

## **Guadalupe Peak, TX, 8,749 ft. – June 8, 2013, HP #15: Watching for Rattlesnakes**

Friday morning, I got up at my regular time of seven o'clock. After spending nine hours at work, I drove from Springville, Utah to the Salt Lake City International Airport to catch a flight to El Paso, Texas via Phoenix Arizona. I arrived in El Paso a just before midnight, feeling sleepy, and picked up a rental car.

Leaving the airport, I located an open store and bought some groceries. Next, I found Highway 180/62 and drove east 110 miles to Guadalupe Mountains National Park. En route I encountered an "Inland (aka Interior) Check Point" operated by the US Border Patrol – something I was not aware existed. As I approached, I assumed it was a weigh station, but as I entered I had this strange feeling that I was crossing the border. Supposedly border agents have the right to set up check points anywhere within 100 miles of the Country's borders. The on-duty officer asked me where I was going and seemed a little surprised due to the late hour. He also wondered where I would be staying. I told him I would sleep in the car. After a while, another officer with a dog arrived, and the pair walked behind the car. I assumed the dog was sniffing for drugs. Once the main officer's apparent curiosity was satisfied, he asked me to state my country of citizenship, and pleased with my answer he sent me on my way.

By 3:00 a.m. I arrived at the Pine Springs Campground, and spent the next hour looking around, getting food ready, and organizing my pack for the pending hike to the highpoint of Texas. The hike rises just over 3,000 vertical feet in 4.25 miles. I figured I could cover that easily in three hours up and two and a half hours down. I wanted to leave the National Park before 2:00 p.m., allowing plenty of time to get back to the airport for my return flight that same day. Having the time and not wanting to hike in the dark, I decided to try to catch an hour of sleep in the car. I did doze off, but as if on cue I woke up at 5:00 a.m., to a hint of dawn. I grabbed my pack, adding my headlamp to it, as there was enough light to not warrant it, and was on the trail by 5:15 a.m. As I wandered up several switch backs, the sun was soon fully up, and the temperature became comfortable enough for a t-shirt.

A mile and a half into the hike, I calculated I was covering about a half mile every 15 minutes. At that rate I reasoned I would likely be on top by 7:30 a.m. The walking was easy, the trail was direct and by 7:10 a.m. I reached the top of Texas, not having stopped for a drink of water or anything. I had both the trail up, and the summit, to myself. At this early morning hour, the sky in all directions was a cloud-free brilliant blue.

On the peak stands a triangular pyramid maybe six feet tall, made of stainless steel. According to Wikipedia, "it was erected by American Airlines in 1958 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Butterfield Overland Mail, a stagecoach route that passed south of the mountain." American Airlines has their eagle logo on one side. Another side remembers the Pony Express Riders contracted to the overland mail outfit. The third side displays a compass rose with north replaced by the fleur-de-lis Boy Scouts of America symbol, and in the center of the compass is an old-school pilot donning an aviator hat and goggles.



I ate my breakfast sandwich as I read entries in the summit log which I found in an ammunition box at the base of the monument. Several entries mentioned the lack of a view due to hazy conditions - not the case this morning. Around 7:40 a.m. I mistakenly thought I heard voices coming up the trail, so I grabbed my pack and started down.

With plenty of time, I decided to wander down to El Capitan a sub-peak to the south. The off-trail travel, over arid terrain, caused me to be keenly cautious of potential rattlesnakes.

Traveling from the Texas highpoint, one must first drop down 900 feet and then regain over 200 feet to obtain the top of El Capitan. Within an hour of leaving the highpoint I encountered a green ammunition box (exactly like the one on Guadalupe Peak). Looking around nothing appeared higher, so I acknowledged it as the El Capitan summit, and added my name to the logbook found inside. The next most recent entry dated back a few months. The views off the cliff face to the west were breathtaking, and the view back to the north, made Guadalupe Peak more impressive. I could see two hikers at the stainless-steel monument a beeline mile away.

I hoped I would encounter a trail leading from El Capitan back to where I had parked the car, but there did not seem to be one. Playing it cautious I retraced my path back up to the Texas highpoint. This required just under an hour, and I was a little less cautious in watching out for rattlesnakes. Once back on the established trail, I made good time. All five groups heading up, that I passed on my descent, were friendly. I glanced over at El Capitan a few times and questioned if the summit register was really on its highpoint. The temperature remained pleasant, with the occasional strong wind gust typical of the area. By 11:15 a.m. I was back at my rental car having reached two peaks in as much time as I had budgeted for state highpoint alone.

Unaware of what else around might be of interest, I decided to head back to El Paso, where I could get some more food and hopefully catch a nap at the airport prior to my 6:30 p.m. flight. As I headed west on highway 180/62, I looked back at the peaks, and noticed that the sky was filling with dust, gone were the clear views I had enjoyed that morning.

On the outskirts of El Paso, I stopped to purchase some fruit and juice before continuing into the city. Tired and not really interested in looking around I filled up the car with gas and returned to the airport. It was close to 2:00 p.m. when I dropped off the rental car and walked across the parking lot. Entering the airport, I stopped at the first restroom to change out of my hiking gear. By the time I checked-in, cleared TSA, and found my gate it was after 3:00 p.m. I tried to sleep sitting at the gate, but that was uncomfortable and so I moved to a couch near one of the TVs, and I managed to doze in and out for the next 45 minutes.

Eventually it was time for my flight to Phoenix and from there to Salt Lake City. I arrived in Salt Lake City close to 11:00 p.m. and was home a few minutes after midnight. After 41.5 hours of no real sleep, I was exhausted, and my bed was a welcome site.



Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/mmxFea7wveB9FnB77>