

GMUG – Hightower Mountain hike trip report – 08/11/2017

Who: Janice Shepherd (and 5 other hikers)

Where: FS 265 to top of Hightower Mountain

Trip Stats: 6.3 miles 4 ½ hours

Observations:

Parking or not parking: The GMUG maps (2015 Motor Vehicle map and the 2015 Zoomable Recreation Map) show a trailhead across from FS 268 “Owens Creek” with a TH. There is a sign on FS 265 indicating Trailhead Parking. But when we parked we spotted a sign indicating that the corral may be in active use from June thru Oct and parking must be 100 feet away. There is no cleared spot 100 feet away. **A better parking lot is needed here to match the signs and the maps.** 272996 4346071 We stayed out of the loop because while it is 100 feet away, it would appear to be there for trailer turning.

Hightower Mtn. is the **5th highest ranked mountain in Mesa County.** So hiking to the top has some appeal. Also it is not completely covered in forests so the **views on top are great.**

No water flowing in Owens Creek but some water in small ponds made with man-made dams.

A series of cattle trails and old tracks lead to the top – making a perfect hike track up the mountain. **A fun challenge.**

Wildflowers: Lots of cone flowers, towering lousewort, blue flax, Indian paintbrush

Wildlife: Mountain bluebirds, bear scat, deer prints.

What appears to be a cow dust wallow is **eroding a sloping section** of the pasture. 273256 4347253 See photo. Repeated use of the same trail by cattle has led to **deep trenches and braiding.** The trail follows the slope straight up hill, so is not very sustainable.

Pond has water present and at least one salamander seen in the water. 272396 4349045 See photo.

Fence around an **exclusion area has been trampled and bent.** 272625 4349036 See photos.

Motorized use likely used to place salt block high up slope above pond – placed in middle of trail and thus reinforcing repeated use of trail. 272454 4349410

Two carsonite signs found well away from any official recreation route. 272498 4349241 and 272494 4349250. The first was broken at the ground (run over??) the 2nd is intact but not in the ground. We moved the 2nd to be beside first. See photos.

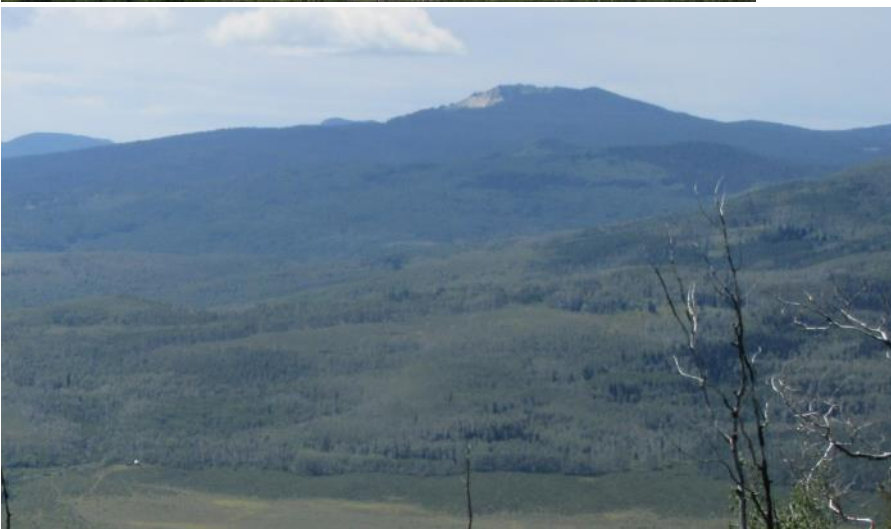
It was fun to see both Chalk Mountain of Mesa County and Chalk Mountain of Delta County from the same view point, especially since both have been climbed by some members of our group.

Two 1937 survey markers are at top of the mountain. A survey marker from 1950s is by the corral at the parking area.

A **large slide area** in White River National Forest visible from summit – slide area: 13S 276685 4349646 See photo. Visible in Google Earth.

