

## **My Journey to the Highest Point in Each of the US States**

**“Taking It To The Top”**

**“It’s a highpointing journey”**

### **What is highpointing?**

Highpointing is the pursuit of reaching the tallest point within a specified area. In practice it is many things – its traveling, exploring, mountain climbing, hiking, fulfillment, planning, exercise, sightseeing, self-discover, and much more.

My pursuit of visiting the highest point in each of the fifty US States is just one example of highpointing. Another example is reaching the top of the tallest mountain on each continent, dubbed the Seven Summits. Comparably, one might choose to reach the highest point of each county in his home state, or whatever region and subdivision is of interest.

As far back as 1909 National Geographic did an article entitled "The Highest Point in Each State" relating to US State highpoint, and according to Wikipedia, “The first person to successfully climb each US State highpoint was A.H. Marshall, who completed the task in July 1936, when there were only 48 states.”

In the late 1980’s the “Highpointers Club” was formed. This club consists of people with the common interest of attaining the highpoint of each of the fifty US States. By the turn of the century membership of the Highpointers Club had grown to over 2000 members. The founder of the Highpointers Club became the seventh person to achieve standing on the summits of all fifty states.

The continental United States is 2,800 miles wide (from west to east) and 1,582 miles tall (from south to north). From my home in Utah, it is close to 2,100 miles to Alaska, and around 2,800 miles to Hawaii. Clearly, a lot of miles must be covered in pursuit of reaching the highest point in each of the states, and typically it takes many years to cover all these miles, along with a good amount of money. As such a relatively few number of people have achieved this feat. From information on the Highpointers club’s website, I estimate as of December 2020 likely less than 400 people have done so. The number I found on the Highpointers website is 305 as of July 2018. Also, it seems annually less than twenty-five people reach their final state highpoint.

## About the US State Highpoints

The US State highpoints range from landmarks as low as 345 feet to mountains as tall as 20,320 feet. I classify thirty-four of the fifty as mountains, another ten as hills, and the remaining six as landmarks. Some highpoints can be driven to, requiring little or no walking effort, whereas others take skilled mountain climbers' days or even weeks to scale on foot. As such, this endeavor offers a range of challenges, and a variety of experiences.

Too often people incorrectly equate the effort of reaching one state highpoint to that of reaching another; unconsciously assuming that since all are highpoints all amount to equal effort. However, with the highpoints having such a wide range of geographical makeup there are many factors which influence their individual difficulty.

Traits such as prominence, isolation, type of terrain, vertical gain, weather, distance from a road, and natural dangers all influence the struggle of reaching a highpoint. Likewise factors such as personal fitness, experience level, sensitivity to altitude, preparation, risk tolerance, time available, gear required, team size/dynamics, and mental clarity, just to name a few, also influence perceived difficulty.

One Highpointer might avoid walking when a driving option is available, use guides to lead him up the most challenging summits, and/or only venture out in fair weather. Whereas another might tackle highpoints solo or only during winter months and avoid driving in favor of hiking.

Adding to the confusion, the Highpointers Club offers no hard and fast rules for obtaining a highpoint endorsing "any route to the top" be it by horse, automobile, foot, helicopter, or what have you – leaving the means of ascent to personal choice.

Furthermore, one might also incorrectly assume that a list of the fifty US State highpoints ordered by elevation would suffice as a list of difficulty. Unfortunately, that too falls short. For example, Mt Marcy of New York stands shorter than Nebraska's Panorama Point with the latter being nothing more than a spot on a prairie requiring no uphill walking and the former being a mountain rising over 3,000 feet from the trailhead.

## About me

I considered myself to be an outdoors enthusiast. Very few activities provide me with as much joy as hiking, camping, skiing, mountain biking, rock climbing, ice climbing and exploring.



This passion began in my childhood. At the young age of ten, I climbed Chief Mountain in Glacier Park, MT. At the age of twelve, with my scout troop, I did a twenty-six mile back-packing trek from Chief Mountain Customs (USA/Canada border) over Stoney Indian Pass to Goat Haunt at the head of Waterton Lakes Alberta. In 1981 & 1982 I camped and hiked in Kananaskis country Alberta, first at the Canadian Boy Scout Jamboree and again at the World Jamboree Hike Master Camp. As a teen I fished lakes and streams in Southern Alberta, and Northern Montana. In college, I took a High-Country Backpacking class.

Over the years I estimated I have hiked thousands of miles, and during these hikes I have encountered black bears, crossed paths with grizzly bears, met cougars, foxes, wolves, and coyotes. I have even been charged by a moose.

