**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.**

Black Mesa is a volcanically formed table top ridge that begins in south eastern Colorado in the vicinity of Mesa de Maya. It extends diagonally across the north east corner of New Mexico, and terminates slightly into the panhandle of Oklahoma. In reference to Black Mesa Summitpost.org states “The USGS lists the highest point in Colorado at an elevation of 5,715', however, this point flows directly up to the Mesa de Maya” - reaching an elevation of 6,837 feet. As the mesa extends east and south along Sheep Pen Canyon it loses elevation and becomes narrower as it enters New Mexico where maps clearly label it as Black Mesa. The crosswise portion across New Mexico, as the crow flies, is 10 miles in length from the CO/NM border to the NM/OK border. At the NM/OK border the mesa extends another 3 miles into Oklahoma, again as the crow flies, to its south east terminus near the confluence of the Cimarron River and Carrizo Creek. The basalt lava flow which forms the ridge is thought to have originated in Colorado from a Volcano named Piney Mountain 65 miles north and west of Oklahoma. This flow extends fifty five miles being as thick as 600 feet and from eight miles wide down to a half mile.

Black Mesa’s name comes from the layer of black lava rock that covered the plateau many years ago. Today the top of the mesa is a shortgrass prairie, with dark pumice found in abundance. The area enjoys an abundance of wildlife ranging from mountain lions to horned lizards - antelope are common, and deer can be spotted grazing the sides of the mesa. The variety of wildlife corresponds with the weather spans, as the mesa is not only the tallest point in the state but also both the coldest and the driest.

See <https://mapper.acme.com/?ll=36.95895,-103.20282&z=11&t=R&marker0=36.93188%2C-102.99768%2Cunnamed&marker1=37.10335%2C-103.50189%2CMesa%20De%20Maya%20Colorado%2081049&marker2=36.94990%2C-102.94410%2Cunnamed&marker3=37.00063%2C-103.18703%2Cunnamed&marker4=37.37072%2C-102.85881%2CPritchett%20Colorado%20&marker5=37.13620%2C-103.66530%2C37.1361975%2F%20-103.6653014>

More info at <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=BL005>

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. The trailhead is located three and a half miles south of the CO/OK line. The first 2.2 miles head primarily west toward New Mexico following an abandoned and over grown jeep trail. The arid terrain is rugged, and desert like – reminding one of landscape seen in old Western movies. Along the way are green painted metal arrows indicating the route. The trail makes a ninety degree turn to the south at mile 2.2 pointing directly at the north wall of the mesa, and the jeep trail can be seen switching back and forth to the table top above. The hike gains 600 feet along the switchbacks. As the trail tops out a shortgrass prairie is encountered. Having reached the table top the route proceeds south for another half mile before heading south west. About a quarter-mile shy of the Sooners State high point an obelisk comes into view indicating the end of the hike.

We reached the highpoint in 1.5 hours. The eight foot tall obelisk granite marker confirmed we were at the highest natural point in Oklahoma and informed us that Colorado is 4.7 miles to the north, Kansas 53 miles to the east (and slightly north), Texas 31 miles to the south, and New Mexico only 1299 feet to the west.

Route: <http://www.bestoklahomatrails.com/blackmesatrail.html>

The plateau that formed at the top of the mesa has been known as a "geological wonder" of North America.

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.

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.~~