

Corte Madera Mountain

Distance	6.5 miles round trip, out-and-back
Hiking Time	4 hours (round trip)
Elevation Gain/Loss	1750'/1750'
Difficulty	Moderately strenuous
Trail Use	Suitable for backpacking, dogs allowed
Best Times	November through May
Agency	CNF/DD
Recommended Maps	USGS 7.5-min <i>Morena Reservoir, Descanso</i>
Notes	Navigation required, moderate terrain

DIRECTIONS: Exit Interstate 8 at Buckman Springs Road and proceed 2.7 miles south to Corral Canyon Road. Turn right (west), and proceed 4.8 miles on narrow pavement to a hairpin turn. Gated, unpaved Kernan Road goes northwest from outside edge of hairpin turn. Park nearby off the pavement and display your Adventure Pass.

On a clear late autumn or winter day atop Corte Madera Mountain, you can see forever—or at least as far as Santa Catalina and San Clemente islands to the west, and the mile-high Sierra Juarez plateau in Baja California to the south. From many parts of San Diego, Corte Madera Mountain's sheer south face appears as an abrupt drop in the profile of the eastern horizon. On the summit, you stand near the edge of that 300-foot precipice. As this book goes to press, Cleveland National Forest is considering a seasonal closure (December through May) of the area around Corte Madera Mountain to protect possible nesting sites for raptors. Contact the U.S. Forest Service—determine if this closure policy has been implemented.

Start the hike by squeezing around the vehicle gate on Kernan Road. Walk 0.5 mile uphill on the road. Where the road bends right in a horseshoe curve, turn left on the Espinosa Trail and continue northwest. After 1 mile of climbing, you top a saddle and intersect Los Pinos Road. Turn right and continue 0.3 mile to another saddle, this one 0.5 mile southeast of a boulder-studded, Coulter-pine-dotted peak 4588. Leave the road there and find and follow a narrow path (basically a use trail worn in by hikers bound for Corte Madera Peak) that works its way up and over peak 4588 and across another saddle just northwest of the same peak.

Continue following the path northwest and then finally southwest along a crest to the summit plateau of Corte Madera Mountain. The view north includes a fabulous vista, available nowhere else on public land, of privately owned Corte Madera Valley. A beautiful lake and oak-studded meadows fill the valley. The name Corte Madera ("woodyard") apparently refers to the use of this area as a source of timber during the building of the San Diego area missions.

Corte Madera Mountain's summit plateau is covered by large sheets of granitic rock and patches of chaparral. From the southernmost point on the plateau, you can peer over the abrupt face into the canyon drained by Espinosa Creek. To the southeast is Los Pinos Mountain, topped by a fire lookout—the last remaining active lookout in San Diego County.

If you care to do a little further exploring, try following the informal network of horse trails cut into the north slope of Corte Madera Mountain. These are used by riders who live in the private homes below. The trails meander down to the edge of the grassy Corte Madera Valley, where the private property begins.