In 1993 I biked the 330-km Golden Triangle solo from Banff, Alberta through Radium and Golden BC. I have rock climbed at Stone Hill Montana, ice climbed in Ouray Colorado, scaled the Grand Teton in Wyoming, explored the Grand Canyon of Arizona, and visited the Copper Canyons of Mexico. I have also been skydiving. My mother, brother, and I, at the stroke of midnight, during a snowstorm, welcomed in the 21st century from the platform on Mount Crandell known as Bear's Hump in Waterton Lakes Alberta. I have white-water rafted on the Gauley River in West Virginia and the Youghiogheny River in Pennsylvania. In 2003 I completed biking the 184.5-mile-long C&O canal trail from Washington, DC to Cumberland, MD. Between August 23, 2007 and August 11, 2008 I climbed 52 peaks exceeding my goal of 40 peaks in one year! It is typical for me to get in more than 30 ski days each ski season. I have accomplished 372 mountain climbs as of year-end 2020.

Growing up in a small town I learned to do things myself. As a child I used to repair and modify my bicycle. As a teenager I worked in the summers as a construction laborer mainly in stucco, drywall, and painting. In high school I took the industrial arts classes of wood shop and mechanics. In college I started out studying engineering and found that I prefer hands-on engineering over theoretical textbook engineering. During college I worked as a plumber's assistant. I have remodeled two houses and got to rebuild both following a fire in 2014. I am constantly doing home improvement, and do-it-yourself projects. I considered myself to be a handyman.

As the Internet was just starting to take off in 1997, I taught myself how to do web development. In 2000 I went into this line of work full time, and over twenty years later I am

still hard at it. The creative side of it, and the problem solving are what I enjoy. Conversely, being in an office, and sitting all day are what I do not enjoy.

I was born in the United States of America, but had the privilege of being raised in Alberta, Canada –where I spent 18 years. After high school I lived in Adelaide Australia for two years and following my graduation from University I was fortunate to work in South Korea for a full year.

From the time I left home, in 1985, until the time I purchased my first home in 2006 I lived what is termed today a “minimalist” lifestyle. With the difference being that I never went from having an excessive number of things to downsizing – instead, I simply just never owned a surplus of things. My way of living over those twenty-one years was to limit my possessions to only what was essential and to never own more things than I could fit into my car all at once – meaning I could pack up and move anytime with just an hours’ notice.

I have always been finically responsible and as such I have managed to work in phases of un-jobbing into my adult life - meaning I leave a permanent career job and go for extended periods of time (six months or more) without major, full-time employment. During un-jobbing episodes I have traveled, lived in foreign counties, remodeled houses, and explored the great outdoors. Temporary employment during these times has bounced me from short-term work at UPS, to being a house painter/drywaller, to doing warehouse production work, and even to teaching English as a second language.

I have had the privilege of traveling to many countries world-wide, taking me to the Eiffel Tower, the Great Wall of China, the monuments of Washington DC, the sights of Macau, Stonehenge, Sydney Harbor, Itaewon, Waikiki, Victoria Peak, the Statue of Liberty, Death Valley, Teotihuacan, Redwood National and State Parks, The Tower of London, as well as many more places.

As a matter of interest, I never use electronic navigation systems as I have been blessed with a keen sense of direction and a love of paper maps. In 1988 I stopped wearing a watch, yet I am never late and can typically estimate the current time to within fifteen minutes. It was 2013 before I finally broke down and got my first mobile phone and to this day I am still not a fan of them, as such I often don’t carry one around with me. I was a bachelor until the age of forty-six. I love to laugh and to make others laugh. During my school days I was the class clown, along with being the top math student of my senior class in High School and an overall good student.

### **How did I become a Highpointer?**

With a lifelong interest in the outdoors, a sense of adventure, and the love of traveling/exploring, it was an utterly natural step for me to take on the challenge of reaching the highest point in each of the fifty US States, however it was a gradual process that evolved into a series of plans and goals. Initially I just happened upon the first few state highpoints I

visited. Others, early on, I sought out because of their highpoint status but not as a formal goal of highpointing each state.

It was on my first climb of Utah's King Peak in September 2006 when I meet a fellow solo hiker, who was there as a US State Highpointer, that the seed of doing forty-five more of these began to germinate.

Nearly three years later I climbed Wyoming's tallest mountain although the fact it is a state highpoint was not the driving reason. The following month I reached the highest point in Idaho seeking it out because of that label. Two weeks later, when I choose to climb Colorado's Mt. Elbert as a noteworthy mountain to be my 100<sup>th</sup> unique peak its highpoint status figured into the choice.

By 2010, I was quite interested in visiting each US State highpoint, but I still had no defined plan nor time frame by which to complete them. Being really into mountaineering, at this point in my life, the tallest, most difficult state high points were the only ones that really interested me. As such, I figured the non-mountainous highpoints could be saved for my golden years making my highpointing plan a long-drawn-out causal one. That year I achieved Alaska's Denali plus two more of the contiguous states. Over the next five years I obtained nine more taking my count to twenty by mid-year 2015.

