

*Entry from United States Board on Geographic Names Quarterly Review List  
# 397, February 20, 2008*

**Mount Crestone:** summit; elevation 4,317 m (14,165 ft); in Rio Grande National Forest, in the Sangre de Cristo Range, 8 km (5 mi) E of the community of Crestone; named in association with the nearby community of Crestone; Saguache County, Colorado; 37°58'47"N, 105°36'09"W; USGS map – Crestone Peak 1:24,000; Not: Frustum Peak, Haystack Baldy, Kit Carson Mountain (BGN 1970), Kit Carson Peak (BGN 1906).

Proposal: to change a name to eliminate confusion and to replace a name believed by some to be objectionable

Map: USGS Crestone Peak 1:24,000

Proponent: Keno Menechino; Crestone, CO

Administrative area: Great Sand Dunes National Park

Previous BGN Action: Kit Carson Mountain (BGN 1970), Kit Carson Peak (BGN 1906)

Names associated with feature:

GNIS: Kit Carson Mountain (FID 204778)

Local Usage: Kit Carson Mountain (hikers, mountain climbers)

Published: Kit Carson Mountain (USGS 1967, 1982, 1988; peakbagger.com)

Case Summary:

This proposal is to change officially the name of Kit Carson Mountain to Mount Crestone. The summit in question has an elevation of 4,318 m (14,165 ft) and is located in the Sangre de Cristo Range in western Saguache County. It also lies within the Rio Grande National Forest. The proponent of the name change, who is a resident of the nearby community of Crestone and a local newspaper reporter, states that local residents have long felt the existing name is confusing because most of them refer to the peak as Crestone Peak, while the name Kit Carson Mountain refers to a different summit “behind Crestone Peak.” He claims the U.S. Geological Survey “got this all wrong years ago and never reversed the mistake.” He adds, “The people of this town are not happy with the wrong names being used and refuse to call them what they officially are today. The current Kit Carson Mountain is the main mountain above town, which can be viewed from all over town (as the official Crestone Peak cannot be). Crestone was named after this mountain.” He adds, “When out of town hikers and mountain climbers visit and ask locals about conditions and terrain up on Kit Carson Mountain, they are instead told about conditions and terrain up on Crestone Peak, and vice versa. The terrain on these two mountains [is] a bit different... [and] wrong info in this case can kill.”

Along with his application, the proponent provided an undated Forest Service sketch map that he notes shows “Crestone Pk.” in the foreground at an elevation of 14,291 feet, with “Kit Carson Mt.” behind at 14,100 feet. Because of the widespread use of the name Crestone in the area, he suggests the new name for Kit Carson Mountain should be Mount Crestone rather than Crestone Peak, as that name already applies to another summit just one mile further to the southwest. It should also be noted that Crestone Peak and Crestone Needle are two of the named summits that collectively make up Crestone Peaks. Each of these three names was the subject of a 1969 BGN decision, which was made in order to clarify the singular vs. plural forms of the various names in the area.

The summit now proposed to be renamed from Kit Carson Mountain to Mount Crestone was originally named Kit Carson Peak in a 1906 BGN decision, but was given its present name in 1970. The 1970 decision made clear that the name applied to the entire mile-long mountain and not just to one of its peaks. Finally, two of the three most prominent peaks atop Kit Carson Mountain have been the subject of more recent BGN decisions: Challenger Point was named in 1985 and Columbia Point in 2003 (a third proposal, to name a sub-peak Galaxy Peak, was recently withdrawn). The proponent is also asking that the highest peak atop the proposed “Mount Crestone” should be named Tranquility Peak (q.v.); this peak does not currently have an official name of its own. The proponent also cites another reason why he believes the name Kit Carson Mountain should be eliminated; the individual for whom the summit and nine other features in the State were named is not popular in the community of Crestone. He notes, “They feel that Kit Carson was a war criminal, not a war hero. The Native Americans, Buddhists and Hindus in the area seem very united on this, and they represent a large group of the population.”

Included in the 1969 Crestone Peak case file is a letter, dated 1947, from the Colorado Mountain Club (CMC) discussing a rumor they’d heard, via the Forest Service, that “a resident of the town of Crestone” wanted to rename Kit Carson Peak to Crestone Peak, and that the CMC wished to go on record strongly opposing the idea. They noted, “We believe that [t]here are more mountaineers who know the entire range rather than a small group of local residents who know only the peak nearest to them.” In 1951, another letter was received, also from the CMC and also opposing any efforts to change the name of Crestone Peak (the 14,294 foot peak to the south) to Kit Carson Peak. A petition signed by members of the Sangre de Cristo Club opposing the latter idea was also included, as were several letters from local residents, schoolchildren, and the San Luis Valley Travel Association. In both cases, the BGN responded that no such proposals had been received but that all parties would be notified if anything was submitted. It appears nothing further came of either of the suggestions.

More recent research conducted by an archivist with the Colorado Mountain Club reveals that the 1878 Wheeler Survey referred to the “unnamed” peak by the descriptive name Frustum Peak. The word “frustum” refers to “a pyramid with the top chopped off,” which the author notes could refer to Kit Carson Mountain but more likely to Humboldt Peak.