



Medano Pass Primitive Road Guide

The Medano Pass Primitive Road is a rough 22 mile road connecting Great Sand Dunes with the Wet Mountain Valley and Colorado State Highway 69. Passable only in the warmer months and only with high-clearance 4-wheel drive vehicles, it gives access to Medano Pass (elevation 10,040') and Great Sand Dunes National Preserve. This road crosses areas of deep sand, traverses Medano Creek nine times, and passes through excellent habitat for bighorn sheep. Average driving time for the entire primitive road is about 2.5 - 3 hours. See map on reverse.

Reduce tire pressure to about 20 pounds if the sand is dry and soft. A free air station is available near the south entrance to the road. If you reduce pressure, you will need to reinflate using your own air compressor before driving over rocks in Medano Canyon. *It is not advised to drive over rocky sections of Medano Canyon with low pressure; wheel damage may occur.* Drive through creek crossings *slowly* to avoid drowning your engine.

The road passes through sections of forest that were burned in a wildfire in 2010. Burned, standing trees may fall at any time, especially during wind.

Mileage Chart (from junction with paved road near Piñon Flats campground)

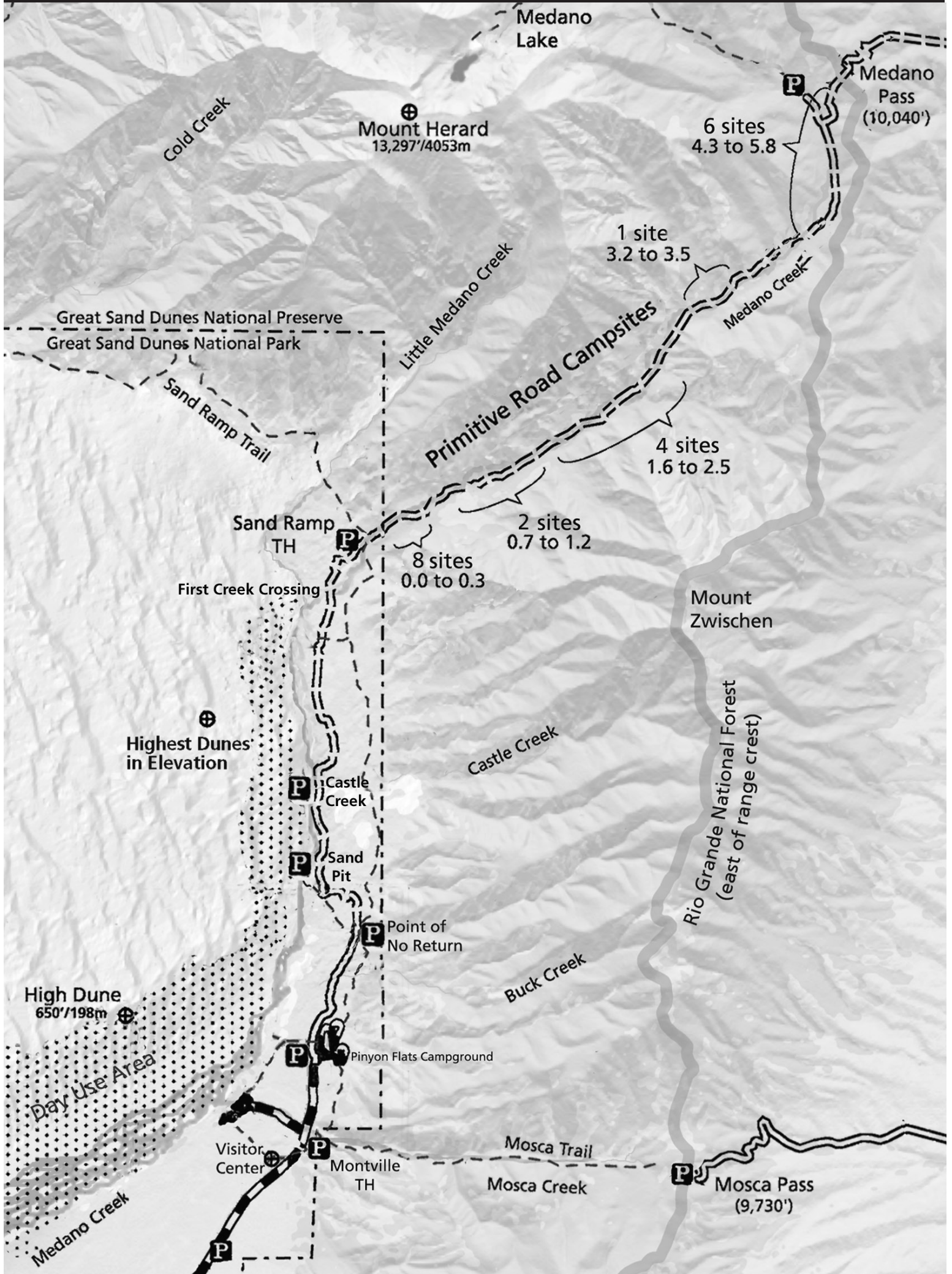
Set your odometer to zero at the beginning of the primitive road to follow along with this guide.

