

Humphreys Peak, AZ, 12,633 ft. – November 18, 2010, HP #11: Expansive Never-Ending Views

We were supposed to leave at 9:00 a.m. but it was almost 10:30 a.m. by the time we headed south on I-15 from Orem, Wednesday Nov 17, 2010. We stopped for dinner at Denny's in Page AZ and by 9 p.m. we were at Arizona Snowbowl ski area, a 14 mile drive up US-180 from Flagstaff. We slept in the parking lot at over 9,300 feet on a cold night, with no one else around. I had told Ana to bring a warm sleeping bag and an extra blanket or two, but whatever she had was not warm enough and I ended up giving her my down bag. Ana had never experienced resourceful accommodations like this before, and that probably added to her sleeplessness.

Next morning, we were up at 5:00 a.m., and on the trail at 6:30 a.m. with the sun somewhat up. Our destination being the highest peak on San Francisco Mountain, named Humphreys Peak - the highest natural point in the U.S. state of Arizona. Yet another mountain peak with a boring name, paying tribute to an Army officer. Perhaps an officer is a bit better than honoring a politician - another common heedless way to name a peak. San Francisco Mountain, also known as San Francisco Peaks or simply The Peaks, is a group of dormant volcanic peaks along a horseshoe shaped Massif located in the Coconino National Forest. San Francisco Mountain is situated between highway 89 to the east, and highway 180 to the west, and houses Arizona Snowbowl ski resort on its western aspect with the town of Flagstaff east of the mountain.

The commencement of the Humphreys' Peak trail was not obvious, so we ended up hiking under one of the ski lifts eventually crossing the trail a few hundred yards beyond the end of the lift. Following the trail, we were guided into a conifer and aspen forest, on the west side of the mountain, and up a set of long switchbacks. Near tree line, just below the saddle between Humphreys and Agassiz Peaks, the forest turned into bristlecone pines bent and twisted by wind and frost. A short push up to the saddle offered us views of the Inner Basin of the Massif that forms the San Francisco Peaks. Up to this point we had cover roughly three miles, with one and three quarter's miles remaining. Here, above tree line, the terrain took on a volcanic appearance as the route steepened passing three false summits before reaching the highpoint.

We made it to the roof of the Grand Canyon state in three and a half hours. A dusting of snow, here and there, coated the mountain but volcanic rocks showed through everywhere. This was my eleventh state highpoint, and my 179th mountain climb. The 360-degree views were expansive seeming to never end almost as though one is looking into space. Out there somewhere was the Grand Canyon, along with a lot of seemingly empty land some of which surely belongs to the Painted Desert – it was remarkable. We



had the summit to ourselves making the views that much easier to enjoy. After forty-five minutes on top of Arizona we began the return trip down.



I wanted to summit Mt. Agassiz on the way down but on the ascent from the saddle we noticed a sign saying it was closed. I have no idea why it was closed but the sign seemed serious threatening a \$500 fine. I had just begun a seven-month un-jobbing phase and did not like the idea of spending \$500 to reach another peak.

Around 3 p.m. we returned to the car, having covered nine and a half miles and over 3,300 vertical feet.

On the drive down from the ski resort we stopped before Flagstaff and ate dinner on the side of the road, then headed to the Kaibab forest near Jacobs Lake where we found a free spot to camp for the night.