



# Penitente Canyon

Special Recreation Management Area



## Map & Guide

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

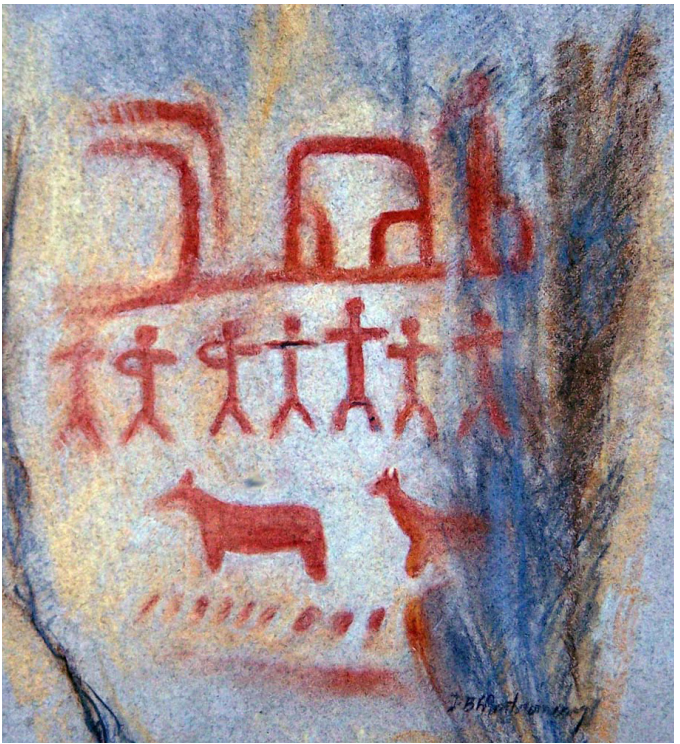


# Penitente Canyon

## Special Recreation Management Area

Maintained by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Penitente Canyon and its surrounding area are a 4,552-acre playground for outdoor sports enthusiasts and heritage tourists alike – all with the convenience of being within 10 miles of a major highway.





## Geology

Between 20 and 30 million years ago, a multitude of eruptions in the San Juan Volcanic Field dramatically changed the landscape of the area. The largest of these spewed more than 1,000 cubic miles of ash across the landscape – making it possibly the largest volcanic eruption in Earth’s history. Visitors can still see the effects of these events today. The rocks and ash formations of the La Garita Caldera are the collapsed remains of that ancient volcano.

## History

The Valley’s first European inhabitants came from northern New Mexico, bringing sheep, crops, and Hispanic culture with them. But, they were only the most recent in the Valley’s long history.

The ancestors of several modern-day Native tribes left extensive evidence of their presence and the Penitente Canyon area has the largest concentration of ancient pictographs and rock art in the Valley. We ask you help preserve these by not interacting with or disturbing them in any way.





## Directions

**From U.S. 285:** Turn west onto Saguache County Road G. In six-and-a-half miles, after passing the La Garita Trading Post, you will reach a Y-intersection. Take the left fork for County Road 38A. In approximately half of a mile, the entrance to the recreation area will be on the right.

## Respect Wildlife

Wildlife is abundant in Penitente Canyon. When you see an animal, remember:

- Don't follow or approach them.
- Never feed them.
- Early mornings, early evenings, and breeding seasons can cause periods of heightened animal sensitivity. Be extra careful during these times.
- Control your pets.

## Stay Safe

Safety is your responsibility. Know your limits and come prepared for the area's changing weather. All recreational activity is at your own risk.

Prairie rattlesnakes are common in Penitente Canyon. Please be on the lookout for them. Always watch where you are stepping or reaching—and don't reach where you can't see. If you encounter a snake, leave it alone and simply back away. Parents should always keep a close eye on their children in snake country.

For more information, check out the entrance kiosk when you arrive.



## Trail Etiquette

The use of public lands requires being aware of those around you. A few simple rules go a long way toward ensuring everyone can enjoy their time on public lands.

- Make your presence known before approaching others. Even a simple greeting will suffice.
- Corners can cause others to appear suddenly. Anticipate others, especially if you are moving quickly or on a bicycle.
- Bicyclists yield to others on any trail that is not designated as bicycle-only.
- Unless otherwise indicated, bicyclists traveling downhill should yield to those traveling uphill.
- Cross-country travel on BLM lands is restricted to hikers and horseback only.
- Public lands are often used for grazing cattle. When passing through a gate, please leave the gate as you found it to protect the animals.

## Stay on Designated Trails!

Motorized vehicles are restricted to designated roads only. Signs at trailheads indicate authorized users. Do not use trails in unauthorized ways. Stay on appropriate roads and trails. Do not cut switchbacks.

