to the Peter Norbeck Scenic Byway

PETER NORBECK

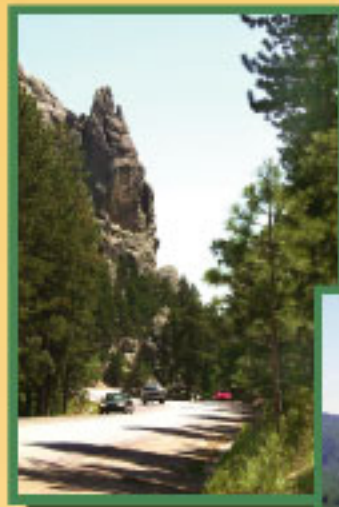
Scenic Byway



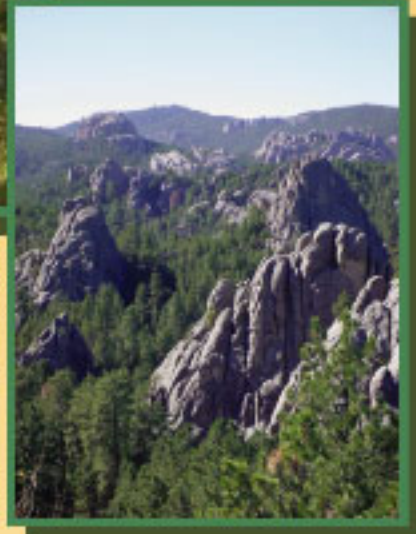
"You're not supposed to drive here at 60 miles an hour. To do the scenery half justice, people should drive 20 or under; to do it full justice, they should get out and walk."

-Peter Norbeck

An Extraordinary Man's Masterpiece of Art & Engineering

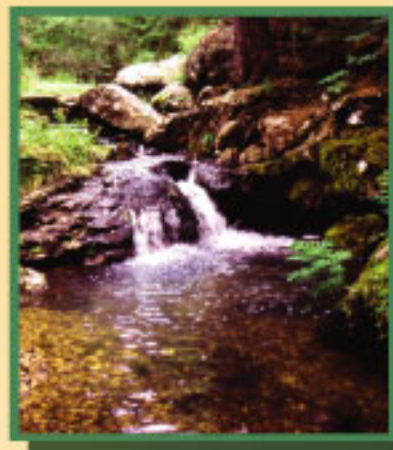


Open your car window and breathe in the perfume of a ponderosa pine forest.



Feel the spiral of the pigtail bridges pulling you closer into the hills.

Let your hands explore the course contours of a granite spire.



Listen to the musical rivulets of a creek finding its way down a valley.

Discover the amazing rock walled tunnels that perfectly frame Mt. Rushmore.

The Peter Norbeck Scenic Byway is a 66-mile double loop that honors a South Dakota conservationist, Governor, and U.S. Senator. "An Ordinary Man with an Extraordinary Vision," Peter Norbeck is credited with an impressive list of conservation accomplishments. To the people of South Dakota and the nation, he bequeathed an enduring legacy through the Peter Norbeck Scenic Byway.

Near the geographic center of the continent, the Black Hills rise 4,000 feet above the high northern grasslands, like an 'island in the plains.' At 7,242 feet, Harney Peak is the highest point east of the Rocky Mountain chain and west of the Spanish Pyrenees.

Ninety percent of the area is cloaked in ponderosa pine, decorated with ribbons of aspen, birch, bur oak, spruce, and willow. The oldest and largest pines are called 'yellow barks,' because of the tint they take on in maturity.

The Lakota Sioux people called the Black Hills 'Paha Sapa' meaning 'hills that are black' which is how they appear from the plains.



Experts debate whether the 'yellow barks' emanate a chocolate, vanilla, or butterscotch odor!



Harney Peak

The Black Hills are the eroded remnants of a mountainous dome formed when younger sedimentary material was bowed upward by molten stone intruding from below. Lakota people sometimes refer to this igneous rock as 'Inyan, the Stone Nation.' Inyan is prominent in their origin story, whereby the

Great Spirit gives movement to the Stone Nation People.



Legend

- Much of what you see from the Scenic Byway is part of the 1.2 million-acre **Black Hills National Forest**. Not only does the National Forest provide a scenic backdrop for the hills, it is also a working forest, providing timber, forage, water, wildlife habitat, minerals, and recreational opportunities.
- The 13,426-acre **Black Elk Wilderness (Black Hills NF)** is named for a famous Oglala holy man. Wilderness is established to be an area "...where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" (1964 Wilderness Act). Travel is by foot or horse only.
- Congress established the 35,000-acre **Norbeck Wildlife Preserve (Black Hills NF)** in 1920 for the "protection of game animals and birds and to be recognized as a breeding place therefore." Here, the needs of wildlife come first.
- Mt. Rushmore National Memorial**, the "Shrine of Democracy," became a reality when Gutzon Borglum sculpted his vision, symbolizing the birth, growth, preservation, and development of the United States.
- Established in 1919, **Custer State Park** preserves the beauty of its landscapes while providing activities for all. Whether you're seeking solitude or an exciting adventure, this 71,000-acre park is the place to go.

SCENIC WANDERS

Washington Profile

Just to the west of the main entrance to Mt. Rushmore, this wayside provides a unique view of Washington's face.

Iron Mountain Road

The road they said 'couldn't be built' spirals up the mountains via three pigtail-shaped bridges. Three tunnels perfectly frame Mt. Rushmore in the distance.

Needles Highway

Hairpin turns and narrow tunnels make this more than your average 'drive in the park!' The 14-mile drive winds through a maze of granite formations, reminiscent of needles, organ pipes, and spires. Watch for the Needle's Eye and Cathedral Spires.

Golden Valley

Lieutenant Colonel George Custer used this area in 1874 as the base camp for the Custer Expedition that explored the Black Hills. More important to the future of the area, Golden Valley was also where gold was first discovered.

Gordon Stockade

The Gordon Party came to the Black Hills in 1874 in search of gold. Although illegal, they built a base camp on French Creek. Today a replica stands as a reminder of those Gold Rush days.

Wildlife Loop Road

This 18-mile loop passes through grasslands and rolling hills that harbor bison (buffalo), pronghorn antelope, elk, coyotes, and an abundance of other wildlife.

The Badger Hole

Charles Badger Clark, South Dakota's first Poet Laureate, lived for 30 years in his cabin deep inside Custer State Park. Clark embodied the spirit of the West, inspired by the sights, sounds, and smells of his own front yard.

Peter Norbeck Visitor Center

Stop here to learn more about Custer State Park and the park's founder - Peter Norbeck.



For More Information

Black Hills National Forest
25041 North Highway 16
Custer, SD 57730
(605) 673-9200
www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills

Mt. Rushmore National Memorial
13000 Hwy. 244
Building 31, Suite 1
Keystone, SD 57752
(605) 574-2523
www.nps.gov/moru

Custer State Park
HC 83, Box 70
Custer, SD 57730
(605) 255-4515
www.custerstatepark.info

Custer Chamber of Commerce
615 Washington St.
Custer, SD 57730
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www.hillcitysd.com

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