

Nowhere Nevada

June, 2009

We took off with our typical late start but armed with “car” entertainment – audio books, the box of questions, lots of tunes and the essential snacks. I had visions of getting to Mono Lake in time to enjoy a relaxing glass of wine by the lake as the sun went down, but that faded with the sun. But we did enjoy catching dust as we drove through Yosemite and up Tioga pass.

We arrived to Mono Lake in time to catch the last open BBQ for a late meal and quick glass of wine. We were off to bed for a late start on sleep due to an early start in the morning to hike the highest point in Nevada.

Boundary Peak is the highest point in Nevada thanks to the USGS moving the Nevada/California border which was a debate and not settled until 1980 – Mt. Wheeler could have been the highest point leaving Boundary Peak in California. Boundary Peak is located in the middle of nowhere. It is about 2+ hours from Mono Lake and the trailhead is about 15 miles down a rough dirt road.

Due to poor planning, we were in low clearance car so the road was not easy, as it was necessary to maneuver around the ruts and rocks. On several occasions we were forced to drive backwards quite a distance (no turnaround) when we made an incorrect guess at the fork. The few trail guides I was able to find were lacking in sufficient detail and all forgot to mention the number of forks in the road (especially coming back – easy to get in, not so easy to find your way out!). Although patience was tested we successfully found the trailhead.

We started our hike later than we wanted and the clouds loomed, which was something to keep an eye on. The trail started with an easy slope which made me a bit nervous since we only had 3 miles to the summit at 13,143 ft. with 4,140 ft. in elevation to claim. That meant it was going to be a very steep slope and we were not disappointed as I we met 25+% grade.

After a couple of hours on the trail, hiking up a steep grade of scree, I hear a mumble, “One step up and half a step backwards, there must be a life lesson in that.” Yes, I suppose that is true. We mount the northeast ridgeline at 12,100 feet, with just another 1,000 to go!

Snow is everywhere and it’s getting a bit colder, we add layers and continue on. The trail often disappears and we are forced to look for kerns left by the nice hikers before us (the register at the trailhead showed the last hikers were there a week earlier - not a popular trail by California standards). My partner’s toes were getting cold and he was nervous of the slope. I tried to make it easier by creating step holes in the snow so he didn’t have to step in so much of it, but he really just wanted to get off the snow.

Since this was his first mountain there were a few things not quite figured out yet. First, neither one of us knew where his proverbial wall existed, and if there were warning signs or if he would just slam into it. I also wanted to create a positive experience so he wouldn't mind walking up another mountain with me.

As we were scrambling around a rock outcrop on steep snow, we talked about how much further we had to go. I expected that we should be at the top by 2PM, it was that time now, the clouds were really looming and getting darker, and his toes were not warming up. I believed the next rock outcrop was the top and believed it would be another 20 minutes. We agreed to continue and 15 minutes later we were at the top – although not quite confirmed yet since we saw Montgomery Peak and thought that might actually be the top of Boundary Peak, which would require a sketchy traverse.

Neither of us had it in us nor did we have the time since the weather was getting thicker, so I was ecstatic when in a few more steps I saw the register box – WHOO HOO, we were on the top of the highest point in Nevada! Congratulatory hugs, a quick note in the register book, and a few pictures later we were off.

We needed to haul our butts down, since it was starting to snow and the wind was picking up. We wanted off this hill and were ready to celebrate properly with a glass of champagne. The weather luckily held out until we got back to the car and didn't get heavy until we were off the sketchy dirt road, which was very lucky since we crossed so many washes on the way in that we were nervous about possible flashfloods if the rain got harder. As soon as we got onto paved road, we pulled over and watched the storm move across the range as we finally celebrated properly with a toast!