

# No frequent flyer miles on this journey

*Editor feels some trepidation planning to drive 1,200 miles to the Hinsdale in Montana*

By Pamela Lannom

plannom@thehinsdalean.com

I walked into the Hinsdale News Agency the morning of June 29 to pick up a few magazines for the drive to Hinsdale, Mont.

"I thought you were gone," Danette Spinazola-Boniecki greeted me when she saw me perusing the racks.

"Not 'til tomorrow," I replied.

"What are you looking for?" she asked.

"Something that won't make me too hungry," I said, moving away from the countless covers featuring photos of gorgeous food.

"How about, 'Shoulda Flown?'" she quipped.

I heard many similar responses when people learned of my summer vacation plans, although not all were as witty as Danette's.

I would tell people Dan, Ainsley and I were traveling to Montana — not by airplane — and I'd get some strange looks.

"You're driving?" people would ask, their surprise evident by the rising pitch of their voice.

"Yes," I'd reply, and, after a brief pause, they'd offer a less-than-sincere, "Oh, that will be fun."

I have to say it was fun — much more fun than I anticipated.

When associate editor Ken Knutson suggested a plan to visit the four Hinsdales in the United States and write about them as part of our 10th anniversary celebration, I thought he was nuts. So did Jim Slonoff. But he kept bringing it up. We kept telling him no.

And then, all of the sudden, it seemed, we had all agreed to go. Ken took the Hinsdales in New Hampshire and Massachusetts and visited them last summer. Jim, as you know, traveled to Hinsdale, N.Y., in June.

We took Hinsdale, Mont., the farthest of the four destinations, thinking we could swing down to South Dakota and visit Dan's Uncle Glenn on the way home. What an amazing detour! I'll be writing about our time at Mount Rushmore and the Badlands

in part four of this series.

And over the next two weeks, I'll share my experiences visiting Hinsdale, Mont., during its Milk River Days celebration July 3-4. We were charmed immediately by the small town, situated off Route 2 in the north-eastern part of the state.

I wasn't sure what to expect, given that the town's residents numbered 214.

"Are you going to interview them all?" Dan taunted me in the early stages of planning the trip.

"Maybe!" I replied. I hoped for the best. And I wasn't disappointed.

My worries had been much more focused on the 18-plus hours we'd have to spend in the car to get there.

Unlike some people I've talked to this summer, my family did not pile into a station wagon or RV to take a major road trip every summer. I did spend a lot of time in the car headed to see my grandparents in Russellville, Ala., after they moved when I was 10.

I was allowed to bring a single shoebox full of books and toys to entertain myself over the 13-hour drive. I don't know why my mom set such strict packing guidelines, seeing as I had the backseat all to myself, but she did.

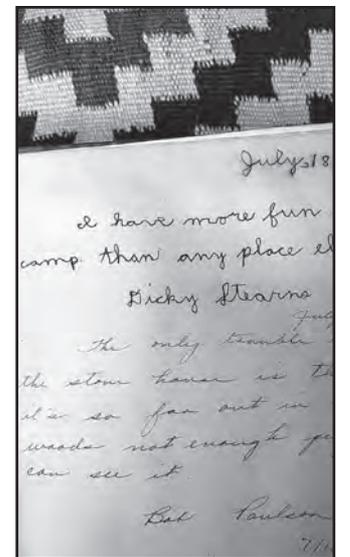
We took the opposite approach with Ainsley, whose longest car trip to this point had been to St. Louis. She had a large bag of books and toys, a large selection of DVDs and her tablet.

We also brought an extensive selection of snacks. I guessed early on this would be a key component of keeping everyone happy.

What can I say? I know my family.

We were a little concerned when Ainsley asked, less than an hour after we got on the road, if we were almost there. Her inquiries became more frequent the closer we got to our destination, and with six minutes left on the drive, she started moaning a bit. But all in all, she was quite the trooper.

She had a good incentive. We spent the first two nights of our trip with her best buddies (whom she met when



**Dan, Ainsley and I were all smiles** as we prepared to pull out of our driveway June 30 to begin our trip to Hinsdale, Mont. Believe it or not, we were still smiling 11 hours later when we reached our friends' lake house in White Earth, Minn. There Ainsley enjoyed paddle boarding and tubing with her buddies, Grace and Philip Ramsey. I enjoyed learning about the history of the property and reading guest book entries from visitors who stayed there 80 years before I did. (photos by Pamela Lannom)

she was 3 at Zion preschool) on their family's property in White Earth, Minn.

Their mom, Joane Ramsey, and I were talking about summer vacation plans a while back.

"When are you going to be in Fargo?" she inquired as I was describing our trip.

I soon learned they were going to her husband's father's lake house that same weekend.

"Why don't you stay with us?" she asked.

Of course, we accepted the invitation. How likely was it that someone we know would have a lake house on the way to Fargo, N.D.? And that they would be there the same weekend we were passing through?

The day we spent with Joane, Brian, Grace and Philip Ramsey and Brian's

siblings and their families at the place they all call "camp" was magical.

Brian's great-grandmother purchased hundreds of acres from the Ojibwe tribe in the late 1930s (her cousin was a real estate agent in Detroit Lakes). Native Americans helped build the main cabin and half a dozen other cabins on the property, which became the summer retreat for generations of the family.

White Earth Lake is a beautiful spot for a little kayaking or paddle boarding, as we discovered Saturday morning. Ainsley enjoyed running around with her buddies and their four cousins, exploring the secret nooks and strange spaces of the many cabins.

One of the highlights for

## ■ HINSDALE, MONT. 59241

*This is the first in a four-part series on our visit to Hinsdale, Mont.*

me was reading comments other visitors had written in the guest book, dating back to the 1930s.

"I have more fun at camp than any place else," Dicky Stearns wrote on July 18, 1937.

I agreed with him completely.

We worried as we pulled away Sunday morning, Ainsley in tears in the back seat, that the amazing day we had just experienced would be the best one of our vacation.

Fortunately, we were wrong. There were many more good days to come.