

10 South Pass Historical Marker

The South Pass area of the Red Desert has been a human migration pathway for millennia. The crest of the Rocky Mountains flattens out onto high-elevation steppes, allowing easy passage across the Continental Divide. Native Americans and their ancestors crossed Indian Gap to the south and traveled this area to hunt and trade. European Americans first traversed the pass in 1812 and were followed by fur trappers, missionaries, pioneers, Pony Express riders, and gold prospectors. Our nation's history of westward expansion was etched into the sagebrush sea here: the Oregon, California, and Mormon National Historic Trails cross over from the east to enter what was known as the Oregon Territory. As many as 500,000 emigrants in the mid-late 1800s followed these trails alongside oxen-drawn wagons or pulled handcarts, constituting one of the largest voluntary human migrations recorded. The dirt ruts visible at this stop are those of the actual Oregon Trail, and

the vistas you see here are remarkably similar to those viewed by thousands of travelers in the past. A side road from the county road will take you to several historical markers memorializing South Pass and the historic trails.

9 Whitehorse Creek Overlook

Whitehorse Creek is one of the easiest landscapes to access in the Northern Red Desert. A short drive from the county road offers excellent viewpoints along the ridge line that marks the wilderness study area's northern boundary, where visitors can look out over the magnificent striped badlands in the foreground and enjoy an expansive view of the Wind Rivers. There are areas here for primitive camping, including a rock fire pit. (Be sure to bring your own firewood and do not cut down or use the local limited wood.) The dotted sandstone outcrops and cliffs along the rim, as well as the twisted juniper, pine trees, and dense sagebrush help support mule deer and a resident elk herd.

Hikers can remain along the rim or drop down into the basin. Keep an eye out for fossils, raptors, and bobcat tracks.

8 Oregon Buttes

The Oregon Buttes, another wilderness study area, stand proudly along the Continental Divide, sentinels to the Great Divide Basin, and mark the northern edge of the Jack Morrow Hills. European American emigrants traveling westward along the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails entered Oregon Territory after crossing South Pass just west of the buttes, which gave these iconic formations their name. The springs along their eastern flanks, and the hardy stands of pine and aspen, bitterbrush communities, and sagebrush, are crucial for a variety of wildlife. Today, local adventurers climb the buttes to enjoy the views of the Great Divide Basin and Wind River Mountains. Easy hiking access to the crest of the buttes is from the northern height of the road, as marked.

7 Honeycomb Buttes

The Honeycomb Buttes Wilderness Study Area is one of the most mesmerizing and difficult-to-access landscapes in the Northern Red Desert. These badlands are made of colorful sedimentary rock layers shed from the rising Wind River Mountains millions of years ago. Iron-rich minerals in these sediments transformed into vibrant reds, purples, yellows, and greens. The gray and brown layers above these colorful badlands are composed of sediments from lakes and tropical swamps that were home to massive turtles, crocodiles, fish, and small mammals for millions of years. In the present environment, horned lizards abound, as do small mammals—including bobcats. Desert elk find refuge in the maze of badlands. The Honeycombs offer some of the West's best hiking, photography, and stargazing. Nearby is Continental Peak, a summit that offers tremendous views and is well worth the climb. The suggested stop offers views of the Honeycombs

to the northeast and also marks a crossing of the historic freight and stage road used to haul supplies to South Pass City. See map for recommended hiking access roads for hiking in this wilderness study area.

