

## Loop 1 – Black Mesa Loop



**Black Mesa State Park (1-1) – 580.426.2222.**

[www.travelok.com/listings/view.profile/id.631](http://www.travelok.com/listings/view.profile/id.631) *Directions: Follow Hwy 325 west and north from Boise City toward Kenton for 20 miles. Turn west at Park sign and follow blacktop for 7 miles to the Park.*

**What to Expect:** Within the eastern half of this loop the well-mowed lawn look of the shortgrass prairie pervades the landscape from horizon to horizon. Dotted with yucca and extensive prairie dog towns the shortgrass prairie is home to a unique set of wildlife species including **burrowing owls, long-billed curlews, swift fox, and ferruginous hawks**. As you travel west within the loop, the gently rolling plains suddenly meet flat-topped mesas capped with black, basaltic lava rising 500' above the surrounding prairie. Systems of deep canyons have been cut by the Cimarron River and its tributaries resulting in numerous ravines and steep slopes which are home to plants and animals closely related to the foothills of the southern Rocky Mountains. The mesas are topped with short-grass prairie but the more gentle slopes of the mesas are covered in a woodland community composed of junipers and pinyon pine. Birders can expect to see **scaled quail, pinyon jay, Chihuahuan raven, curve-billed thrasher, and common bushtit**. Other wildlife include **rock squirrel, mule deer**, and numerous lizards including the “horny toad” a.k.a., **Texas horned lizard**.

**Lodging: Boise City:** Longhorn Motel 580.544.2596; Townsman Motel 580.544.2506; Branding Iron B&B [www.brandingiron.woodpress.com](http://www.brandingiron.woodpress.com) 580.426.2456 or 580.651.0057.

**Black Mesa Area:** Black Mesa B&B 800.821.7204 [www.bmbb1.com](http://www.bmbb1.com); Hitching Post B&B and Guest Ranch 580.261.7413 [www.blackmesacountry.com](http://www.blackmesacountry.com); Hoot Owl Ranch House & Cabins [www.hootowlgustranch.com](http://www.hootowlgustranch.com) 580.261.7789 **Camping/RV:** Black Mesa State Park; Wild Bill's RV in Boise City, 580.517.1001, [www.wildbillsrvtrailerpark.wordpress.com](http://www.wildbillsrvtrailerpark.wordpress.com).

**One-Day Outings:** Fill up your gas tank in Boise City before driving the Loop. Make sure you have water and snacks.

**Black Mesa State Park (1-1):** A very unique State Park situated within a sandstone canyon created by the south fork tributary of Carrizzo Creek. This creek feeds into the Lake Carl Etling which is known for excellent trout fishing in the winter. This park is a highly recognized birdwatching site and has many other wildlife viewing opportunities, including a hiking trail. **See directions above.**

**Black Mesa Nature Preserve Trail (1-2):** At 4,973 feet, Black Mesa, formed 30 million years ago, is the highest point in Oklahoma and it extends for 45 miles into New Mexico and Colorado. The highest point can only be reached by a fairly challenging, 4.2 mile hiking trail (~ 9 miles round trip) and is marked by a granite monument. Allow at least four hours to walk from the parking area to the top of the mesa and back. There is a vault toilet located on the preserve. Camping is not allowed. Be sure to bring plenty of water and avoid hiking during the hottest part of the day. **Directions from Boise City:** Follow Hwy 325 west 35 miles, toward Kenton, to a blacktop road marked "Colorado" and turn north (right). Drive five miles to the preserve parking area on the west side of the road.

**Birding Route:** Fill up your gas tank and plan on a 30-mile drive from Boise City to the first early morning stop at the overlook on the south side of the **Black Mesa State Park (1-1)** (See directions above.) Next drive down into the Park and walk along the edges of Carrizzo Creek for riparian birds. Take road through Park to Lake Carl Etling. Next, drive to the trailhead of **Black Mesa Nature Preserve (1-2)** (directions above) and walk a little way along the Trail. From Kenton drive 8 miles east on Hwy 325 and turn north (left) onto gravel road. Travel about a mile until you come to **Watson's Crossing (1-3)**, a concrete low-water crossing. Travel south back to Hwy 325 and turn left. Travel south for 12 miles where the highway takes a sharp turn to the left. Take next right and continue south on blacktop road and enjoy the shortgrass prairie views. At the junction of Hwy 412, turn right on the Hwy to **Felt (1-4)** and follow signs to the picnic area. This is part of the **Rita Blanca National Grassland**. The trees at this stop attract many birds from the surrounding prairie. Restrooms are available. Good place for a picnic lunch. Take Hwy 412 east back to Boise City. Once in town go to the northeast corner of the Dairy Queen parking lot to look out over the **Boise City Lagoons (1-5)**. Great place for waterfowl and shorebirds year-round.

**Off the Beaten Trail: Both of these scenic routes should only be driven during good weather as wet conditions make these roads very slippery. A high-clearance vehicle is strongly recommended.**

**(1-6) Cimarron Scenic Route** traverses 32 miles of pinyon pine and juniper covered mesas and canyons. Start at **Watson's Crossing (1-3)** go north on gravel road winding eastward through pristine prairie. Follow the Trail signs to Hwy 287, turn right and travel south for Boise City. **Black Mesa Draw Scenic Route (1-7)** traverses 22 miles of outstanding shortgrass prairie within several wide draws occurring between mesas. Travel north out of Boise City on Hwy 287 for 11 ½ miles and turn east (right) onto gravel road. Follow the Trail signs that will take you into the town of Keyes.