0.0	End of Paved Road	Start of Medano Pass Primitive Road
0.2	Garden Creek	Flows until mid-summer. Campground on right.
0.5	Buck Creek	Intermittent stream.
1.0	Sawmill Creek	Flows until mid-summer. ♿ camp nearby, free permit required.
1.1	Point of No Return	4WD vehicles ONLY past this point. Sand Ramp Trail access.
1.4	Ponderosa Point	Picnic area. View of Mt. Herard (13,297') and dunes.
1.8	Sand Pit	DEEP SAND! Reduce tire pressure to about 20 lbs. if sand is soft
2.6	Castle Creek	Picnic area/Pit Toilet. Park only in designated areas.
3.3	Horse Canyon	Views of eastern dunes and foothills.
4.5	1st (Shockey's) Crossing	Medano Creek. Spring runoff can be very deep! Use caution.
4.6	Old Fire Road	Closed to vehicles. 1/2 mile walk to ridge with good views.
5.0	Sand Ramp Trail	Trail crosses road. Overnight backpacking permit required.
5.2	Park/Preserve Boundary	Roadside campsites begin, numbered by mileage from boundary. 8 campsites over next 0.3 mile. See map on back.
5.6	Medano Creek crossing	2nd crossing of Medano Creek.
5.9	More Campsites	2 campsites over next 0.5 mile. See map on back.
6.1	Medano Creek crossing	3rd crossing. Look for bighorn sheep in meadows and cliffs.
6.2	Herard Homestead site	Herard family's 1870s homestead site (only foundation remains).
6.4	Medano Creek crossing	4th crossing.
6.8	Medano Creek crossing	5th crossing. 4 campsites over next 0.9 mile. See map on back.
6.9	Tight squeeze	Narrow roadway, boulders on roadsides. Use caution!
6.4	Medano Creek crossing	6th crossing.
7.7	Creek crossing	Tributary creek.
7.8	Two alternatives	Left side usually best.
7.9	Medano Creek crossing	7th creek crossing. Road steeper ahead.
8.4	More campsites	1 campsite within next 0.3 mile.
8.6	Creek crossing	Tributary creek.
8.8	Beaver dams	Long meadows, marsh, and beaver dams.
9.0	Three cabins	Burned in the 2010 wildfire.
9.5	More campsites	6 campsites over next 1.5 miles.
9.6	Medano Creek crossing	8th crossing of Medano Creek.
10.6	Creek crossing	Tributary creek.
10.7	Medano Lake Trailhead	Trailhead at end of short spur road.
11.0	Irrigation ditch	Steep section ahead.
11.2	Medano Pass	Elevation 10,040' above sea level.

Important Leave No Trace Backcountry Regulations for Medano Pass

- Camping is permitted in designated, marked sites *only in the national preserve*. No permits are necessary.
- Tents must be located within 40 feet of the front of the bear box at each site.
- Pets must be leashed or restrained at all times.
- Fires only in existing fire rings; put out completely with water. Gather dead and down firewood 4" or less diameter.
- No off-road driving. Vehicles must be highway-legal in Colorado. Park only in designated campsites or parking areas.
- Secure food, coolers, toiletries, and trash from black bears. Lock them in the bear boxes provided at most sites.
- All trash, including orange peels, egg shells and toilet paper, must be removed. Bury human waste 6" deep.

Medano Pass Primitive Road Map



0 1 2 3 4 5 Miles

0 1 2 3 4 5 Kilometers

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Updated April 2015