



**Josh Noel** courtesy of: Tribune Newspapers

Southwestern S.D. — Calendars and catalogs tell us that fall color is best served as an array. It is red, orange, yellow and every burnt shade between. Fall colors are so broad and brilliant that the English language can't keep up to name them all.

In the **Black Hills of South Dakota**, however, fall presents itself in one primary shade: yellow. But within that yellow are many yellows: canary, school bus, lemon peel, banana peel, daisy, mustard and maybe even Big Bird. There is orangey-yellow, reddish-yellow and lime-green-yellow.

Rather than bowl you over, the yellows tickle you like a feather — a subtle, luminous feather always peeking out from the next piney turn in the road or dark, craggy canyon. When backlit by a warm afternoon sun, look out, those yellows turn electric.

Western fall color, which usually peaks here in early October, offers little cider. It is hiking boots and fly-fishing, buffalo burgers and Indian tacos, vertical rock and sparse population. It is the perfect time to visit this legendary landscape; the summer's 90-degree days have fled, and so have the tourists that turn small towns into traffic calamities in mid-July.

And then there are the yellows.

(Harney Peak, which at 7,242 feet is the tallest mountaintop between the Rockies and Europe.)

... towering rocks that reached from the earth like giant fingers and the dense pools of yellow. The occasional tourist paused on the edge of the trail to photograph that color below, usually tall, thin aspen and birch trees.

In the Black Hills, the way to find it is by car.

I spent much of the next couple of days like that. I would wake early to explore every wrinkle of the Black Hills I could by daylight, gliding slowly across the scenic roads: Vanocker Canyon Road, Needles Highway, Iron Mountain Road and Spearfish Canyon, where the sherbet like yellows leapt out from the evergreens. The best part: All are within about 100 miles of one another.

There was a simple joy in taking the drives and winding curves at speeds you'd never employ when simply trying to get somewhere. Amid the color, clean air and elbowroom, you're constantly where you're trying to be.

The way to make the drives last longer, of course, is to stop often.

The fall to the Adirondacks, where there are 200 people everywhere you turn. That's not the case here in the Black Hills. Someone spoiled by Eastern falls and those brilliant colors might not think this is as picturesque as that.

Later in the fall, the poison ivy turns red. Stay away but it sure is beautiful! Fall color variety, South Dakota style.

**If you come to visit...** Rapid City Regional Airport, the gateway to the Black Hills, gets nonstop service from Allegiant (from Las Vegas and Phoenix), American (Chicago and Dallas), Delta (Salt Lake City and the Twin Cities) and United (Denver and Chicago). All flights from elsewhere connect through those cities.

**Do:** The best way to appreciate the fall color within the Black Hills is to explore by car. Most of the major rental companies are represented at the airport, then we can help with your days of scenic driving to memorable colorful, winding drives through Spearfish Canyon and along Vanocker Canyon Road, Needles Highway and Iron Mountain Road. Another tip: No matter how jaded you are, Mount Rushmore is worth a stop. Get there just before sunset, watch the faces in the late afternoon light, then wait for the lights to come on. You get two markedly different perspectives.

