

Great Sand Dunes

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Great Sand Dunes
National Park and Preserve



Hiking in Great Sand Dunes National Preserve

The Mountain Watershed of the Great Sand Dunes

Know Before You Go

Safety in the wilderness is your responsibility. Before you go:

- Be prepared and self sufficient. Take maps, water, sun protection, food, layered clothing, and first aid kit.
- Make sure someone at home knows where you're going and when you'll be back. Instruct your contact to call our area-wide dispatch at (719) 589-5807 if you don't return as planned.
- Watch for weather changes. Seek shelter when lightning is present.
- Bears and mountain lions frequent the area! Hang your food, trash, and toiletries at least 10' above the ground and 4' horizontally from the tree trunk, or use bear proof containers. Secure your food, trash, and toiletries whenever it is not in use. Ask for the free information sheet on bears and mountain lions to learn more about preventing a dangerous encounter.



Hikers at Music Pass

Medano Lake (11,518')

3.5 miles one way

1900' elevation gain

Moderately easy for first two miles; then moderately steep

The trail begins at 9600', ½ mile west of Medano Pass in a stand of spruce and fir trees, then rises as it follows Medano Creek to Medano Lake. Access the trailhead from the Medano Primitive Road (4WD required), which begins near the entrance to Pinyon Flats Campground or from the east via Highway 69 and USFS road #559.

the forest with few views until you reach Medano Lake. The dunes can be seen by hiking to the ridge lines above the lake. Summer is usually the best time for hiking; snow may block the trail at least through May. Fishing is catch and release *only* in Medano Creek. Rio Grande Cutthroat, a species of special concern, has been reintroduced to this watershed.

This popular trail gradually rises through

Mosca Pass (9,737')

3.5 miles one way

1480' elevation gain

Moderately easy

The lower end of the trail begins at the Montville Trailhead, just north of the Great Sand Dunes National Park Visitor Center at an elevation of 8240'. Vehicles can access the top of Mosca Pass and the upper end of the trail from the east side of the Sangre de Cristos via Highway 69 and USFS roads #580 and #583.

road, in use in the 1870s and early 1900s. The road washed out completely in 1911. Look for the remains of a Model A truck in the aspens below the pass.

The trail leaves from the south side of the Montville Nature Trail loop, passing through forests and subalpine meadows. You will follow the route of an old American Indian trail, and the Mosca Pass toll

Notice how summer temperatures change as the trail rises to the pass. This is a good afternoon hike for those wanting to avoid the midday heat of the dunes. Mosca Creek flows year round near most of the trail; bears frequent this habitat. Wildflowers bloom along the trail in summer months, and aspens color the hillsides with gold in late September.

Music Pass (11,380')

3.5 miles and 2000' elevation gain from lower parking lot

1 mile and 700' elevation gain from the upper parking lot (high clearance 4WD only)

Steep

Music Pass offers superb views of the glacially carved Upper Sand Creek Basin, ringed by 13,000' peaks, as well as the Wet Mountain Valley to the east. The pass also accesses the Sand Creek Lakes Trail and the Little Sand Creek Lakes Trail (see back).

The trailhead for Music Pass is accessed from Highway 69, 4.5 miles south of Westcliffe. Turn off Highway 69 to the west at the sign for Music Pass and South Colony Lakes Trailhead. At the "T" junction turn left onto South Colony Road. At the end of the ranch fence on the right,

you'll see another sign for Music Pass. Driving time to the Music Pass trailhead from the national park Visitor Center is about 2.5 hours.

2WD drivers should park where the Rainbow Trail crosses Music Pass Road; 4WD drivers may drive another 2.5 rough miles to the end of the road. Watch for hikers and horseback riders on this stretch. From the pass there are views into the Upper Sand Creek Basin, especially spectacular in early summer when snowfields grace the 13,000' peaks and wildflowers color meadows and tundra.

