

White Butte, ND, 3,506 ft. – May 31, 2015, HP #20: The clay on the hiking path was wet and slippery.

After spending a rainy night in a tent in South Dakota the following morning we continued north into North Dakota to its state highpoint, White Butte.

White Butte is located forty five miles, more or less, northeast of the south west corner of North Dakota. This is a sparsely populated area, in the least populated county of the state, consisting mostly of grasslands. This state high point resides within the perimeter boundaries of a patch work of United States Forest Service (USFS) lands called the Little Missouri National Grassland (LMNG). All the same White Butte is privately owned, as within the borders of the national grassland are substantial portions of both state owned and privately owned land. LMNG is a 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 Little Missouri National Grassland with 95% of the zone authorized for leasing.

We parked shy of an old dilapidated and abandoned farm house, 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 peak. The elevation gain is roughly 400 feet, but since there are virtually no trees on this wind swept prairie it's enough for some really nice views in all directions. Looking around we felt the buttes had an almost badlands like vibe to them. Hiking in, the primary view of the 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 USGS benchmark which is mounted to the top of a three inch diameter pipe extending two feet above ground level. Attached to the pipe by a cable was a green ammo box containing a summit registry book which we signed. Next to the ammo box sat a long wooden box which we didn't open, but which I have since learned contains a hand trowel which I don't know 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 pictures from the highpoint before returning to our vehicle. The clay on the hiking path was wet and slippery after lots of rain the day and night before, and as we descended Ana slipped giving her a muddy gray colored back-side.

Hikers are often cautioned about the rattlesnakes which are abundant in the area, but we didn't 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 there at 10 p.m.. Way too much driving for one day!