

Text And Photography By Dr. Randall D. Royer



## Spearfish Canyon, Black Hills National Forest SOUTH DAKOTA

### Location

Spearfish Canyon in the northern Black Hills of western South Dakota is located just off of I-90 and close to the town of Spearfish. The U.S. 14 Scenic Spearfish Canyon Highway winds directly alongside the canyon, paralleling Spearfish Creek, while the canyon itself winds about 20 miles through extended limestone rock walls that tower along both sides of the brook. Spearfish Canyon is full of ponderosa and spruce pine trees, plus aspen, birch and oak trees, which provide lovely contrasting color in the fall. The canyon is full of wildlife,



from small varieties like squirrels, raccoons and porcupines to larger varieties like mountain goats, deer and the occasional elk. Brook, rainbow, brown and cutthroat trout can be found in the creek, and there are a number of trails, waterfalls and picturesque views. In addition to hiking, other activities include fly-fishing, mountain biking, road biking and rock climbing. Spearfish Canyon is also a geologist's heaven, as it's said to be older than the Grand Canyon.

### Weather

Spearfish Canyon is a great place to visit anytime of the year, although this particular scene was taken in fall, about 10 miles up the canyon below the junction where Iron Creek flows into Spearfish Creek. It's in the middle of a horseshoe bend, which provided a real panoramic view of the fall colors, rock textures

and the flowing creek. Winter allows peaceful snowshoeing on the same trails I enjoy during the other seasons. At the small town of Savoy in Spearfish Canyon, there's a trailhead for a 300-mile snowmobiling trail system, too. Spring is vibrantly green, with plenty of new vigorous growth. Because of the steep canyon walls, the floor of the canyon receives very little direct sunlight, so summer is refreshing as the temperatures are generally much cooler than in the nearby town of Spearfish.

### Photo Experience

My favorite lens and setup for landscape images is a wide-angle zoom with a polarizing filter. Wide-angles capture the whole scene, and the zoom helps me to frame my composition properly. Polarizers are useful for giving me more control over

exposure, especially useful in Spearfish Creek for getting a "cotton-candy" effect with the water, as well as reducing reflections from the surface. When I shot film, I also used Fujichrome Velvia for saturating the colors of the area, especially in the fall. Now that I've gone digital and sold all of my film cameras and lenses (I miss them!), I'm able to do that in postprocessing. While pro lenses are ideal, on extended hikes through the Black Hills, I bring my Panasonic Lumix FZ-35 megazoom. It's great for hiking, mainly for its roughly 13 ounces of weight and also because it includes a built-in 27-486mm (35mm equivalent) Leica zoom lens.

### Best Times

Although fall is one of the best times to visit for photos, it also can be one of the worst as it's not a very well-kept secret. Once the fall colors appear, the highway can be clogged with visitors, especially on weekends. That's why I like to visit during the week, and close to sundown, as the colors are best during the magic hour and it's relatively quiet. If you can find a time when the canyon is almost empty, the silence, along with the sounds of the canyon, can be particularly relaxing and refreshing.

**Contact:** Black Hills National Forest, [www.blackhillsbadlands.com](http://www.blackhillsbadlands.com). **OP**

## Essential Gear...



The best way to remove reflections is to use a polarizing filter. The **Hoya PRO1D Circular PL filter** works by straining out the polarized rays of light created from nonmetallic reflective surfaces like water. Colors are also more saturated, improving contrast and enhancing blue skies. Available in eight thread sizes from 52mm to 82mm, the PRO1D is designed to be thin, tough and unobtrusive. **Contact:** Hoya (THK Photo Products), (800) 421-1141, [www.thkphoto.com](http://www.thkphoto.com).

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