



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.

Fees

There is a camping fee of \$3 per person per night (ages 16 & older). Children (15 & under) are \$1.50 per person per night. There is no discount for pass holders.

The camping fee is in addition to the park entrance fee of \$3 per person (ages 16 & older). All fees are collected at the entrance station at the beginning of the Dunes Drive.

Campsites

A permit is required for backcountry camping. Campers must register in person at the visitor center at least 10 minutes before visitor center closes. After that permits are available at the entrance station. No advance reservations are accepted. A specific campsite will be assigned when the permit is issued.

There are 10 sites available on a first come, first serve basis. Groups are limited to no more than six people per site. Larger groups should contact the monument to make other arrangements. The sites are primitive with no water or toilet facilities. However, a portable restroom is provided at the trailhead parking area. The trailhead and parking area are located seven miles from the visitor center. The trail is a two-mile loop

marked by wooden posts. The first campsites are approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the trailhead. To assist you in locating your site, a map is posted at the trailhead and on the back of your permit. Sites are marked by brown posts with a tent symbol and the site number. Tents must be placed within five feet of this post. 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.

RV or car camping is not available in the monument. Due to the hiking distance required, people with small children or who are not prepared for backpacking may want to consider other camping options in the area. Ask at the visitor center desk for a handout listing area campgrounds.

Plan Ahead and Prepare

Visitors need to be prepared for a variety of weather conditions, which can change quickly. During the summer months, daytime temperatures can exceed 100 degrees (F) and drop into the 60s at night. In winter, nighttime temperatures can drop below zero. The average daily temperature difference can vary 30-60 degrees. Spring is usually very windy. During summer afternoons and evenings, thunderstorms can move rapidly into the area.

Bring lightweight clothing that can provide comfort in a variety of weather conditions. A hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses are essential for hiking and enjoying the dunes in mid-day.

A minimum of one gallon of water per person per day is recommended in the arid desert environment. Fill your water bottles at the visitor center before entering the park. There is no water available in the dunefield.

Leave No Trace

In addition to following camping and general park 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. Below are the principles that apply at White Sands National Monument.

Concentrate Use in Resistant Areas

Hike on the open sand along the edge of the dunes. Avoid the fragile interdune areas and easily damaged cryptobiotic crust (dark, bumpy surface in low-lying areas). The crust is a community of microscopic organisms

working together to stabilize and create a soil layer in the nutrient-poor sand, making plant life in the dunefield possible. When camping in these areas, restrict your movement to a confined space to help protect the crust.

Pack It In, Pack It Out

All campers (and other visitors) are required to pack out all trash, including toilet paper. Leave a clean campsite for others to enjoy. No ground fires are

allowed but campstoves are permitted. In addition to aesthetic concerns, there are also health concerns for people and wildlife when trash is not packed out.

Respect Wildlife

Animals will be attracted to food odors. They are unable to digest human food or its packaging. They may become sick, die, or have to be destroyed if they learn to

associate people with food. Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them. Pets must be kept on a leash at all times.

Properly Dispose of What You Can't Pack Out

Urine and solid waste are the only things that do not need to be packed out. Solid waste must be buried at least 100 feet away from the designated backcountry campsites and trails.

You may urinate on the sand, then cover it with a layer of fresh sand. Please do not urinate on or near plants; it may interfere with wildlife's use of the plant for food or shelter.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.

Let nature's sounds prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises.

Leave What You Find

Remember that everything is protected in a national park. It is unlawful to remove sand or other objects, pick or damage plants, or disturb wildlife. The exception to this is litter. Please feel free to pick up trash someone else may have

left behind. Safety note: The monument is surrounded by an active missile range and missile debris falls into the dunefield and gets buried before it can be removed. For your safety, do not touch any such items.

Missile Tests

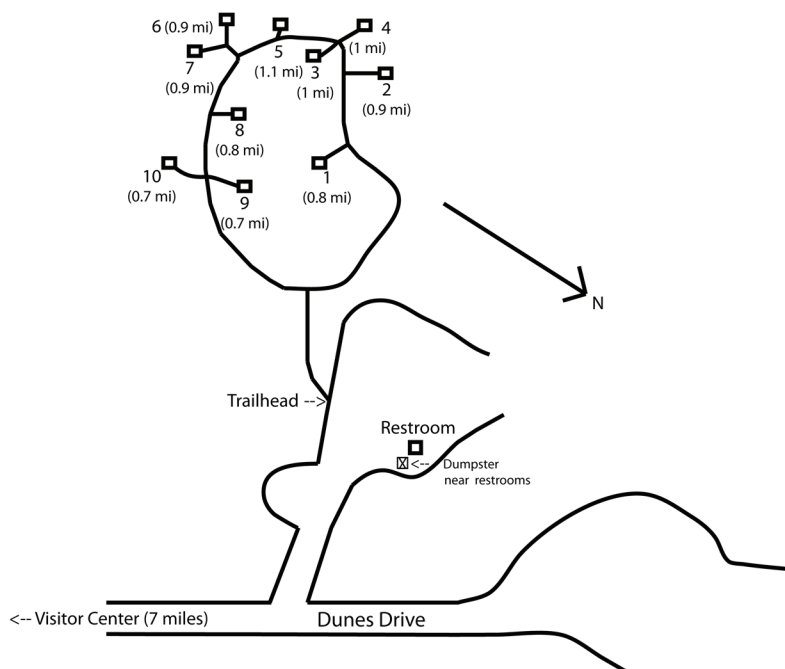
The monument and backcountry camping areas are occasionally closed for safety reasons during testing operations on White Sands Missile Range. Since missile tests are subject to

change, please call the monument the day before you wish to camp to verify availability. For this or any park information, call (575)-479-6124, ext. 236.

Finding Your Campsite

Below are examples of the markers that you will see on the way to your campsite. The trail is well marked, and sign posts are in place to help you find your way. Follow the arrow markers to your assigned site.

Once there, set up your camp no more than five feet away from the brown marker. Remember, it is easy to become disoriented in the dunes after dark, so don't stray far from your campsite. Enjoy the unique experience of camping in the heart of the dunes.



Backcountry camping trail marker.



Follow arrows to campsite.



Camp within 5 feet of this marker.