



## Backcountry Camping



Spend a night under the twinkling stars of the vast New Mexico skies surrounded by the world's largest gypsum dunefield. White Sands National Monument offers backpackers the opportunity to enjoy a night camping on the white sands and listening to the nocturnal activities of the animals that make their home in this unique ecosystem.

### General Information

Backcountry camping is the only type of camping that is permitted at White Sands National Monument. Car camping and RV camping is not allowed. Due to the hiking distance required, those who are not prepared for backpacking may want to consider other camping options in the area. Ask at the visitor center for a brochure about area campgrounds.

To camp, you must obtain a permit in person at the visitor center. No advance reservations are accepted. A specific campsite will be assigned when the permit is issued. Groups are limited to no more than six people per site. Larger groups should contact the monument to make other arrangements at least two weeks in advance. There is a cut-off time for issuing backcountry camping permits that varies throughout the year. Please call (575)479 -6124, ext. 236 to inquire about specific times.

There are 10 primitive backcountry sites

along the two-mile (3.5 km) trail. These sites are on a first-come, first-served basis. The earlier you arrive, the better chance you have of obtaining a site.

Camping in the dunes requires you to hike up and over steep dunes and loose sand. These sites are primitive and do not have any shade or amenities. The nearest restroom is at the trailhead approximately one mile (1.6 km) away from each site.

Sites do not have any water. The last place to fill up your water containers is at the visitor center, which is located six miles (10 km) from the backcountry camping trail parking lot.

At least one gallon (4 liters) of water is recommended per person per day. It is vital that you take enough water to last you through the day and overnight. You will not be able to access water during the night.

### Fees

Campers are required to pay non-refundable monument entrance and camping fees. There is a 50% discount on camping fees for holders of the Access and Senior Interagency passes

only. The discount is only valid for the cardholder. It does not apply to other campers in the group. All fees are collected at the fee station at the beginning of the Dunes Drive.

### Weather

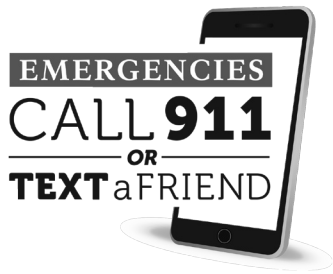
Visitors need to be prepared for a variety of weather conditions, which can change quickly. During the summer months, daytime temperatures often exceed 100°F (38°C) and drop to approximately 65°F (18°C) at night. In winter, nighttime temperatures frequently

drop below freezing. The daily temperature difference can vary from 30°F to 60°F (-1°C to 15°C), especially after the sun sets. Spring is usually very windy. During the summer, thunderstorms can move rapidly into the area. Tents do not protect you from lightning.

## Planning and Preparation

The following is a list of highly recommended items for camping at White Sands National Monument:

1. Bring clothing that can provide comfort in a variety of weather conditions. A wide-brimmed hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses are essential for hiking and cutting down on the harsh glare of the sun from the bright white sand.
2. A minimum of one gallon (4 liters) of water per person, per day. Fill containers at the visitor center. There is no water available in the dunefield.
3. Bring high-energy food and snacks.
4. Open campfires are NOT permitted in the dunes. Small camp stoves are allowed.
5. We are surrounded by an active missile range. From time to time, debris from missile tests falls into the monument and is buried by sand. If you see any strange objects, please do not touch them. Make a note of their location and tell a ranger.



6. There are no restrooms in the backcountry area. Bury human waste three to six inches (7cm -15cm) and pack out all trash including toilet paper. Consider using a human waste disposal bag to pack out human waste.
7. Bring a compass, flashlight, headlamp, whistle, mirror, and first-aid kit. Carry a park map and compass. Orient yourself to landmarks such as mountains or a water tower. GPS can be unreliable here.
8. Make sure your cell phone is fully-charged when you arrive at the monument and bring a portable charger. There are no outlets for electricity available to charge cell phones or other electronics at the monument.
9. Conserving your cell phone battery for emergencies could mean life or death. In an emergency, call 911 first. Data and cellular strength can vary drastically in the monument. If you are unable to make a call, you may still be able to text a friend who can call the 911 for help.

## Leave No Trace

In addition to following camping and general monument regulations, campers and hikers are asked to follow the principles of Leave No Trace, a minimum impact skills program, designed to help protect the environment. Here are some of the key principles that will help preserve White Sands for generations to come:

1. Hike on the open sand along the edge of the dunes. Avoid the fragile bumpy soil (biological soil crust) in between dunes. When camping restrict your movement in these areas.
2. All trash must be packed out, including toilet paper. Use dumpster

located at the trailhead to dispose of all trash.

3. Respect wildlife. Do not follow or harass animals. Properly store your food and trash in a ziplock bag in your backpack.
4. Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience. Let nature's sound prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises.
5. Remember everything is protected in a national park. It is unlawful to remove sand or other objects, pick or damage plants, or disturb wildlife.



Scan for more information on biological soils

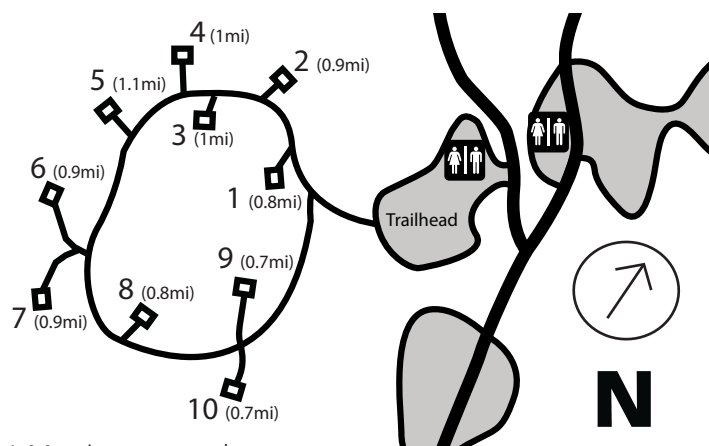
## Finding Your Campsite

The backcountry camping trail is marked by orange trail markers with a spade symbol. Always follow trail markers. If you cannot see the next marker, do not continue. Return to your car and report the missing trail markers to a ranger. To assist you in locating your site, a map is posted at the trail head and on the back of your permit.

Campsites are marked with orange trail markers that have a tent symbol and the site number. Tents must be placed within five feet (1.5 m) of this marker. Camp only in your designated site and keep your permit with you at all times. For your safety, you must be in your campsite and set up by dark. Remember, it is easy to become disoriented in the dunes after dark, so don't stray far from your campsite. Have fun and be safe!



Backcountry camping and site trail markers.



\* Map is not to scale  
\*\* Trash dumpster is available at trailhead



Backcountry camping trail marker.



Follow arrows to campsite.



Camp within 5 (1.5 m) feet of this marker.