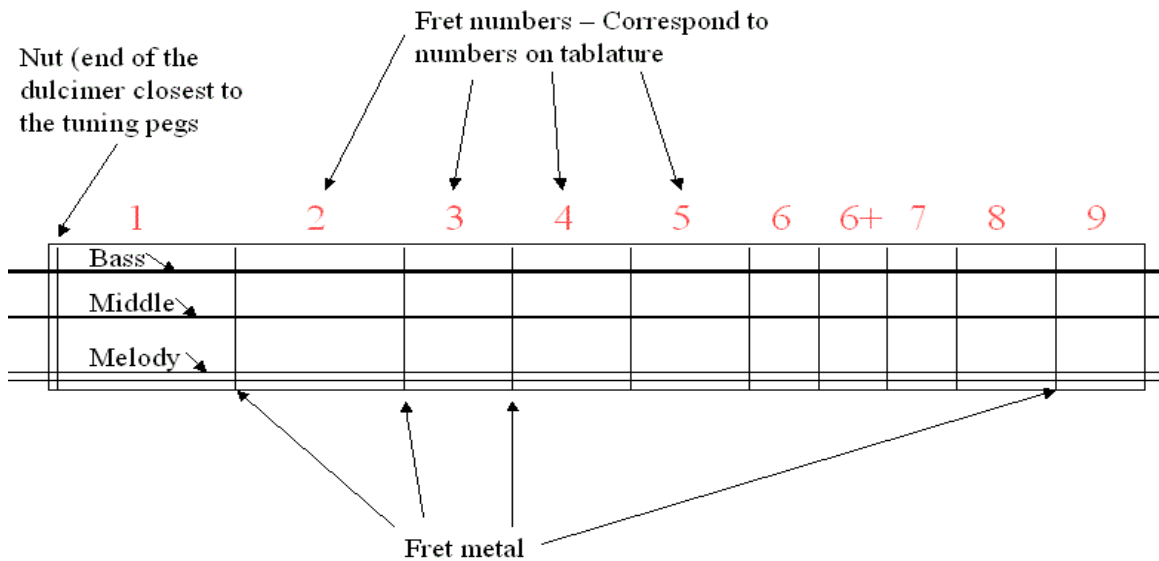


# How to Read Mountain Dulcimer Tablature

Bruce W. Ford

I get requests from time-to-time on exactly how to decypher mountain dulcimer tablature. I hope this helps. These images are designed to nudge you along, but keep in mind that mountain dulcimer tab is an easy concept. The tab is shown like the strings look when the dulcimer is on your lap. Below is a diagram of your fretboard or fingerboard when it's on your lap and ready to play.

*Click on any image to enlarge it!*



Here's a peice of tab from our collection, *Hector the Hero* arranged my Steve Smith. As a beginner, there is very little information on this tab that **your REALLY need.**

*Hector The Hero*  
Mountain Dulcimer: D A dd and D A A A Scottish Arrangement: Steve Smith

Time signature

Key notation (for music majors again)

D	2	DE	F#	E D	H	A	F#	A	---	DE	F#	E D
A		5 5	0 0 0	4 4 3	0					4	5 4	0 0 0
dd		0 0	0 0 0	3 3 3	3					1	1 1	0 0 0
D		0 1	2 - 1 0	5 - 4 - 2 - 4	---	4	---	0 1	2 - 1 0			
A		5 3	0 0 0	0 0 0	0				0	5 3	0 0 0	
A		0 0	0 0 0	6 6 6	5				6	0 0	0 0 0	
AA		5 - 5 4	5 - - 4 5	8 - 7 - 5	7	---	7	---	5 4	5 - - 4 5		

H	H A F# D	E	---	DE	F#	E D	H	A	F#	A	F#	F# D	E	F# D	H
5	5 5 0 0	5		1	1 1	0 0 0	5	5 5	0 0 0	5	5 5	0 0 0	5 5 5		
5	5 5 5 0	1		0	0 0 0	0 0 0	5	5 5 5	5 0 0	5 5 5	5 0 0	5 5 5	6		
5	5 4 2 0	1	---	1	0 1	2 - 1 0	5	5 - 4 - 2 - 4	3 0 1	1	7 - 5				
0	0 0 0 0	4		4	4 4	0 0 0	0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 5 5	5			
6	6 6 0 0	0		0	0 0	0 0 0	6	6 6 0	0 0 0	6	6 6	0 0 0	5 5	6	
R	R 7 5 4	4	---	4	5 4	5 - - 4 5	R	7 - 5	7 - 5	4 - 4	5 1 0	R			

*Hector The Hero*  
Mountain Dulcimer: D A dd and D A A A Scottish Arrangement: Steve Smith

Standard musical notation. (For trained musicians)