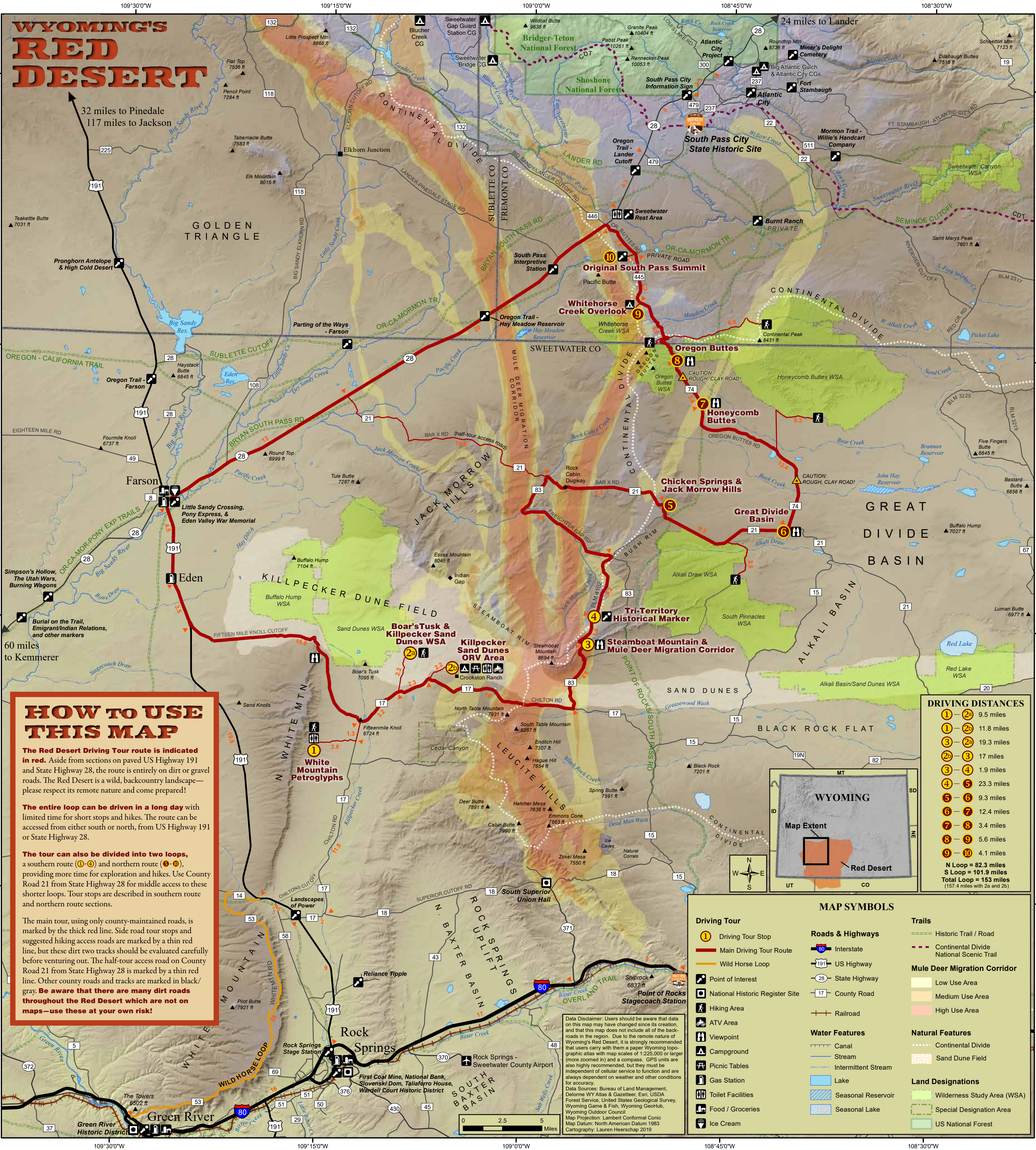
6 The Great Divide Basin

As you drive through this central section of the Northern Red Desert, you'll cross into the Great Divide Basin, the only place in North America where the Continental Divide splits into two paths, creating a basin in the middle where waters flow neither to the Atlantic nor the Pacific. The road runs along a rim of land looking south towards Alkali Draw and The Pinnacles Wilderness Study Areas. Alkali Draw contains rugged cliff escarpments, and its springs and seeps help support several wildlife herds. The Pinnacles are named for their pyramid shapes and colorful landforms. This country is some of the widest undeveloped desert lands in the northern Rocky Mountain states. At the suggested stop, take time to get out of the vehicle and view the 360-degree

panorama of desert, buttes, and wild lands. A short walk south reveals the mysterious Pinnacles.

5 The Jack Morrow Hills

The Jack Morrow Hills, named for a 19th-century crook and homesteader, run north-south between the Oregon Buttes and Steamboat Mountain and define the western edge of the Great Divide Basin. These hills are a complex of sagebrush-clad ridges and rims, with seeps and drainages that provide important habitats for birds and ungulates, including sage-grouse, pronghorn, elk, and mule deer. Sportsmen and women prize the chance to hunt the elk that roam between the dunes, the Jack Morrow Hills, and the badlands of the Great Divide Basin. The east-facing slopes of Bush Rim sport a kaleidoscope of colorful sediment layers and hidden springs supporting lush groves of trees that offer shaded respite for a convenient lunch spot.



