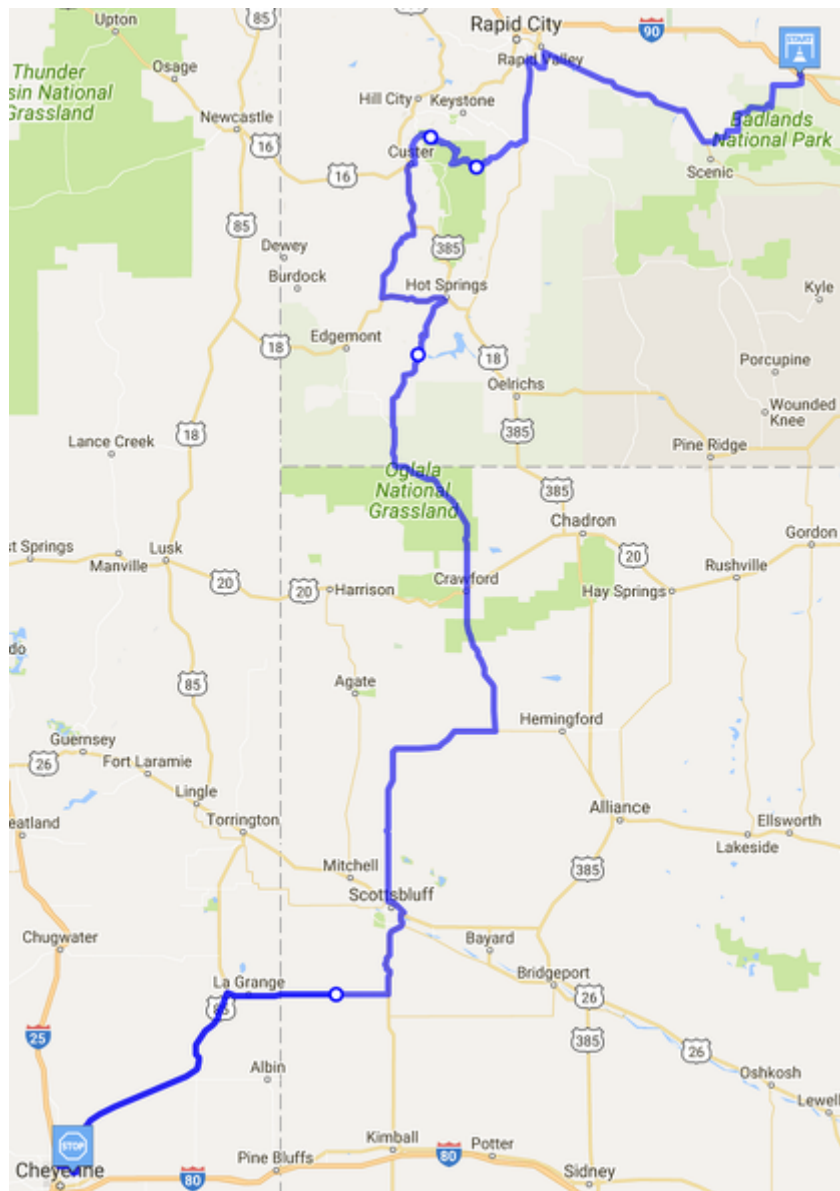


## Needles to Nebraska to Nearly Tipping

Saturday (October 1st) saw me packed, up and riding before the chill had left the air. I had a long day's ride planned: a meandering route heading west into Custer State Park to ride Needles Highway, then down into Nebraska before finally back west to my room for the night in Cheyenne, Wyoming.



*400 miles in about 9 hours.*

## Needles to Nebraska to Nearly Tipping

I started by heading south, taking Sage Creek Road and skirting the western edge of the main section of the Badlands. The route made the most sense given my desire to keep things scenic and off the highway. I knew at least part of it would be gravel (it all was), and was happy at how quiet it was at that hour in the morning. I like taking gravel roads but have been wary of them when all my top-heavy luggage is attached.



*Sage Creek Rd.*

It was a gorgeous ride, the western side of the Badlands is less dramatic and mixes in open grassland with hills and cliffs.



*View from Sage Creek Rd.*

Eventually my route took me back up to skirt Rapid City and then into Custer State Park. This is near Mt. Rushmore, and the area reminds me a lot of the Smoky Mountains. Pine forests and granite outcroppings, it's very different than the Badlands.

A few people who saw my bike had asked me if I'd ridden Needles Highway, so I'd arranged my route today to head that direction. Highway is a misnomer; it's a small road with no dividing line, only sometimes wide enough to handle both directions of traffic at a time. It winds its way through a few one-at-a-time width tunnels cut through a series of granite spires (the "needles"). It's not a fast ride, but it was definitely a beautiful one.