D	2	DE	F#	E D	H	A	F#	A	---	DE	F#	E D
A		5 5	0 0 0	4 4 3	0					4	5 4	0 0 0
dd		0 0	0 0 0	3 3 3	3					1	1 1	0 0 0
D		0 1	2 - 1 0	5 - 4 - 2 - 4	---	4	---	0 1	2 - 1 0			
A		5 3	0 0 0	0 0 0	0				0	5 3	0 0 0	
A		0 0	0 0 0	6 6 6	5				6	0 0	0 0 0	
AA		5 - 5 4	5 - - 4 5	8 - 7 - 5	7	---	7	---	5 4	5 - - 4 5		

H	H A F# D	E	---	DE	F#	E D	H	A	F#	A	F#	F# D	E	F# D	H
5	5 5 0 0	5		1	1 1	0 0 0	5	5 5	0 0 0	5	5 5	0 0 0	5 5 5		
5	5 5 5 0	1		0	0 0 0	0 0 0	5	5 5 5	5 0 0	5 5 5	5 0 0	5 5 5	6		
5	5 4 2 0	1	---	1	0 1	2 - 1 0	5	5 - 4 - 2 - 4	3 0 1	1	7 - 5				
0	0 0 0 0	4		4	4 4	0 0 0	0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 5 5	5			
6	6 6 0 0	0		0	0 0	0 0 0	6	6 6 0	0 0 0	6	6 6	0 0 0	5 5	6	
R	R 7 5 4	4	---	4	5 4	5 - - 4 5	R	7 - 5	7 - 5	4 - 4	5 1 0	R			

*Hector The Hero*  
Mountain Dulcimer: D A dd and D A A A Scottish Arrangement: Steve Smith

If your dulcimer is tuned DAD, use this line and ignore the rest.

D	2	DE	F#	E D	H	A	F#	A	---	DE	F#	E D
A		5 5	0 0 0	4 4 3	0					4	5 4	0 0 0
dd		0 0	0 0 0	3 3 3	3					1	1 1	0 0 0
D		0 1	2 - 1 0	5 - 4 - 2 - 4	---	4	---	0 1	2 - 1 0			
A		5 3	0 0 0	0 0 0	0				0	5 3	0 0 0	
A		0 0	0 0 0	6 6 6	5				6	0 0	0 0 0	
AA		5 - 5 4	5 - - 4 5	8 - 7 - 5	7	---	7	---	5 4	5 - - 4 5		

H	H A F# D	E	---	DE	F#	E D	H	A	F#	A	F#	F# D	E	F# D	H
5	5 5 0 0	5		1	1 1	0 0 0	5	5 5	0 0 0	5	5 5	0 0 0	5 5 5		
5	5 5 5 0	1		0	0 0 0	0 0 0	5	5 5 5	5 0 0	5 5 5	5 0 0	5 5 5	6		
5	5 4 2 0	1	---	1	0 1	2 - 1 0	5	5 - 4 - 2 - 4	3 0 1	1	7 - 5				
0	0 0 0 0	4		4	4 4	0 0 0	0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 5 5	5			
6	6 6 0 0	0		0	0 0	0 0 0	6	6 6 0	0 0 0	6	6 6	0 0 0	5 5	6	
R	R 7 5 4	4	---	4	5 4	5 - - 4 5	R	7 - 5	7 - 5	4 - 4	5 1 0	R			

*Hector The Hero*  
Mountain Dulcimer: D A dd and D A A A Scottish Arrangement: Steve Smith

If your dulcimer is tuned DAA, use this line and ignore the rest.

D	2	DE	F#	E D	H	A	F#	A	---	DE	F#	E D
A		5 5	0 0 0	4 4 3	0					4	5 4	0 0 0
dd		0 0	0 0 0	3 3 3	3					1	1 1	0 0 0
D		0 1	2 - 1 0	5 - 4 - 2 - 4	---	4	---	0 1	2 - 1 0			
A		5 3	0 0 0	0 0 0	0				0	5 3	0 0 0	
A		0 0	0 0 0	6 6 6	5				6	0 0	0 0 0	
AA		5 - 5 4	5 - - 4 5	8 - 7 - 5	7	---	7	---	5 4	5 - - 4 5		

H	H A F# D	E	---	DE	F#	E D	H	A	F#	A	F#	F# D	E	F# D	H
5	5 5 0 0	5		1	1 1	0 0 0	5	5 5	0 0 0	5	5 5	0 0 0	5 5 5		
5	5 5 5 0	1		0	0 0 0	0 0 0	5	5 5 5	5 0 0	5 5 5	5 0 0	5 5 5	6		
5	5 4 2 0	1	---	1	0 1	2 - 1 0	5	5 - 4 - 2 - 4	3 0 1	1	7 - 5				
0	0 0 0 0	4		4	4 4	0 0 0	0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 5 5	5			
6	6 6 0 0	0		0	0 0	0 0 0	6	6 6 0	0 0 0	6	6 6	0 0 0	5 5	6	
R	R 7 5 4	4	---	4	5 4	5 - - 4 5	R	7 - 5	7 - 5	4 - 4	5 1 0	R			