Saw no one else during the 4 ½ hour outing until we returned to FS 265. It was **a great hike**, definitely worthwhile coming back to. Many of our group asked me to organize more hikes in this area, especially once the **aspen colors** come on. Problem – **hunting season means hikers need to stay on trails more, but there are no non-motorized trails in this area.**

Views on the way up. Looking South. West Elks in the distance.



Chalk Mountain of Delta County. We also had a good view of Chalk Mountain of Mesa County.



Views in many different directions at the top. This one is looking northwest.



Eroding dust wallow. 273256 4347253



Pond with water present. At least one salamander spotted in water. At: 272396 4349045



Smashed "closed to motorized" sign – other side has direction arrow. Broken at ground level. 272498 4349241. 2nd sign found 30 feet away on ground but intact. Left by this one.



Large slide area in White River Ntl Forest visible from summit.



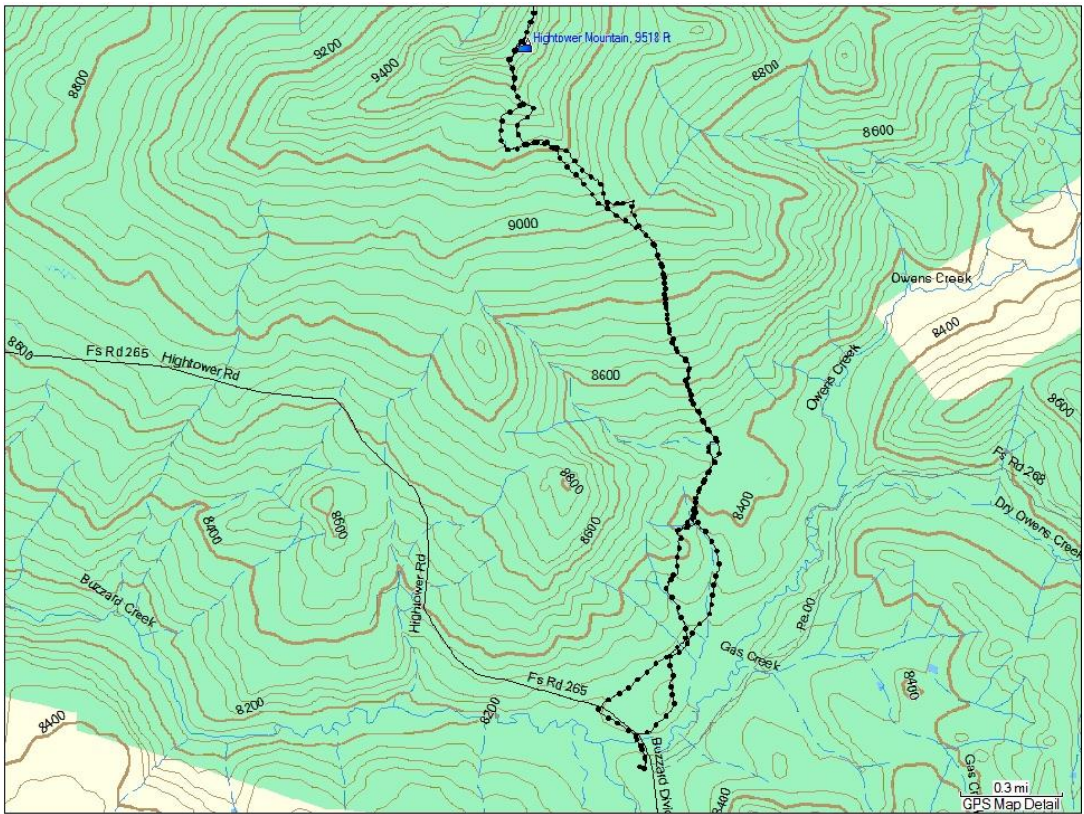
Fun to find old survey markers. 1937.



Fence around enclosure has been bent over and trampled. 272625 4349036



Fence is no longer excluding cattle.



Hiking track. We crossed #524 by the power line. We saw no one during our hike.