Needles to Nebraska to Nearly Tipping



*Needles Highway with some Needles in the background.*

Needles to Nebraska to Nearly Tipping



*Will we go around or through?*



No picture of the tunnels themselves; tiny holes drilled through rock where vehicles carefully nosed through and hoped the oncoming driver would see them in time.

After that scenic detour I got back more-or-less on route, and fairly shortly found myself blasting across the plains of Nebraska. I skimmed by Hot Springs first, wondering if I should get fuel but only down a quarter tank. The answer was “yes” but I chose “no” and headed south. I was quickly second guessing that decision, although saw signs for Ardmore and hoped for a gas station there. My heart sank as I finally arrived; the town looks nearly abandoned. It was eerie driving through, seeing houses spread out in various states of decay, most with some vehicles in the yard but hard to tell which had people in them and which ones sat alone. At that point my mind was on fuel so I didn’t stop to take any photos, which I regret. Although I hadn’t seen another car in a while, and it felt creepy enough I’m not sure I would have stopped.

## Needles to Nebraska to Nearly Tipping

Eventually I made it to Crawford, which thankfully had actually people and fuel I could buy. I was fairly low at that point, but not yet on the light nor using my fuel bottles. I spend a lot of time thinking about gas on this trip.



*Later in the plains of Nebraska I pulled over and ate lunch.*



*Scooter admiring the cliffs of Nebraska.*

Near Scottsbluff the plains are suddenly torn asunder by giant rocky outcroppings. It's a startling and beautiful transition.



Needles to Nebraska to Nearly Tipping



*Back to slow hills and beautiful plains. I'm not actually sure if I was in Nebraska or Wyoming when*

*I took this.*

Sometime after 4pm I rolled into Cheyenne, fields of grass and crops giving way to fields of houses. Cheyenne's downtown seems fairly small and the suburbs sprawl out. I neared where I would be staying for the night so stopped to fill up the tank.

My scooter has two stands, one on the side (like a bicycle's kick stand) and one center stand. The center stand is a bit harder to use, you have to hold the bike up and stand on a flange that comes out from the stand, pulling the bike up onto the stand, so it's then balanced on an upside down "U". The center stand is super convenient for any maintenance work, and is what I use while fueling so I can get every last drip of gasoline in the tank. That worked just fine this time, until I was finished and tried to shove the bike forward to fold the stand up. The left leg of the stand remained planted and the right leg tore and collapsed.

I'm not a very large or strong fellow. My bike weights over 400lbs, that weight is held low so it's surprisingly easy to move around. Until you add all my luggage on the top case and on the seat. As the bike lurched over to the right I caught it, but it was *heavy*. I struggled to keep it upright, and then tried to push it forward to fold the center stand (what was left of it) back up. I finally heaved it forward to pop the stand up, but in doing so the bike pivoted around the center stand and tried to crash down to my left. With some handy assistance of the gas pump, I caught it, righted it drove for all of 6 inches then put the side stand down to try and figure out what the heck just happened.

The center stand was clearly broken, but I couldn't see anything else obviously wrong. The rear brake didn't feel right though, there was resistance in the lever (fully automatic scooter, so left hand operates rear brake not the clutch). It seemed to be working ok, just not releasing unless I pushed it forward. So I cautiously hit the road, figuring I needed to test the bike out and might as well get to my host, a mile or two away.



*Tear in the center stand. Definitely not going to hold any weight. Note the spring is beyond the tear. Cause for future excitement.*

I made it fine and my Airbnb hosts that night were a lovely couple. We chatted briefly and then I headed outside to spend half an hour as the light faded; poking, prodding and inspecting. The rear brake lever is either bent or the whole attachment has rotated up a bit, causing it to rub against the plastic a little. I couldn't easily get it back down and didn't have the light nor desire to tear into the front fairing to look much closer. A few more test rides, and everything else seemed to be operating fine. I'd already scheduled maintenance for the upcoming Thursday in Denver, so figured I'd keep an eye on things and hope for the best.

I had a nice evening, rode to downtown Cheyenne and ended up finding the local cocktail bar. They recommended the civeche for dinner so I tried not to think about geography and ordered what I think of as an appetizer, here served over Spanish rice and made into a large,

bland meal. It was still better than any dinner I'd eaten in Wall. If I'm in a cocktail bar, and the bartender seems to have the bandwidth, I often request whatever their current favorite-to-make drink is. This evening the result was a pumpkin pie cocktail. "Like Starbucks!" the young gentleman happily exclaimed. It was actually not bad; well balanced and not too sweet, but one was enough and I ended the evening on a more traditional note before heading back to the house and chatting with my hosts for an hour.

The next day I planned on touring downtown Cheyenne before finding a non-highway route down to Denver, and meeting up with my good friends and hosts for the upcoming couple of weeks. Assuming the bike had no further issues.