**Hector The Hero**  
Mountain Dulcimer: D-A-dd and D-A-AA Scottish - Arrangement: Steve Smith

D	3	3	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	0	0
A	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	0	0
dd	0	1	2	1	0	5	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	0	1	2
D	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AA	3	4	5	4	3	8	7	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	3	4

This line describes where to fret the bass string

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      6+                      7                      8                      9

**Hector The Hero**  
Mountain Dulcimer: D-A-dd and D-A-AA Scottish - Arrangement: Steve Smith

D	3	3	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	3	3
A	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	3	3
dd	0	1	2	1	0	5	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	0	1	2
D	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AA	3	4	5	4	3	8	7	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	3	4

This line describes where to fret the middle string

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      6+                      7                      8                      9

**Hector The Hero**  
Mountain Dulcimer: D-A-dd and D-A-AA Scottish - Arrangement: Steve Smith

D	3	3	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	3	3
A	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	3	3
dd	0	1	2	1	0	5	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	0	1	2
D	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AA	3	4	5	4	3	8	7	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	3	4

This line describes where to fret the melody strings

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      6+                      7                      8                      9

If you're a beginner and have no interest in chording to start with, just play this line for your tuning. Yes, for all that information on the tab, this could be all you need to play very nicely... one line!

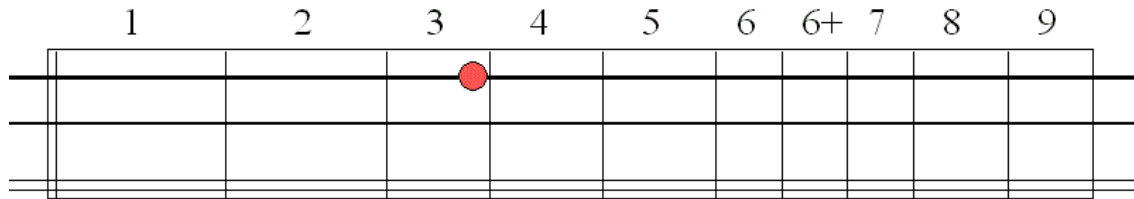
*Hector The Hero*

Mountain Dulcimer: D-A-dd and D-A-AA      Scottish - Arrangement: Steve Smith

D	3	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	0	0
A	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	0	0	0
dd	1	2	1	0	5	4	2	4	4	0	1	2	1	0
D	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	0
A	0	0	0	0	6	6	6	5	6	0	0	0	0	0
AA	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	7	7	5	4	5	4	5

Now for playing the tablature: the red box above represents one note in the song if your dulcimer is tuned to DAD. (DAD tuning means your bass (deep) string is tuned to D, your middle string is tuned to A and your twin melody strings are tuned to D (one octave higher than your bass string)).

So, to play this note I would press on the string in the places indicated:

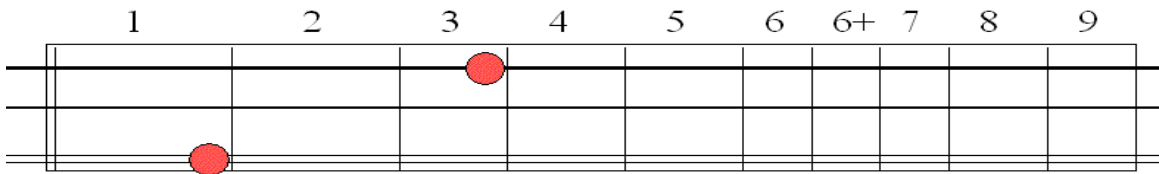


**To play the note, strum across all strings.**

Mountain Dulcimer: D-A-dd and D-A-AA      Scottish - Arrangement: Steve Smith

D	3	3	0	0	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	0	0
A	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	0	0	0
dd	1	2	1	0	5	4	2	4	4	0	1	2	1	0
D	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	0
A	0	0	0	0	6	6	6	5	6	0	0	0	0	0
AA	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	7	7	5	4	5	4	5

This line describes where to fret the bass string



Press just behind the fret metal for a clear sound.

**There's no more to it. Continue stepping your way through the song in this manner.**

**Two important points:**

- Select a song you already know the tune to. Just using tab can lead to

**errors because pure tab doesn't tell you how LONG to hold the note. That information is in the music notation. But, if you know the tune...**

**- Don't worry about chording the notes (chording to a MD player means pressing more than just the melody strings to lay a note). You can play just fine playing JUST the melody strings.**