

# A Daycation - Black Mesa, the "North American Geological Wonder"

## Ranked No. 4 - Oklahoma State Parks

Special thanks to Jane Apple of Kenton, Oklahoma's Hitching Post for her storytelling and guided tours along the land that her family has worked and survived on for generations, and all Kenton residents. Photos and map by Miranda Gilbert with information compiled from Kenton Museum, No Man's Land Museum, state historical texts, and personal accounts.



**History of Black Mesa** -The mesa gets its name as it is capped by erosion resistant basaltic lava formed by a volcanic eruption approximately 3 to 5 million years ago. The lava erupted from a vent in the Raton-Clayton volcanic field in northeastern New Mexico and southeastern Colorado. The area has produced evidence of numerous dinosaurs, Plains Indians, Coronado the Spanish Conquistador, Santa Fe Trail travelers, outlaws and now ranchers.

From Guymon, travel northwest on US Hwy 64/412 to Boise City 60 miles. As seen on the map, the tour is a loop that can first stop in Black Mesa State Park, approximately 26 miles from Boise City, or further north at Black Mesa Summit Trail which is 40 miles from Boise City.

**Tip:** At Boise City, you will want to fill your gas tank, buy ice, water, some No Man's Land Beef Jerky, and anything else you will need for the day since there will be no convenience stores the rest of the trip. Additional gas will allow for exploration miles to the tri-state marker (approximately 5 miles northwest from the Black Mesa Summit Trail), the Dinosaur Tracks, The Old Maid rock formations, Overlooks, and other points of interest.



**Tri-State Marker** - Stand in Oklahoma, New Mexico and Colorado - all at the same time! This marker is about a 6 minute drive northwest of the Black Mesa Summit Trail pull off. Follow the map to the tri-state marker, along a narrow road which includes a left fork onto a dirt road near the end. Just about when you think you may be lost, the gray granite marker will appear on the prairie with an obvious pull off and tear drop parking area. The original marker shown at left, is just north about 1.4 mile along the old ruts. Not bad measurements for a day of no GPS system!



**Robbers Roost** - The present-day Oklahoma Panhandle belonged to no state and served as a buffer between Texas, a slave state, and Kansas a free state. The strip of land 167 miles long and nearly 35 miles wide was known as "No Man's Land" and lacked law enforcement agencies and hence the outlaws found it safe to hide in the region. The notable ones who made this area their hideout were William Coe and Blackjack Ketchum. Three-quarters of a mile south from the point of Black Mesa lay a small jut of rocks he named robbers roost peak. This is where he and half-dozen specially- recruited men built his fort. They built a 16x36 foot house with stone walls 30 inches thick. Robbers' Roost housed a blacksmith shop, gun ports for windows, and a piano. However, as new settlers arrived in the area for copper and coal mining and also for cattle ranching activities by grazing cattle in the mesa region, law enforcement became more effective, and the outlaws were brought under control by canons. A painting of this battle was commissioned in 2009 and is on display at the State Capitol in Oklahoma City.



**Dinosaur Quarry** – During the 1930s a dozen dinosaur quarries were opened and excavated in the USA. A femur from a Brontosaurus/Apatosaurus, said to be the prize fossilized bone of the Southwest, was found at the quarry in Black Mesa. The discovery was made by J.R. Collins of Kenton, when the blade of his grader uncovered a piece of bone. A concrete replica of the femur marks the site of the quarry from which the brontosaurus skeleton was taken. Abundant dinosaur fossils have been recovered from the Triassic and Jurassic strata in the area and tracks left by the allosaurus are located in Carrizo Creek just to the north of the Black Mesa Summit Trail. More than eighteen tons of camptosaurus, stegosaurus, brontosaurus, diplodocus, and edmontosaurus bones have been quarried at Black Mesa. Additional vertebrae were discovered by scientists in 2012 during an educational dig with OU students.



**Black Mesa Summit Trail** - For a rewarding hiking or mountain biking experience explore the Black Mesa Summit Trail. This trail will take you all the way to the top of Black Mesa, where you can stand at the highest point in Oklahoma - 4,973 feet above sea level. At 8.4 miles out and back, this is an intermediate to expert-level trail with distinct elevation changes. In this area, you'll find a combination of shortgrass prairie and foothills covered with juniper, shrub oak and cacti. From the trailhead, you'll head west, starting on a relatively flat stretch.



