



SEA OF SAND

A History of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

By Michael M. Geary

Sculpted into graceful contours by countless centuries of wind and water, the Great Sand Dunes sprawl along the eastern fringes of the vast San Luis Valley of south-central Colorado. Covering an area of nearly thirty square miles, they are the tallest aeolian, or wind-produced, dunes in North America, towering 750 feet above the valley floor. With the addition of the enormous Baca Ranch and other adjacent lands, the dunes—originally designated as a National Monument in 1932—attained official National Park status in 2004. In *Sea of Sand*, Michael M. Geary guides readers on a historical journey through this unique ecosystem, which includes an array of natural and cultural wonders, from the main dunefield and verdant wetlands to the summits of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Described by explorer Zebulon Pike as “a sea in a storm” and by frontier photographer William Henry Jackson as “a curious and very singular phase of nature’s freak,” the Great Sand Dunes are a nexus of more than 10,000 years of human history, from Paleolithic big-game hunters to nomadic Native Americans, from Spanish conquistadores and transcontinental explorers to hard-rock miners and modern-day tourists in motor homes.

Like these successive waves of visitors, *Sea of Sand* follows the water,

analyzing its critical role in the settlement and development of the region. Geary also describes the profound impact that waves of human use and settlement have had on the land—which ultimately inspired the early grassroots efforts by San Luis Valley citizens to protect the dunes from further exploitation. He examines as well the more recent legislative effort led by an unprecedented coalition of local, state, and federal agencies and organizations, including The Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service, to secure the Great Sand Dunes’ national park designation.

Amplly illustrated, *Sea of Sand* is the definitive history of the natural, cultural, and political forces that helped shape this incomparable landscape.

Michael M. Geary, author of *A Quick History of Grand Lake*, is currently a writer, researcher, and historian. He lives in Fort Collins, Colorado.

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