



Roam-O-Rama

Climb to the top of Corte Madera Mountain, and survey a world of ocean, islands, and inland mountain ranges.

By [Jerry Schad](#) | Published Thursday, Nov. 17, 2005

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-high precipice.

To reach this 6.5-mile hike's starting point, exit Interstate 8 at Buckman Springs Road and proceed three miles south to Corral Canyon Road. Turn right (west), and proceed 4.8 miles on narrow pavement to a sharp hairpin turn. Unsigned, gated Kernan Road goes northwest from the hairpin. Park nearby off the road. First, squeeze around the gate and walk 0.5 mile uphill on Kernan Road. Where the road bends right in a horseshoe curve, go left on the Espinosa Trail and continue northwest. After one more mile of climbing, you top a saddle and intersect Los Pinos Road. Turn right and continue 0.3 mile to another saddle, this one a half mile southeast of boulder-studded, Coulter-pine-dotted peak 4588 (4588 being its elevation in feet). Leave the road there and find and follow a narrow path that works its way up and over peak 4588 and across another saddle just northwest of the same peak.

Continue following the path northwest, 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 supporting 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 spindly-looking fire lookout.

