

HIKE of the MONTH



Morena Buttes—Challenging ■ ■

Recommended Level: Cadettes-Adults

Dates: Feb.-March

Cost: Free (self-guided, family hike)

Please note that this is a self-guided, family hike (not a troop event.) Please wear masks on the trail if you encounter other people, and follow proper COVID-19 protocols.

Length: 10 miles (8 miles for a simple loop)

Difficulty: Moderate/Strenuous (the 1-mile lateral trail to the top of the buttes is steep, strenuous, and requires some route finding; doing the loop without going to the buttes is straightforward and moderate).

Elevation Gain/Loss:

→ To the Buttes: +1900' -1900'

→ Simple loop: +1000' -1000'

Driving directions: Interstate 8 east to Buckman Springs Road. Buckman Springs south to Oak Drive, turn right. Drive through Lake Morena Village, turn right on Lake Morena Drive until it dead ends at Lake Morena County Park.

Parking: Outside the park entrance, on the left, is a big dirt lot. Park here for the day for no fee. The Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) South trailhead is a few feet west of the lot.

Adventure Parking Pass is required

General Route:

A hike to the buttes is best done in late fall, winter, and early spring with cooler temperatures. This is a lovely section of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) and offers either a simple loop returning along the dirt lake road, or a sweaty and rewarding climb to the top of the Buttes. If you hike up to the buttes you must be comfortable with some route-finding once you leave the PCT.

Bring: [10 +2 Essentials](#) (link to our WHC handbook)

See map and specifics on reverse



HIKING LEVELS

■ Easy (all levels of hikers) ■ Moderate (intermediate) ■ Strenuous (experienced only)

Map: <https://caltopo.com/m/QGEO>. At the top of the page, click on “Print”, then “Print to a PDF”. You might want to print this large map in 2 halves to maximize your view on each section.

Specifics: Turn by turn

- The trailhead, PCT South, is just a few steps west of the dirt parking lot.
- Hike south on the PCT, passing your alternate route back (or simple loop option) at about 2.5 miles.
- Continue to the top of the saddle at the east end of the buttes (at 3 miles). You might see a signed junction for Morena Buttes, or the sign may be missing and all you see is a duck (rock cairn) marking the ‘social trail’ to the top of the buttes.
- Turn right and head up the ridge. This ‘trail’ is hard work, so hike slowly and enjoy the emerging views. This route is not maintained, but it is frequently used, so this social trail is pretty obvious at the beginning. Ducks often mark the route when you reach areas of granite boulders.
- **Always use good judgment when hiking off-trail:** go slowly, take time to search for the route, and don’t be shy about stopping before you reach the summit plateau if you’re unclear about where to go next. Getting down is more important than getting to the top.
- Where is the top? There are two ‘peaks,’ but the huge plateau of granite at the top makes a great destination with fine views, boulders to block any wind, and endless picnic spots.
- Return the same way you came, or once back to the PCT, divert west toward Lake Morena and follow the dirt jeep roads along the lake and back to the county park. Note: you can’t reach the lake from the dirt road; this direction simply offers an alternative to returning the same way you came.

Key Risks:

- Weather (heat/wind, wet/ice)
- Ticks in late spring (after it warms up, especially on the route up the buttes)
- Rattlesnakes
- Heights/exposure on the buttes: mind the cliff at the far northern edge of the granite plateau
- X-country hiking has its own inherent risks
 - o Go slowly to assess your route.
 - o Be sure of your intended route before continuing to go forward.
 - o Take breaks to rest, unmaintained trails require more exertion.
 - o If you build ducks to find your way back, be sure to dismantle them on your way down (Leave No Trace).

Be safe! Have fun! Share your pictures!

- Send us a picture: [GSSD Backpacking](#)
- Post a picture on the [GSSD Trail Buddies Facebook Page](#) (completion of Wilderness Hiking is a requirement to join this private group. We encourage you to join GSSD Trail Buddies to stay connected to the GSSD hiking and backpacking program, and learn about upcoming hikes, classes, and trips.)