## Mountain Biking

Follow the International Mountain Bicycling Association's Six Rules of the Trail:

- Ride on open trails only
- Leave No Trace
- Control your bicycle
- Always yield the trail
- Never scare animals
- Plan ahead

Riding in wet and muddy conditions causes damage to trails and we ask visitors to avoid riding in those conditions. While there is no fee to bike or climb in the area, the BLM does accept donations to be used to maintain and enhance recreation within Penitente Canyon.



## Climbing

- No new bolting is permitted anywhere in the recreation area. Know your limits and skill level. All climbing is at your own risk.
- Do not chip, chisel, glue, tag (graffiti) or in any way deface rock surfaces.
- Minimize chalk use and brush off heavily chalked holds. If you must use chalk, use pigmented chalks that blend in with the natural colors of the rock.
- Climb in small numbers. Disperse your activities.
- Use established trails to reach climbing areas.
- Don't monopolize routes.
- Follow the climbing principle of Leave no Trace.

### Plan Ahead

- Use appropriate equipment.
- Check route and equipment before climbing.
- Find out about permits and practices. If you use a guide, ensure they are permitted for the area you plan to climb.





## Amenities

Drinking water is available during the warm season – typically May through October – at the well house near the entrance to Penitente Canyon. Other amenities are available in the area, including a picnic shelter, interpretive kiosk, toilets, and trash receptacles.

## Camping

The area has two group campsites and 15 single campsites. All sites must be reserved and paid for through [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). Checkout time for all campsites is 1 p.m.

- Dispersed camping is allowed in some areas; please use existing sites.
- Dispersed camping is not allowed in the campground or day-use area; use designated campsites only. No camping in parking lots. No camping in the Rock Garden.
- No horses allowed in the campground.
- Dogs must be under owners' control everywhere in Penitente Canyon.
- No firewood cutting or gathering.
- No shooting or firearms in the campground or day use area.
- Use designated fire rings in the campground and pre-existing fire rings in dispersed campsites.

For camping reservations visit:  
[www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)

# Contact Us

## Bureau of Land Management

San Luis Valley Field Office  
1313 Highway 160 E.  
Monte Vista, CO 81144

Open Monday – Friday  
from 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
Closed weekends and holidays

719-852-7074

BLM\_CO\_SLVPLC\_Mail@blm.gov

## Camping Reservations:

[www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)

877-444-6777

[www.blm.gov/colorado](http://www.blm.gov/colorado)

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The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages more than 8.3 million acres of public lands and more than 27 million acres of mineral estate in Colorado. BLM lands in Colorado range from alpine tundra, colorful canyons and mesas, to rolling sage covered hills. The BLM has activities and programs for all public land users to enjoy.

Visit

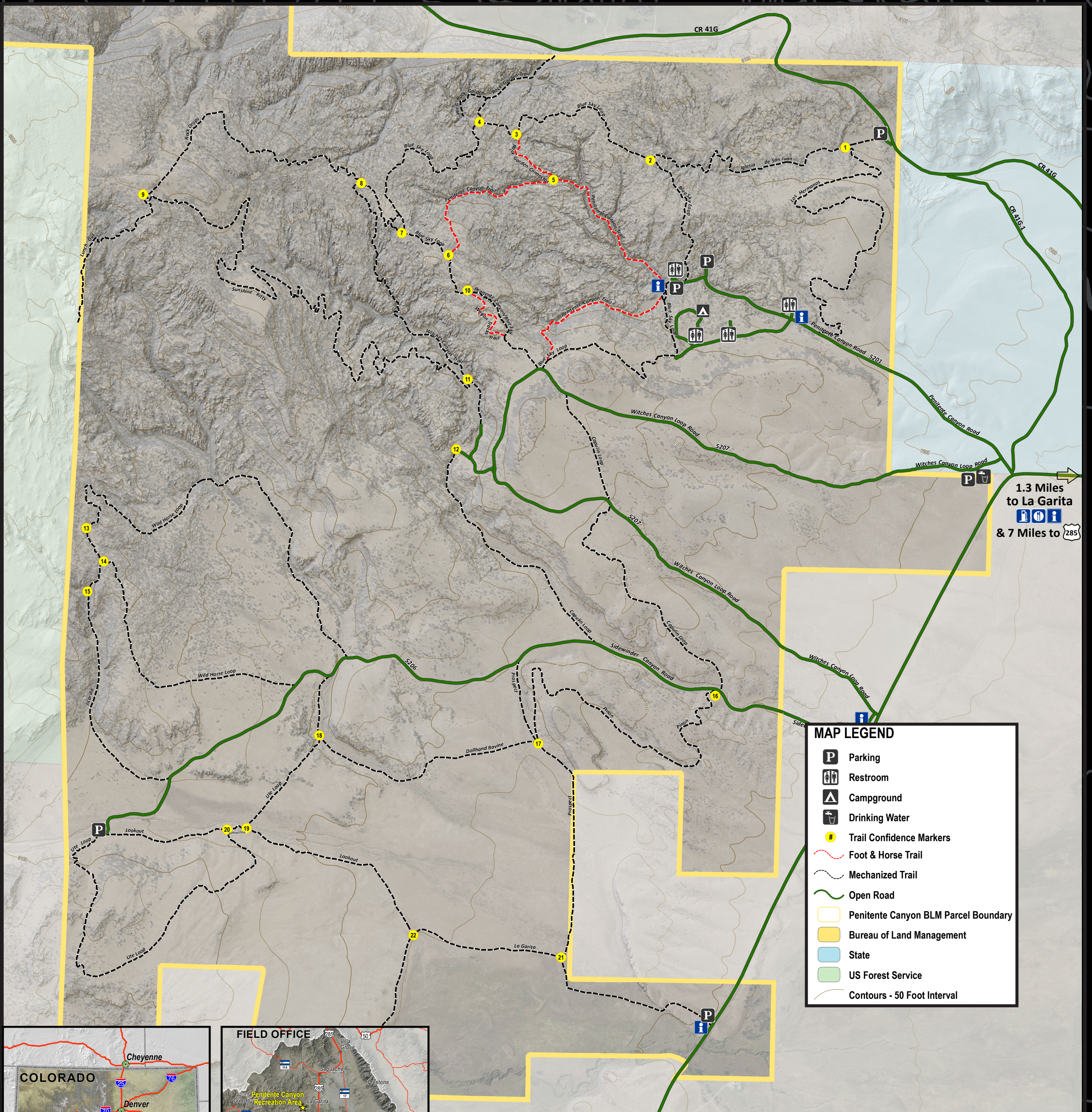
[www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov) to learn more about your public lands.