For a while, the trail will stay flat, then start to slightly curve around to the southwest. At this point, the terrain becomes rocky, and you will begin to ascend the side of the mesa. About two miles into the trail, you'll make a sharp turn, entering a series of switchbacks as you begin the 600-foot climb up the mesa. When you reach the top of the mesa, you'll begin the one-mile stretch to the summit marker. The trail will lead you to a granite monument that marks the Black Mesa summit and the highest point in the state. The marker was donated by the Jenkin Lloyd Jones family of the Tulsa Tribune. Take in the stunning view from the top, where you can see New Mexico and Colorado in the distance.

**The Dinosaur Tracks** - Tracks left by the allosaurus are located in Carrizo Creek just northeast of the Black Mesa Summit Trail. There is a small dirt road that forks right when heading north from the trail marker which will take you to an overlook of the dry creek. The area where the tracks are found was at one time a swamp and forest area. There are three sets of tracks in the creek bed - the main set, a shallower but similar set about 50 yards upstream, and a smaller and much more eroded set downstream. These tracks are in Jurassic formation - sandstone – and estimated at 150 million years old. This dinosaur, from head to tail, was about 25 - 30 feet long, walked on hind legs (since no front leg prints are visible) and did not drag a tail. Tracks close together indicate walking slowly along a beach or pool, maybe foraging for



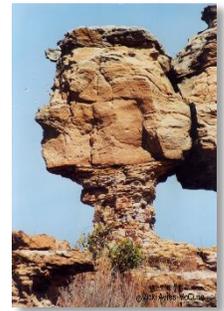
food. If you look closely you can actually see how the dinosaur's weight pushed the mud up to one side on each step. Almost all tracks found worldwide are so eroded you can no longer see the mud pushes.

**Black Mesa Nature Preserve** – The preserve is home to 31 state rare specials (23 plants and eight animals) and four community types. Black Mesa is a birder's paradise any time of the year. Golden Eagle, scaled quail, Black-billed Moggie, Pinyon Jay, and red-tailed hawk are just a few birds that may be observed.

Black bear, bobcat, mountain lion, big horn sheep, mule deer and antelope are some of the mammals that may be seen in the Mesa region. 61 species of butterfly are found in the preserve. The Broad-headed Skink, Prairie Racerunner, Red-lipped Plateau Lizard, Northern Earless Lizard, Eastern Collared Lizard, and Texas Horned Lizard are also indigenous to the area. Perhaps more surprisingly, two types of turtle, the Ornate Box Turtle and the Yellow Mud Turtle have been found in the Black Mesa preserve.

Only one frog is found in this desert habitat, the American bullfrog, but there are six other species amphibians; the Great Plains Narrowmouth Toad, New Mexico Spadefoot, Plains Spadefoot, Woodhouse's Toad, Red-spotted Toad, and the Western Green Toad.

**The Old Maid** - The "Old Maid" is located just north of State Highway 325 east of the The Wedding Party & Black Mesa State Park entrance road, resembling the concept of what a "spinster of years ago" might have looked like from a side profile view. It is made of sandstone.



**The Wedding Party** – The Wedding Party, also known as the Three Sisters, is located just south of State Highway 325 and just east of the Black Mesa State Park entrance road. Formed from erosion out of Dakota sandstone, this rock formation has awed many a site seer. Some say the rock resemble a minister, the bride and groom, with the grouped rock formations behind as the seated wedding guests.

**Black Mesa State Park & Lake Carl Etling** – Lake Carl Etling is located within Black Mesa State Park and normally offers 159 surface acres and 5 miles of shoreline. Trout season is November 1 thru April 30. Carl Etling is operated by the Oklahoma Wildlife Department. The lake is stocked with largemouth bass, flathead catfish, walleye, and smallmouth bass. There are boat ramps on the east and south sides of the lake. No water sport activities are allowed. Camping facilities including hookups, showers, playground, picnic areas, and group facilities are available at the state park. Also hosts a small petrified forest. For camping information, call Black Mesa State Park: 580-426-2222.