HOW TO USE THIS MAP

The Red Desert Driving Tour route is indicated in red. Aside from sections on paved US Highway 191 and State Highway 28, the route is entirely on dirt or gravel roads. The Red Desert is a wild, backcountry landscape—please respect its remote nature and come prepared!

The entire loop can be driven in a long day with limited time for short stops and hikes. The route can be accessed from either south or north, from US Highway 191 or State Highway 28.

The tour can also be divided into two loops, a southern route (1-5) and northern route (6-10), providing more time for exploration and hikes. Use County Road 21 from State Highway 28 for middle access to these shorter loops. Tour stops are described in southern route and northern route sections.

The main tour, using only county-maintained roads, is marked by the thick red line. Side road tour stops and suggested hiking access roads are marked by a thin red line, but these dirt two tracks should be evaluated carefully before venturing out. The half-tour access road on County Road 21 from State Highway 28 is marked by a thin red line. Other county roads and tracks are marked in black/gray. Be aware that there are many dirt roads throughout the Red Desert which are not on maps—use these at your own risk!

DRIVING DISTANCES table with 10 rows and 2 columns showing distances between stops. Total Loop = 153 miles.

MAP SYMBOLS legend including Driving Tour, Roads & Highways, Trails, Mule Deer Migration Corridor, Water Features, and Land Designations.

1 White Mountain Petroglyphs

The White Mountain Petroglyphs, containing hundreds of carved figures etched into the sandstone bedrock, is estimated to date back some 200-1,000 years. The area is managed to protect this important artifact of Plains Indian rock art. Cultural historians and tribal elders believe most of these etchings were created between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with many scenes depicting hunting and wildlife, contact with European culture, and the advent of horses. Members of the Shoshone, Arapaho, and Ute tribes consider this

site sacred. Please be respectful and do not touch or deface the petroglyphs. They are located on the cliff face at the end of a 1/4-mile foot-path.

2 Sand Dunes and Boar's Tusk

The sand dunes that stretch more than 100 miles—from near Farson to the Ferris Mountains to the east—make up one of the largest "living" sand dune complexes in the United States. The complex contains four wilderness study areas and the Killpecker Sand Dunes Open Play Area. These shifting dunes contain numerous ephemeral

ponds which are formed when sand blows over and insulates snow drifts in the winter, causing pockets of hardened snow that melts out slowly in the spring and summer. Standing 400 feet tall just south of the sand dunes is a rare monolith: Boar's Tusk. This volcanic plug—the core of an extinct volcano—is an icon of the Northern Red Desert and sacred to many Native Americans. Take the 1a access road for hiking within the Sand Dunes Wilderness Study Area and proceed to the 2b road for access to the motorized play area and campground.

3 Steamboat Mountain and World's Longest Deer Migration

A mass visible for miles and recognizable for the small pyramid midway along its otherwise flat summit, Steamboat Mountain rises above the Jack Morrow Hills in the background. Indian Gap Trail, a favored Plains Indian route across the Red Desert, passes directly to the west of Steamboat and east of Essex Mountain. Steamboat is a volcanic butte similar to the other dramatic buttes to its south, including Black Rock, Spring Butte, and the Table

Mountains. The aspen glades on Steamboat's northern slopes are a favorite of campers and hunters. The boulder fields and cliffs on the northeast side (visible from the noted viewpoint) served as a buffalo jump for Native American hunters—a place where the animals were herded off a steep incline and killed. The Red Desert is home to the southern terminus of the longest mule deer migration in the world. Every spring, thousands of deer leave their winter range in this area and cross Steamboat Mountain toward summer range in the Hoback region south of Jackson. At the top of the road, you can see

nearly the entire stretch of the Sand Dunes, with Black Rock and Spring Buttes in the foreground.

4 Tri-Territory Historical Marker

The Tri-Territory Historic Site marks the spot where Mexico, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Oregon Territory intersected. This isolated location tells the story of the western expansion and how three nations competed and fought for control of the North American continent. The snowy crest of the southern Wind River Mountains—renowned for its rock climbing terrain—is visible to the northwest.

