**Black Mesa, OK, 4,973 ft. – December 24, 2019, HP #31: The personality of the owner, which was both appealing and amusing, revealed itself enthusiastically through the highpoint.**

It was close to 4pm when we left Mount Sunflower, KS, and began the 200 mile drive to Black Mesa Preserve. The drive went fast to Pritchett Colorado 160 miles away. However just past Pritchett we had to exit the highway and get on gravel country roads and it was dark. My printed directions put us on CR 10, which we found easily even though at first it wasn’t labeled. Then it put us on CR 8, to CR C and to CR 5. Well CR 5 didn’t exist, but we did find a CR 55, and in the dark as I got out of my truck to read the tiny sign illuminating it with my headlamp I noticed a second marker on the same pole pointing east which read “OKLA”. “OKLA” did not register with me immediately as meaning Oklahoma, but as I got into the truck and began to explain to my wife what I had learning it hit me.

Soon, within a mile, we crossed the CO/OK state line, and the road turned to pavement. After 40 miles, or so, from Pritchett CO, we came to the Black Mesa Bed and Breakfast and then highway 325, which means we had overshot the trailhead entrance for Black Mesa. However, as we turned around and drove back past the Bed and Breakfast heading back to camping near the state line we saw a sign for Black Mesa Nature Preserve. We laughed because in the direction we had come from Colorado the Preserve wasn’t marked with a sign. All in all we only drove an extra 10 miles, which in the dark on unfamiliar country roads in the middle of nowhere was acceptable. It wasn’t much after 9pm when we pulled into the trailhead parking area, giving us the knowledge of where the hike tomorrow would begin.

Nearby we found a primitive spot to park for the night and we set up our bedrolls in the back of the truck. Temps were in the 40’s Fahrenheit. The nighttime skies on publicly accessible land in the country. I slept much better in the back of the truck then in the motel the night before.

At dawn we woke up, and before 8 am (Mountain Standard Time) we started our 4.2 mile hike ~~to Oklahoma’s highest point~~. Our destination, the highest point in Oklahoma, is located along a 28 mile long ridge known as Black Mesa which encompasses parts of New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Colorado. The 4,973 foot point we sought after, interestingly, is not the tallest point on the mesa. Its highest elevation is 5,705 feet found in Colorado but that did not interest us. New Mexico can also claim a higher point on the mesa at 5,239 feet than is found in Oklahoma.

The hike only gains 600 feet, and so we reached the highpoint in 1.5 hours. At the highpoint is an 8 foot tall obelisk granite marker informing us that Colorado is 4.7 miles to the north, Kansas 53 miles to the east, Texas 31 miles to the south, and New Mexico only 1299 feet to the west.

The plateau that formed at the top of the mesa has been known as a "geological wonder" of North America.[3] There is abundant wildlife in this shortgrass prairie environment, including mountain lions, butterflies, and the Texas horned lizard.

This area is found in the extreme western part of the state's Panhandle, and is named for the dark pumice found all over the terrain. When this area was volcanically active, lava flows, cones and domes all worked in concert to shape the landscape that can be seen today. The main draw to the area is nearby Capulin Volcano in New Mexico, which spewed forth the lava flow that created Black Mesa.

The route to the "summit" of Black Mesa is owned by the [Nature Conservancy](http://www.nature.org), which has purchased much of the land in the area and is maintaining its natural beauty for the coming generations. The "summit" itself is a small bastion of Black Mesa State Park; the vast majority of this park is located several miles south. Currently, there are no access restrictions on the trail leading up to the summit.

Black Mesa is located in northwestern Oklahoma in Cimarron County where the the Rocky Mountains meet the shortgrass prairie. It's not only the tallest point in the state at 4,973 feet tall, but it's also the coldest and driest as well. The name Black Mesa comes from the layer of black lava rock that covered the mesa many years ago.

In 1991, The Nature Conservancy conveyed this property to the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department with restrictions regarding development and other use. The preserve is located inside the Black Mesa State Park and protects about 60% of the mesa top in Oklahoma in addition to talus slopes and plains habitat.

We hung out for about an hour taking photos, and eating an early lunch before returning the 4.2 miles. Return took about 1.5 hours as well.

Around 12:30 pm we were on the road heading to Santa Fe NM 260 miles away. Between Las Vegas NM, and Santa Fe the sun began to set and snow began to fall. ~~Hotels in Santa Fe are located a few miles from I-25 so it took a while to find one. We ended up at the Courtyard by Marriott and got ripped off to the tune of $172.00 – cable didn’t work, no breakfast, broken elevator, barking dogs, no thermostat, just crappy. Decent amount of snowfall.~~