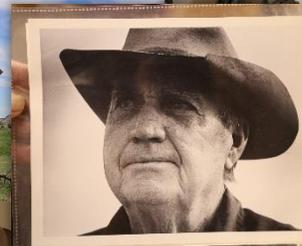
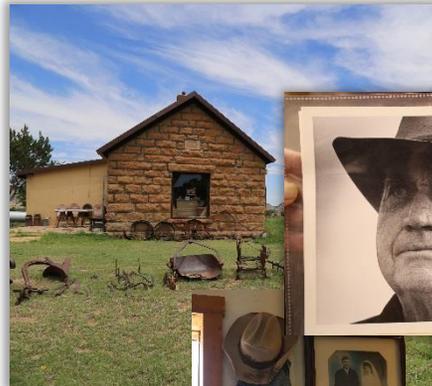
**Santa Fe Trail:** The Santa Fe Trail is thought to be the oldest and longest commercial highway across the Great Plains, from Franklin on the Missouri River east of present Kansas City nearly 800 miles southwest to Santa Fe of today's New Mexico. A direct path across the plains (the Cimarron Route or Cut-off) was used almost exclusively. The Cimarron Route was the road to Santa Fe for wagon traffic from 1822. It was shorter and easier to travel with mule and ox drawn freight wagons and was used into the 1870's, when the railroad built into Colorado. It is widely believed that one of the earliest travelers on the Trail through this area known by name was the Spanish explorer, Don Francisco Vazquez de Coronado, who was searching in 1541 for Quivira. Others known to have followed portions of the trail included numerous scouts, soldiers, trappers and buffalo hunters. It was a trading route of the Kiowa, Ute, Comanche and Apache Tribes.



**Autograph Rock** – (This point is located on private, gated property and permission must be given to access it.) Autograph Rock is a 200 yard long cliff face approximately 20-25 feet high. This area was a regular rest stop for settlers heading west, because of the fresh water from the Cold Springs Creek. While there, settlers would often leave their mark upon the sandstone rock face. There are over 300 engravings in the soft stone, most as early as 1826. A famous name is freight merchant F.B. Delgado from Santa Fe. Native American Petroglyphs are also carved into the rock, as well as the name Coronado.



**Kenton Museum** – The oldest building in Kenton, built in 1902 of native rock for a lady doctor, now serves as the Kenton Museum. Inside are gems of real Native American artifacts, Pioneer tools and antiques nearly 200 years old, as well as many dinosaur artifacts and notes by Truman Tucker, a Kenton rancher who was helping a road crew who discovered dinosaur bones while grading a road in 1930. He continued his quest for archeology through the years and many of his finds are on display in the museum. Bones of prehistoric dinosaurs were discovered in 1931 about eight miles east of Kenton which included an almost complete skeleton of a brontosaurus, thought to be the largest specimen of its kind in existence. It was 80 feet long, 40 feet tall and weighed 40 tons. The find was reported to Dr. J. Willis Stovall, paleontologist of Stovall Museum on the campus of the University of Oklahoma, Norman. In June of 1931, Dr. Stovall, accompanied by two of his OU students and four Kenton men, Truman and Fred Tucker, Wesley Collins and Crompton Tate, began working on excavating the cast of perfectly fossilized material. They led a WPA crew of workmen who had received four months of training under a government program.



Over the next few years the specimens were removed to Norman, Oklahoma, where they stayed packed in old newspapers, unanalyzed, until they were "rediscovered" during the 1980's. Early in 1991, officials of the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History at Norman were attempting to document the creatures which once roamed Oklahoma's prairies and fully catalog the bones. Richard L. Cifelli, assistant curator of the museum, contacted Jack McIntosh, a researcher with Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, one of the world's foremost experts on sauropids, a family of dinosaurs that includes the brontosaurus. McIntosh said the bones are larger than any brontosaurus bones he has seen on skeletal exhibits in New York City, Chicago, Pittsburgh, New Haven and elsewhere. "This is a very large, very nice collection", according to McIntosh. It can be seen on display in Oklahoma City, but Kenton is where it roamed.

**Fun Facts:** Stargazers gather each Fall near Black Mesa for the annual Okie-Tex Star Party with volunteers cooking meals for the astronomers. Registration is due in August.

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Thank you! Miranda Gilbert, Guymon Convention and Tourism Liaison

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