

## **Wheeler Peak, NM, 13,161 ft. – April 27, 2013, HP #14: In the Sangre de Cristo Mountains**

On the way to New Mexico's Taos ski resort, I swung by the four corners monument where I did my best inverted crab pose allowing me to be in four US states at once. One hand was in Colorado, the other in New Mexico, and my feet were separately in Utah and Arizona. Next stop was Farmington New Mexico where I supplemented my food supplies.

Along Highway 64, after passing through the Apache Nation Reservation, I encountered an Earthship home. Ten mile or so before reaching Taos I crossed over the Rio Grande River on the second highest bridge of the U.S. Highway system.

The ski resort allows over-night parking in their Coyote parking lot and I took advantage of it sleeping in the back of my SUV. The next morning, I woke up at 4:00 a.m. and by 5:00 a.m. I was hiking the Bull of the Woods trail on my way to the two highest peaks in New Mexico; 13,133-foot Mt. Walter and its neighbor, Wheeler Peak 28 feet taller making it the tallest in the state.

Along the way I had to do some route finding, and I made the occasional stop, as such it took over four and a half hours to cover the 3,660+ vertical feet and eight miles to Mt. Walter. Near the first summit, I spooked some bighorn sheep. A sign marking the peak read, "MT. WALTER, ELEV. 13,141 FT., NAMED FOR H. D. WALTER, WHO LOVED THESE MOUNTAINS." It made me smile, after all it is not every day you get stand on a mountain that shares a name with you! Too bad it was not his first name.



It was only another twenty minutes to the pinnacle of the Land of Enchantment, and I arrived at a few minutes after 10 o'clock. Wheeler Peak, used to be called Taos Peak, meaning "place of red willows" but in 1950 it was changed to its current name in honor of the leader of the Wheeler Survey. There is a plaque on top, mounted above a cannon type pipe set in a rock base, stating he led the survey for ten years. Walter and Wheeler lie in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains (Spanish for "Blood of

Christ"). Perhaps alpenglow led to the name of this range which extends into Colorado.

As I headed down, I decided to make my excursion into a loop hike, turning left (west) between the two peak. With everything still covered in snow I down climbed and glissaded to 11,040-foot Williams Lake in about 45 minutes. At the snow-covered lake, I took a photograph looking south east toward Simpson Peak with just the south shoulder of Wheeler Peak showing in the photo. Wheeler and Walter are to the north on the same ridge line as Simpson. In another 30 minutes, traveling north, I arrived at the south end of the ski resort; the time was 11:30 a.m. I had not encountered anyone else on the hike.

To get back to my vehicle at the north end of the resort, I had an hours walk on the Twinning road. Marching down the gravel road lined with cabins, a few cars passed me, and they all ignored my extended thumb asking for a ride.



Later that evening I drove to Taos, and then through Durango Colorado to the outskirts of Cortez where I camped in the National Forest. Next day I arrived in Moab and road the slick rock trail on my mountain bike and drove my SUV over Baby Lions Back.

Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/HXka642pLkJbXXV29>