

White Butte, ND, 3,506 ft. – May 31, 2015, HP #20: Wet and Slippery Clay

After spending a rainy night in a tent in South Dakota Ana and I continued north into North Dakota to the state highpoint, White Butte.

White Butte is located 45 miles, more or less, northeast of the southwest corner of North Dakota. This is a sparsely populated area in the least populated county of the state, consisting mostly of grasslands. This state highpoint resides within the perimeter of a patch work of United States Forest Service lands called the Little Missouri National Grassland (LMNG). All the same White Butte is privately owned, as within the borders of the LMNG are substantial portions of both state owned and privately owned land. LMNG is part of the Dakota Prairie Grasslands; a National Forest unit consisting entirely of prairies. In spite of being a part of a National Forest unit the major portion of the grassland lacks a wilderness designation and mineral development is a major threat to the LMNG with 95% of the zone authorized for leasing.

We parked shy of an old dilapidated and abandoned farmhouse and walked due south along a flat over-grown dirt farm road. Within a half a mile we went through a gate, to the west, in the barbed wire fence paralleling our track. We crossed a sandy wash in a little ravine as well as a



downed barbed wire fence, and soon encountered a steep section to the top of the hill. The elevation gain is only 400 feet, but since there are virtually no trees on this wind-swept prairie it was enough for some really nice views in all directions. Looking around we felt the other buttes we saw had a badlands like vibe to them. Hiking in, our primary view of White Butte showed it to be a grass covered knoll. However, from a further distance, allowing for a panoramic view of the butte's full massif, much of it is white in color.

On the summit, a rock cairn stood to the north of the US Department of Interior benchmark which is mounted to the top of a three-inch diameter pipe extending two feet above the ground. Attached to the pipe by a cable was a green ammo box containing a summit registry book which we added our names to. Next to the ammo box sat a long wooden box which we did not open. I have since learned the wooden box contains a hand trowel which I am not clear as to the significance of. Also close to the cairn is a metal marker for the late Lawrence P. Buzalsky (1935-1990) a member of the family that used to own the farm incorporating White Butte.

We snapped several picture from the highpoint before returning to our vehicle. The clay on the hiking path was wet and slippery due to lots of rain the day and night before. As we descended Ana slipped giving her a muddy gray colored backside.

Hikers are often cautioned about the rattlesnakes which are abundant in the area, but we did not encounter any at this time of the year.



This was a quick hike of under an hour round trip covering approximately 2.2 miles total– but I understand that nowadays the trailhead has been moved about 0.7 miles to the north of the abandoned farmhouse making the round trip closer to 3.4 miles.

By noon we were driving south again. We drove by Devils Tower in Wyoming, and then to Casper for dinner. From Casper we continued to Rawlins and checked into a motel 10:00 p.m., exhausted from way too much driving. The following day we would return to Orem UT having driven 1908 miles over four days. A plethora of miles, but well worth the effort with three more US state highpoints obtained.

Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/tKAPr68T4pdriXnV6>