WYOMING'S RED DESERT

Heart of the West

RED DESERT DRIVING TOUR MAP



1 Whitehorse Creek Overlook

Many thanks to our sponsors:

For more info, go to RedDesert.org

A Wild Landscape

The Northern Red Desert is often described as the largest unfenced area in the Lower 48. It is home to several "wilderness study areas"—large, wild, roadless tracts determined through a national process to contain some of our nation's best remote opportunities for solitude and recreation. These areas are open to the public for camping, hunting, fishing, and hiking, but motorized use is prohibited. The Northern Red Desert boasts nine unique WSAs, the largest concentration in Wyoming. These special places help preserve badlands, historic trails, fossilized remains from the shores of ancient seas, and early Native American petroglyphs and camps. The wide-open country also supports abundant wildlife, including a rare desert elk herd and crucial winter range for the migratory big game herds that roam southwest Wyoming.

The Golden Triangle is a name wildlife biologists use to describe the stretch of land north of Farson bordered by State Highway 28 and US Highway 191 and continuing to the flanks of the Wind River Mountains. This pristine stretch of sagebrush steppe is known for its exceptional wildlife habitat and rich biodiversity. The rolling sagebrush sea supports the world's longest mule deer migration corridor, huge herds of elk that summer in the Wind Rivers, plus pronghorn, golden eagles, red fox, and hundreds of other sagebrush-dependent species. The region also sustains the planet's largest population of Greater sage-grouse, a species that is imperiled across the West. Here, more than 800 male grouse perform their elaborate spring mating rituals on mating grounds called leks.



Sage Grouse, Mule Deer, Red Desert Elk



3 Steamboat Mountain and Mule Deer Migration Corridor

Longest Ungulate Migration in the United States

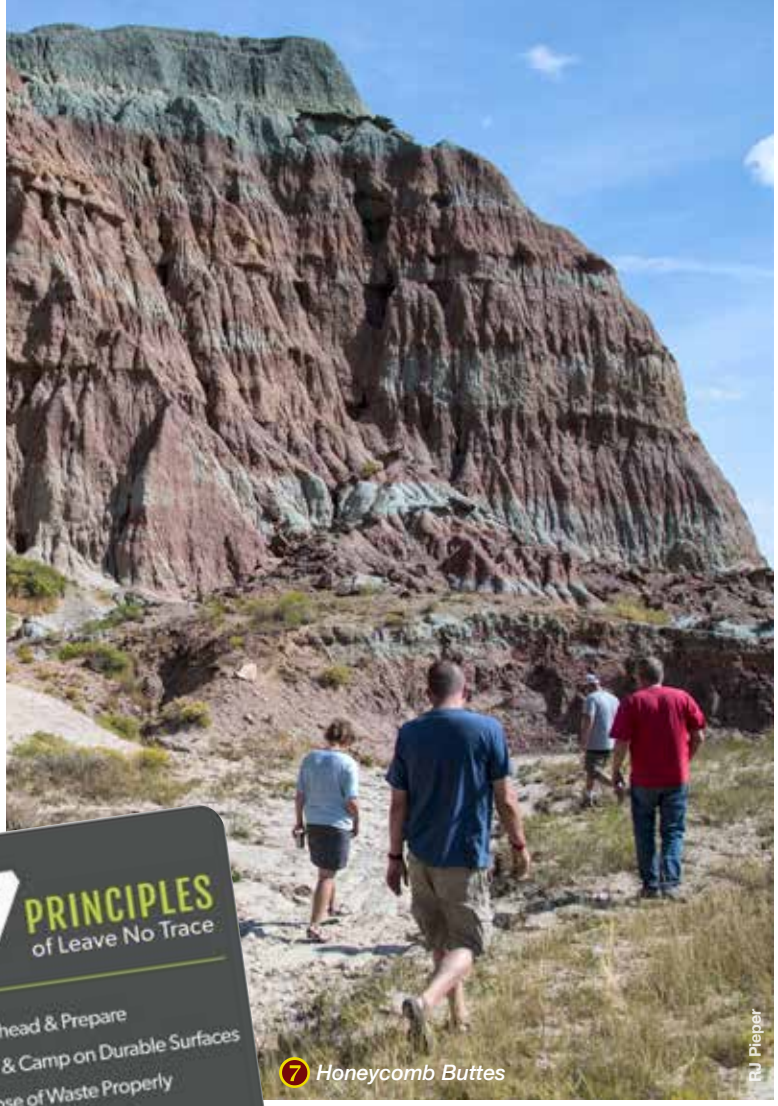
The longest big game migration corridor in the Lower 48 begins just north of Rock Springs in the Red Desert. Twice a year, mule deer migrate between their winter range in the Red Desert sagebrush and their high-elevation summer range 150 miles north in the Hoback. This one-way trip, aptly referred to as the Red Desert to Hoback Migration, allows the deer to access highly nutritious forage—essential to their health and survival—over the course of several months as the sage and grasses "green up" throughout the spring. Mule deer are extremely faithful to their migration routes, with herds traveling the exact same paths year after year. Recent scientific research suggests the knowledge of migration routes is passed down from one generation of deer to the next, in a continuous line spanning centuries. Studies also show that migration corridors are threatened by human disturbance and development, and that mule deer populations across the state are in decline. Protecting migration corridors and crucial winter range is essential to conserving these iconic herds. The Red Desert provides some of their last, best habitat.

