

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 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.

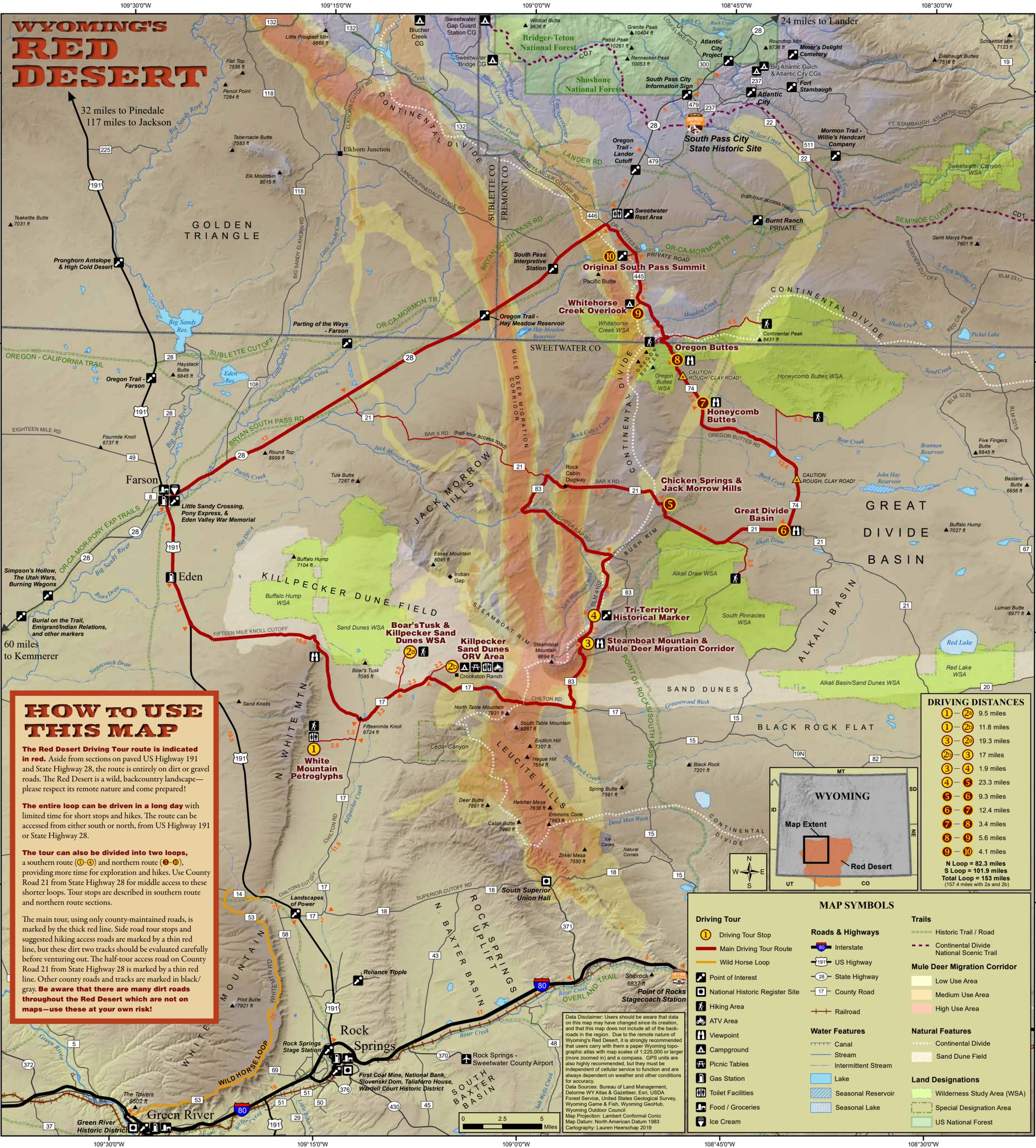
6 The Great Divide Basin

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 (5-9) 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.

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

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.