BLM Colorado values diversity and is committed to creating a strong workforce that reflects the face of our Nation. Public lands are inclusive for all people and groups. Come out and share your public lands with neighbors and friends today!

## Accessibility

The BLM is dedicated to ensuring that everyone has an equitable opportunity to access their public lands by providing access to facilities, programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. To learn more visit [www.blm.gov/accessible-recreation](http://www.blm.gov/accessible-recreation).

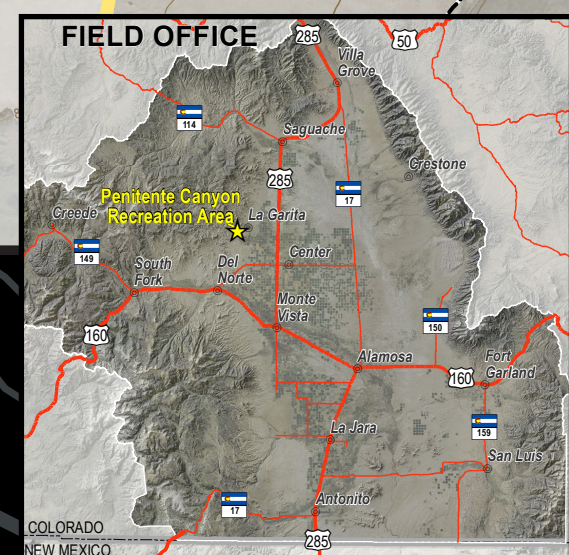
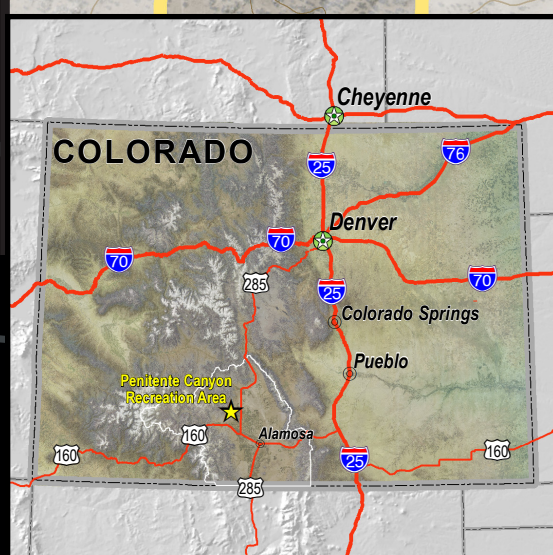




1.3 Miles to La Garita  
 & 7 Miles to 285

**MAP LEGEND**

- Parking
- Restroom
- Campground
- Drinking Water
- Trail Confidence Markers
- Foot & Horse Trail
- Mechanized Trail
- Open Road
- Penitente Canyon BLM Parcel Boundary
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- US Forest Service
- Contours - 50 Foot Interval



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**Share the Trail**  
 Cross-country travel on BLM lands is prohibited (except for hiking and horseback).  
**Stay on designated trails!**