A Land of Many Uses

The Red Desert has been a multiple-use landscape for thousands of years. Today, people use the desert for everything from backcountry adventures to oil and gas production. The majority of these lands are federal public lands, owned by all Americans and managed by the Bureau of Land Management for a range of purposes. Due to its Serengeti-like wealth of big game, this area was proposed to be set aside as a national winter game preserve as far back as 1898. South Pass City State Historic Site at the desert's northern edge is a historic "ghost town" from the gold rush days of the late 1800s, and old stage and freight roads leading north to that area crisscross the sagebrush. Abandoned ranches dot the landscape and serve as a testament to the difficulty of eking out a living on this rugged land. Currently, wild horse herds are managed here to assure range health, and historic trails and Native American cultural sites are protected for their national heritage values. Today, much of the public land in the Northern Red Desert is leased for grazing, with large "allotments" required to support the scattered cattle. Visitors may encounter ranchers checking their fences, hunters scouting their camps, or oil and gas workers near the sand dunes servicing wells. Please respect the private property you may encounter on your travels and do not disturb livestock.



South Pass City



7 Honeycomb Buttes

THE 7 PRINCIPLES of Leave No Trace

1. Plan Ahead & Prepare
2. Travel & Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors



2 Boar's Tusk & Killpecker Sand Dunes WSA

North America's Largest Living Sand Dunes

Rising from the southern Red Desert like a mirage and stretching over 109,000 acres from the Green River Basin to the Great Divide Basin, the Killpecker Sand Dunes are the largest living dune field in North America. Comprised of granite ground down by glaciers high in the Wind River Mountains, the sand accumulated on the banks of the Big Sandy and Little Sandy rivers downstream and was blown across the Continental Divide by westerly winds over thousands of years. Each winter, the sand collects snowmelt and windblown ice deposits, which support the vegetation that stabilizes the dunes. The collected water creates ephemeral oases in the desert that sustain a surprising array of wildlife, from migratory shorebirds to salamanders and freshwater shrimp. The dunes are also a haven for pronghorn, mule deer, and a rare desert elk herd. Travelers may hear the sand "sing," as sand avalanching over the crescent shaped dunes creates a roaring, booming sound that can last for several minutes.



2a The Killpecker Sand Dunes are the largest living dune field in North America, stretching over 109,000 acres between the Green River Basin and the Great Divide Basin.