More than four years slipped away by the time I sought out my twenty-first state highpoint. During that time, I had finished rebuilding my home following a 2014 fire, and I had returned to work as a Software Engineer after a two-year hiatus. I completed sixty-two mountain climbs, and several other adventures over those four years but I did not have much of a desire to travel and so my state highpointing objective slipped into hibernation. However, in August 2019 when I realized I was in danger of reaching the use or lose point of my accumulated personal time off at work, the reluctance to travel was forgotten.

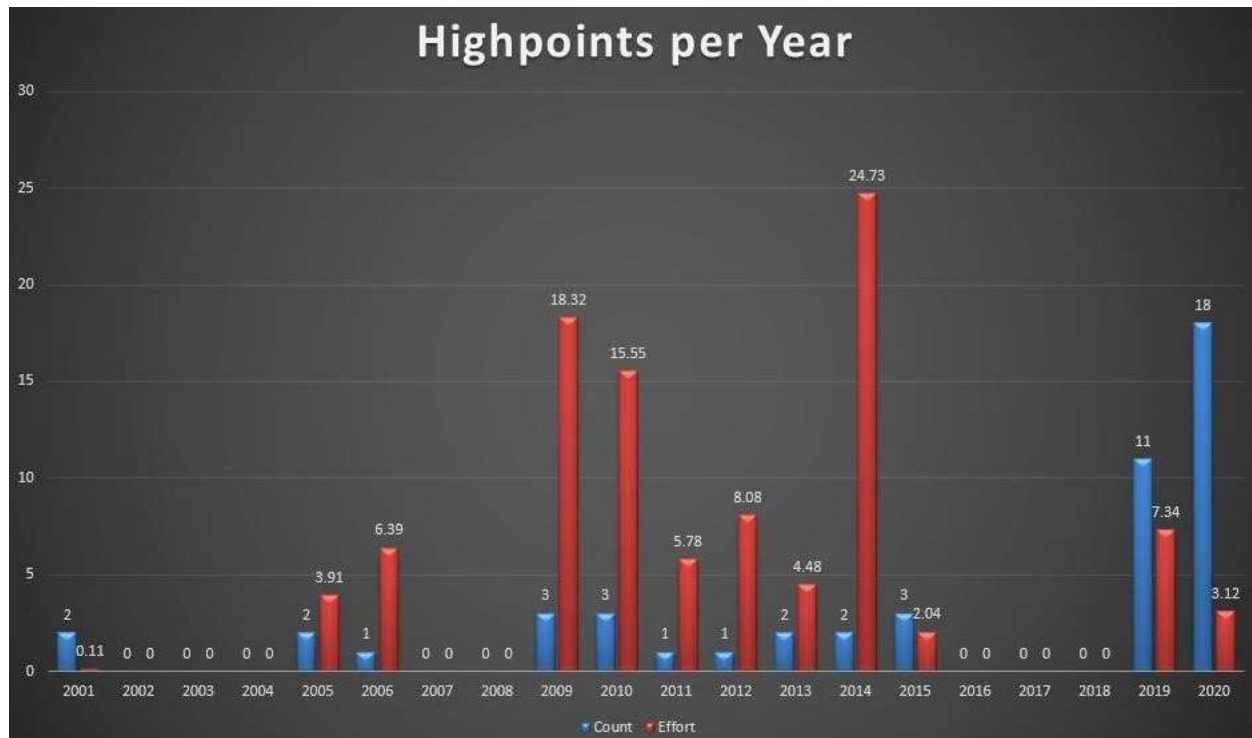
Returning from the August 2019 highpointing trip, where I tagged four summits, I realized eighteen years had already slipped away from the time I had reached my first state highpoint. I decided then it would be neat to accomplish all fifty within a twenty-year time frame. As such the last quarter of that year I made two more trips adding seven more highpoints to the "done" list.

I planned to make a big push for the remaining nineteen following the winter 2019/2020 ski season. However, Mother Nature surprised the world by introducing the COVID 19 virus which hit the USA during the late winter of 2020. Many thought the pandemic would go away come summer, and so I prudently postponed making any highpointing arrangements for the spring.

Nevertheless, come summer 2020, despite the virus not letting up, I decided to take a calculated risk, and use up some airline miles. As such I increased my total count to thirty-six by August 1, 2020 with two highpointing trips. At the end of August 2020, my employer granted me a full week off in recognition of my five years of service, time I used to tour through the

southern states picking up six more highpoints. In October 2020 I completed the remaining continental states leaving only Hawaii unreached.

This will need more when I complete the goal...



A per year comparison of HP counts (in blue) to HP effort (in red). Just because you do a lot of HPs in one year doesn't mean you have done most of the job. Ignoring zero years, my third smallest effort year was 2020 yet it is my highest count year. In contrast my largest effort year tied as my second lowest count year with 2 HPs.