

Loop 12– Quartz Mountain Loop



Quartz Mountain Nature Park (12-1): 580.563.2238;

www.quartzmountain.org;

Directions: Take Hwy 283 north out of the city of Altus to SHwy 44 then turn onto Hwy 44A.

What to Expect: The landscape in this Loop exhibits an intricate pattern of mixed-grass plains and shinnery oak grassland intermingled with the dominant mesquite grassland plains. Here within the open canopy of the short and extremely thorny mesquite trees can be found the **verdin**, the only bird restricted to mesquite grasslands. The seed pods of this important shrub are consumed by many species of wildlife including **thirteen-lined ground squirrel, kangaroo rat, scaled quail** and **ladder-backed woodpecker**. This area in southwest Oklahoma is drained by the Red River and its tributaries which have such high salinity content that only two species of fish are present: Red River pupfish and plains killifish. Most of the landscape appears as gently rolling plains but in the northeast part of the Loop, the western arm of the Wichita Mountains rises spectacularly above the plain in what appears to be squared boulders stacked upon one another. These mountains may be considered short (300 to 800 feet above the plain) but they are 250 million years old which makes this mountain range one of the oldest in the United States – not to mention extremely fun to explore!

Lodging: Altus: (8) motels, (1) B&B, www.altuschamber.com, 580.482.0210; **Erick:** (3) motels, Erick Chamber of Commerce, <http://erickchamber.com>, 580.526.3505; **Resort Lodge & Cabins:** www.quartzmountainresort.com, 877.999.5567. **Camping:** Great Plains State Park – www.oklahomaparks.com. 580.569.2032; Quartz Mountain Nature Park (contact information above).

One-Day Outings: Fill up your gas tank and pack a picnic lunch (grocery stores in Altus, Mangum, Erick, Quartz Mountain [seasonal] and Great Plains State Park [seasonal]).

Start your day at **Quartz Mountain Nature Park (12-1)** with a visit to the Nature Center and let the Naturalist on duty help you plan your day. With at least 13 different trails with diverse challenge levels there are many opportunities to explore this ancient mountain. Take a picnic lunch with you or eat at the Lodge's Sundance Café.

Great Plains State Park (12-3) offers an opportunity to hike the 1 ½ mile Granite Trail System through granite boulder fields of this rugged and beautiful area. Hike in the morning and picnic within the Park. In the afternoon enjoy the Camp Radziminski Nature Trail that provides an overlook to Old Snyder Lake. Enjoy the fishing and boating opportunities.

Birding Route: Start your early morning stop at the beginning of any of the trails at **Quartz Mountain Nature Park (12-1)** (listen for the echoing song of the **Canyon Wren**). Next, leisurely drive the **Altus-Lugert Northshore Road (12-2)** to Hwy 9. Go west and as you near the town of Granite at the junction of Hwy 6, turn north and follow sign to **Headquarters Mountain Hiking Trail and Butterfly Garden (12-4)**. At the base of Headquarters Mountain, enjoy the wildflower and butterfly garden. The site has interpretive signage for the butterfly garden and for the two trails that provide a wonderful vista of the mountains. Next, go south on Hwy 6 to Hwy 283, then west to Mangum for a restroom break and snack. Pack a picnic lunch in Mangum and then follow the Trail signs west 11 miles on Hwy 9, then north 6 miles on CR N184 and turn west on county road. Follow this dirt road (travel in good weather only) through the southern area of **Sandy Sanders WMA (12-7)**. At Hwy 30, turn south and follow Trail signs to **Lake Hall (12-6)** and take the well-maintained gravel roads around the east side of the Lake. For a restroom break drive 9 miles south to Hollis or return to Altus and picnic at **Altus City Reservoir (12-9)**. Take one of the two routes to **Great Plains State Park (12-3)**. If your vehicle has high clearance and its good weather, drive the roads in **Mountain Park WMA (12-8)** and get into the mesquite woodland for **ladder-backed** and **golden-fronted woodpeckers** and the **verdin**.

Off the Beaten Trail: To really experience the Great Plains consider spending the day at **Sandy Sanders WMA (12-7)**. **Note:** High clearance vehicle is necessary and 4-wheel drive is strongly recommended. A map of the area can be printed off of the OK Dept. of Wildlife Conservation's website: www.wildlifedepartment.com. From rolling plains to rugged terrain, spring-fed creeks to constructed ponds this area is a remarkable example of the diversity of the Great Plains. To experience the mesquite grassland, drive **Mountain Park WMA (12-8)** on the north side of Tom Steed Lake. A map can be printed off from ODWC's website (website listed above).