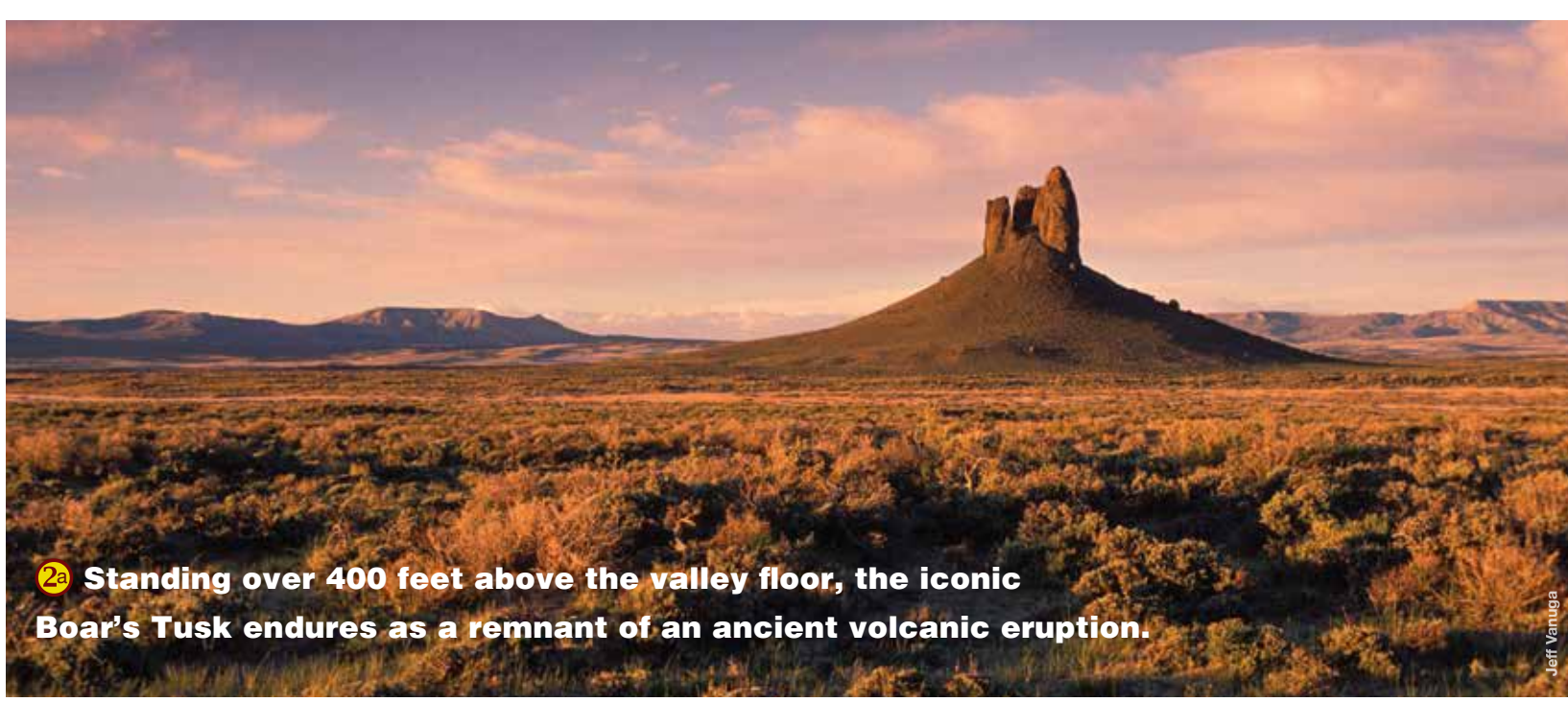


1 White Mountain Petroglyphs

Scattered throughout the landscape are thousand-year-old rock art sites, and stone circles with spiritual significance.

Early Peoples and Native American Cultural Importance
 Since time immemorial the Red Desert has been an important home, hunting area, and spiritual center. The most recent Native American inhabitants were the Shoshone and Ute, although many other Great Basin and Plains tribes came through the area, such as the Arapaho, Lakota, and Cheyenne. For the Shoshone people, the Red Desert has two names. The first is "the place where God ran out of mountains." The second name, "land of many ponies," relates to the major change in native cultures caused by the introduction of the horse. The Shoshone and the Ute tribes were among the first to develop

horse-based commerce that stretched for miles across Wyoming's Great Divide Basin. The area is the ancestral hunting grounds for many tribes and contains numerous cultural and holy sites. Scattered throughout the landscape are thousand-year-old rock art sites, and stone circles with spiritual significance. Tipi rings, outlining campsites, are evident throughout the region. The dramatic Boar's Tusk is strongly associated with the origins of Shoshone culture. The Indian Gap Trail, passing through Indian Gap, connected the Ute tribes further south and west in Utah and Colorado with the the Shoshone in the Wind River Basin. Nearby, on the sheer face of Steamboat Mountain, was a favored "buffalo jump" hunting area for Native Americans.



