

## **Black Mesa, OK, 4,973 ft. – December 24, 2019, HP #31: An Untamed Feeling**

Ana and I woke up at dawn, and before 8:00 a.m. (Mountain Standard Time) we started the four plus mile hike to Oklahoma's highest point. The trailhead is located three and a half miles south of the Colorado and Oklahoma line, roughly at the terminus of a huge volcanically formed tabletop ridge. This plateau, known as Black Mesa, begins in south eastern Colorado while extending diagonally across the northeast corner of New Mexico and slightly into the panhandle of Oklahoma. It ends not far from the confluence of the Cimarron River and Carrizo Creek. Black Mesa's name comes from the layer of black lava rock that covered the plateau centuries ago.

The first two miles of the hike we traveled primarily west toward New Mexico following an abandoned and overgrown jeep trail. The arid terrain was rugged, and desert like reminding us of the landscape featured in old Western movies. Along the way an occasional green painted metal arrow pointed the way. At mile 2.2 the trail made a ninety degree turn to the south pointing directly at the north wall of the mesa. Switchbacks zigzagging up the north wall to the tabletop above could be seen.

Since we began hiking at the terminus of the mesa, we did not fully comprehend its grand size which extends three miles, as the crow flies, to the Oklahoma New Mexico line, 10 more straight-line miles northwest from New Mexico to Colorado, and as much as another 40 miles into Colorado generally gaining elevation in that direction of travel. In reference to Black Mesa Summitpost.org states "The USGS lists the highest point in Colorado at an elevation of 5,715', however, this point flows directly up to the Mesa de Maya" - which stretches to an elevation of 6,837 feet. The mesa also becomes wider en route to its starting point ranging from eight miles at its widest to as narrow as a half mile. The basalt lava flow which formed the ridge is thought to have originated from a volcano named Piney Mountain 65 miles northwest of Oklahoma.

The hike gained 600 feet as it climbed the switchbacks. Along the way dark pumice stones were found in abundance. As the trail topped out, we entered a shortgrass prairie. Having reached the tabletop, we proceeded south for another half mile before heading southwest across the prairie. About a quarter-mile shy of the Sooners State highpoint the summit obelisk came into view prompting us to quicken our pace.



From trailhead to summit, we reached the highpoint in an hour and a half. The eight-foot-tall obelisk granite marker informed us Colorado is 4.7 miles to the north, Kansas 53 miles to the east (and slightly north), Texas 31 miles to the south, and New Mexico only 1,299 feet to the west.

We hung out for about an hour posing for Christmas Eve photos in our Santa caps, and eating an early lunch. Not only the summit but the whole hike through the Black Mesa Preserve gave off an untamed lonely feeling which was rather pleasant.

We did not notice any wildlife, but the area is known to contain a wide range from mountain lions and antelope to horned lizards. The area has been described as a birder's paradise with a variety of birds including golden eagles frequenting the area. The diversity of

wildlife goes right along with the variety of weather Black Mesa sees. After all the mesa is both the coldest and driest area of Oklahoma. During the summer months temperatures can easily exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit and hikers are encouraged to return to their vehicles no later than 10:00 a.m.

On our return hike we noticed a few farm buildings and a house tucked into a hill off to the northeast. The angle had caused the homestead to be out of sight during our ascent. The return trip took about the same amount of time as the climb.

Around 12:30 p.m. we were on the road heading to Santa Fe NM 260 miles away. Between Las Vegas NM, and Santa Fe the sun began to set, and snow began to fall.

Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/wK7YiKfQkwxiGX7e6>