<p>Sand Creek Lakes</p> <p>4 to 6 miles one way</p> <p>2000' elevation change</p> <p>Moderate difficulty</p>	<p>This spectacular area is most easily accessed from Music Pass on the east side of the Sangre de Cristo range. See Music Pass entry for driving and hiking instructions to the pass.</p> <p>As a popular destination for hiking, horseback riding, and fishing, trailhead parking can be tight on summer weekends. Always purify water taken from natural sources, and store your food so it is safe from bears. Please follow Leave No Trace guidelines to protect this area.</p> <p>From Music Pass, the trail descends steadily into the Upper Sand Creek drainage. Less than 1 mile from the pass, there is a trail junction; turn right (northwest) for the lakes.</p> <p>Heading north from the junction, the trail</p>	<p>crosses Sand Creek, then forks again. Turn left to reach the lower lake (.6 mile) or right to reach the upper lake (1 mile). Note: older maps do not reflect recent trail rerouting. The very steep sided, pointed peak is Tijeras Peak (elev. 13,604'). To its right are Music Mountain, 13,355', and Milwaukee Peak, 13,522. Climbing routes for the peaks in this basin are found in <i>The Essential Guide to Great Sand Dunes</i>, available at the Visitor Center.</p> <p>For those who want a much longer hike to these lakes via the dunes, there is the option of accessing the Upper Sand Creek Basin via the Sand Ramp Trail. Inquire at the Visitor Center for current conditions, backpacking permits, and information.</p>
<p>Little Sand Creek Lakes</p> <p>2.5 miles one way from junction with Sand Creek Trail</p> <p>2320' elevation gain</p> <p>Very rough, steep trail; good route-finding ability needed.</p>	<p>This trail is accessed from Music Pass and the Sand Creek Trail, described above. Due to its length and difficulty, it is best done as part of a backpacking trip into the Upper Sand Creek Basin. The Little Sand Creek Lakes route begins at its junction with the Sand Creek Trail and ends in a high glaciated valley containing several small lakes. After the trail reaches the</p>	<p>glacier-carved valley, it disappears. To reach any of the lakes one must navigate an unmarked route paralleling the stream leading to the lake. This hike shows the dramatic earth-shaping effects of glaciers. The north side of the ridge was carved by glaciers, while the more gentle, south side of the ridge was not affected by them.</p>
<p>Carbonate Peak and Revelation Point</p> <p>Routes only; no established trails</p> <p>About 4 miles one way</p> <p>About 4200' elevation gain</p> <p>Difficult and strenuous</p>	<p>The rounded bald peak visible directly east of the Visitor Center is the shoulder of 12,200' Carbonate Peak. The slightly lower grassy knoll to the north of Carbonate Peak is locally known as Revelation Point, and offers tremendous views of the dunefield and the valley floor. This hike is not for beginners; fitness and route-finding is required. From the Visitor Center, take the small trail across the road into Morris Gulch. When the trail disappears, bushwhack left up the slope to Revelation Point. From there, note the curving ridge</p>	<p>line rising to the south -you may follow it all the way to the summit of Carbonate Peak. Dense timber and high elevation makes this a challenging hike. Upon descending, carefully sight Revelation Point before dropping into the trees; it is very easy to miss the ridge going down and end up in the thick forests of upper Morris Gulch. Please check with a ranger at the Visitor Center before hiking to clarify the route and conditions.</p>
<p>Minimum Impact Camping and Hiking</p>	<p>Most of Great Sand Dunes National Preserve is part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. Please do your part to keep this area wild and pristine by following these and other Leave No Trace guidelines:</p> <p>Keep wildlife wild! Do not feed wildlife, including birds. Feeding them is dangerous for you and unhealthy for them.</p> <p>All pets must be leashed.</p> <p>Bury human waste at least 6 inches deep and 100 feet from water. Pack out toilet paper.</p> <p>Use stoves for cooking whenever possible. If you must build fires, collect only dead and down firewood less than 4" in diameter. Build fires only in existing fire rings below timberline. (Fires are not permitted in the national park backcountry). Camping and fires are not permitted above</p>	<p>timberline.</p> <p>Pack out all trash and burned refuse.</p> <p>Bears frequent this area! Hang your food and toiletries at least 10 feet above the ground and 4 feet horizontally from the tree trunk, or use bear-proof containers. Secure your food whenever it is not in use.</p> <p>Pack animals are prohibited within 300 feet of lakes. Picket them in an open meadow. Don't allow them to damage trees or paw around tree trunks.</p> <p>Pack only weed-free hay, grain, or processed pellets into the preserve for pack animal feed.</p> <p>No bicycles or motorized vehicles are permitted on hiking trails.</p>