2a Standing over 400 feet above the valley floor, the iconic Boar's Tusk endures as a remnant of an ancient volcanic eruption.

Fascinating Geology

The landscapes and landforms in Wyoming's Northern Red Desert tell a dramatic story of the earth's recent—and ancient—geologic processes. Some of the world's rarest rocks and minerals are found in the Leucite Hills, eroded remnants of a geologically young (1-3 million years old) volcanic field composed mainly of a rock type called phlogopite lamproite. These volcanic remnants now form some of the most interesting formations of the Northern Red Desert: Boar's Tusk, North and South Table Mountains, and Steamboat Mountain. These volcanic plugs, necks, dikes, flows, and cinder cones erupted violently through the crust from sources deep in the earth's mantle. The colorful badlands of the Honeycomb Buttes and Bush Rim are made of sedimentary rocks deposited along the front of the actively rising Wind River Mountains around 50 million years ago.

Oxidation and reduction of iron-rich minerals eroded from the rising mountains, mixed with ash from the Absaroka volcanic field to the north, has created an array of light-colored clays that make up the badlands. The darker gray and brown layers above the colorful badlands are part of the Green River Formation, deposited in the enormous Lake Gosiute and its coastal swamps that concentrated dark organic matter. Continental Peak and the Oregon Buttes are also made of sedimentary rocks that are layered on top of the Green River Formation and similar in origin, deposited in lake and river systems and mixed with ash from volcanic eruptions to the north. These landmarks are located just south of the major fault zones responsible for the uplift of the Wind River Mountains and subsequent down-dropping of the Wind River Basin.



7 South Pass historic trails

Western Expansion

Mountain men exploring the Rockies first set foot in the wild, wide-open land of the Red Desert in 1812. During one of the earliest surveying expeditions of the west, in 1871, Dr. Ferdinand V. Hayden, passing through part of the Red Desert, noted the region's aspen groves and clear, flowing springs on Steamboat Mountain. Except for a few roads—and the notable lack of bison herds—the landscape looks very similar today as it did then.

On the northern edge of the Red Desert lie the old mining towns of South Pass City and Atlantic City. Directly south is the Sweetwater River Valley, which provided an easy route to South Pass and the crossing of the Rocky Mountains over the Continental Divide. The pass served as the primary mountain gateway from the east to the west for hundreds of thousands of emigrants en route to Utah, California, or Oregon in the 1800s. Today, visitors can still see the network of rutted wagon trails from the thousands of settlers who traversed this landscape. The Red Desert includes sections of the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails as well as the Pony Express mail route between the east and west coasts in the 1860s. The national significance of South Pass as a thoroughfare for western expansion is one reason the area has been designated as a National Historic Landmark.

4 Tri-Territory Historical Marker

From towering buttes to intricate dunes, from ribbons of sand badlands, to remote springs, the Northern Red Desert is a diverse landscape. Adventurers seeking solitude, families camping for a weekend, and hunters scouting for elk, as well as birders, rock hounds, artists, horseback riders, and countless others enjoy the ruggedness and open spaces of the Northern Red Desert.

The landscape is rich with the history of the American West, from early Native American petroglyphs to the ruins of the Oregon Trail. It is home to pronghorn and horned lizards—species that thrive on an array of native plants and springs that dot the sagebrush sea. Vast sections of these public lands—administered by the Bureau of Land Management—are largely untouched by humans. So tread lightly and enjoy your time among the buttes and badlands, but beware: you will want to return again and again.



4 View from Tri-Territory area north toward the Wind River Mountains

BE PREPARED

The Red Desert is wild and remote. Travelers must come prepared.

- Start any trip with a full tank of gas and a spare tire.
- Let someone know where you are headed and when you plan to return.
- We recommend a high-clearance 4-wheel drive vehicle to traverse the dirt roads.
- Call phone service is spotty at best. Don't count on having a signal.
- Bring extra food and water—even if you don't think you will need it.
- We suggest traveling the route between May and October. Road conditions deteriorate quickly, especially when wet.
- Expect strong winds and changing temperatures. Dress appropriately.
- Stick to numbered BLM and county roads and don't trust your GPS or Google Maps. There are a number of two-track dirt trails that a GPS will often recognize as a road, but many are unreliable. Use extreme caution driving off main roads.
- Watch out for wildlife!



7 Honeycomb Buttes