

White Butte, ND, 3,506 ft. – May 31, 2015, HP #20: Slippery Clay

After spending a rainy night in a tent in South Dakota, Ana and I continued north into North Dakota to the state highpoint, White Butte.

White Butte is located 45 miles northeast of the southwest corner of North Dakota; a sparsely populated area in the least populated county of the state, consisting mostly of grasslands. The highpoint resides within the perimeter of a patch work of United States Forest Service lands called the Little Missouri National Grassland (LMNG). All the same White Butte is privately owned, as within the borders of the LMNG are substantial portions of both state owned and privately owned land. LMNG is 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 LMNG with 95% of the zone authorized for leasing.

We parked shy of an old, dilapidated, abandoned farmhouse, and walked due south along a flat over-grown dirt road. Within a half a mile we went west through a gate 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 top of the hill. The elevation gain is only 400 feet, but since there are virtually no trees on this wind-swept prairie it was enough for some nice views in all directions. Looking around we felt the other buttes we saw had a badlands like vibe to them. Hiking in, our primary view of White 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 US Department of Interior benchmark which is mounted to the top of a three-inch diameter pipe extending two feet above the ground. Attached to the pipe by a cable was a green ammo box containing a summit registry book which we added our names to. Next to the ammo box sat a long wooden box which we did not open. I have since learned the wooden box contains a hand trowel, the significance of which escapes me. 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 due to plenty of rain the day and night before. As we descended Ana slipped giving her a muddy gray colored backside.

Hikers are often cautioned about the rattlesnakes which are abundant in the area, but we did not 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. 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 heading back home to Orem UT. We drove by Devils Tower in Wyoming, and then on to Casper for dinner. From Casper we continued to Rawlins and checked into a motel around 10:00 p.m., exhausted from way too much driving. The following day we completed the drive home having driven 1,908 miles since leaving home on May 29. A plethora of miles, but well worth the effort having obtained three highpoints - Panorama Point NE (May 29), Black Elk Peak SD (May 30), and White Butte ND (May 31).

Photo Album: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/tKAPr68T4pdrjXnV6>