

# Cuesta Ridge

## Santa Lucia Ranger District

### Los Padres National Forest

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The Cuesta Ridge area is a narrow eight mile ridgetop strip of National Forest land north of San Luis Obispo between Cuesta Pass on Highway 101 and the Cerro Alto area adjacent to Highway 41. Access is by trail from Cerro Alto campground or vehicle from Highway 101. Cuesta Pass is 1,600 feet above sea level with most of the ridge being 2,000 feet above sea level. The dominant vegetation is coastal chaparral and the unique Sargent Cypress.

The ridge top offers an impressive variety of spectacular views overlooking San Luis Obispo to the south, Morro Bay and Morro Rock to the west, the Atascadero hills to the north and the Santa Lucia Wilderness to the east. A variety of unique plants make this an area of special interest to both the casual nature lover and the professional botanist.

**No target shooting.** Target shooting is prohibited on Cuesta Ridge by Forest Order #92-11-6700-3.

## POINTS OF INTEREST

### Cuesta Ridge Botanical Area

This area was established in 1969 and contains 1,334 acres of National Forest land. The most conspicuous plant is the Sargent Cypress, a relatively uncommon tree. This unique plant community has developed on a coastal ridge dominated by heavy marine influence resulting in frequent fog and low clouds along the ridge. The fog “drip” tends to increase the available moisture for plants.

### New Developing Forest

At a point 1.5 to 1.7 miles northwest of the Botanical Area

entry sign can be found a newly developing stand of Sargent Cypress. The several acre area, on both sides of the road, was burned in the 1970’s by a wildfire. A few remnant snags can still be seen. Sargent Cypress is a prolific seeder after a fire. Their cones remain intact, protecting the seeds during a wildfire, opening up after the fire cools to scatter seeds on the newly prepared seedbed.

### Valley Overlook

Several impressive views of the area from San Luis Obispo to Morro Bay can be found about midway between Cuesta Peak and Tassajera Peak. Morro Rock protrudes from the ocean due west of several distinct volcano cones, similar to Morro Rock, to San Luis Obispo.

### Cerro Alto Trail Connector

A short 1/2 mile connector trail ties the Cuesta Ridge road to the Cerro Alto trail. From the connector trail junction, the Cerro Alto trail allows two options. Turning right leads to the tip of Cerro Alto Peak; the left hand route will take the hiker down to Cerro Alto campground. The Cerro Alto trail is not long, but gains almost 2,000 feet in elevation, requiring many rests for the average hiker.

### Eucalyptus Grove

A popular picnicking site is the Eucalyptus Grove, 2.5 miles from the end of the paved road at Tassajera Peak. This area is not accessible much of the year when the access gate is locked during wet weather. The seven acre grove was planted by a Forest Service Ranger in the 1940’s and remains a healthy stand to this day.

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