

Valencia Peak

DISTANCE: 4.5 miles

ELEVATION GAIN: knapp 1300 feet

ROUTE TYPE: Out & Back

At 1,347 feet, Valencia Peak is one of the highest summits in Montaña de Oro State Park and may provide the best panorama of the park's stunning shoreline and inviting inland peaks. The views are epic and the hike is 4.5-mile round trip with 1,275 feet of elevation. An older version of Valencia Peak Trail was 0.4 miles shorter each way, and the new route uses more switchbacks to ease the ascent. Valencia Peak Trail crosses a couple level steps in the terrain that offer inspiring ocean views on the scenic climb to a summit with 360-degree views.

Begin from the parking area just south of Spooner's Cove and the park visitor center. Hike inland on Valencia Peak Trail toward the pyramid-shaped Valencia Peak. The level Bluff Trail also begins from this parking lot, heading south down the coast from the opposite side of the road. The single-track Valencia Peak Trail cuts through coastal sage, passing a junction with Rattlesnake Flats Trail after just one-tenth of a mile.

After the junction, Valencia Peak Trail curves to the left (passing an older route of Valencia Peak Trail). You'll head in the wrong direction for a stretch as the trail angles north to views over Spooner's Cove. Stay to the right past a spur to some holding tanks, 0.2 miles from the start. The trail then makes a broad curve to the right, allowing you to look down over Islay Creek Campground in the canyon below.

Around 1/3 of a mile from the start, stay to the right past a trail that descends to the right to connect to Oats Peak Trail. This connector makes it possible to form some different loops and reach Valencia Peak Trail from the campground.

The start of Valencia Peak Trail

Proceed up Valencia Peak Trail to the base of a series of switchbacks, 0.45 miles from the start. Hike through a handful of turns as the trail takes an easy route up steep terrain, expanding views over the coast. After a quarter mile of switchbacks, cross a draw in the terrain and rise to a landing that provides great views over the ocean to the west and the canyon to the northeast.

Get an eyeful looking up Islay Creek Canyon as the trail continues. You can also look down on Oats Peak Trail on its way up to a summit inland of Valencia Peak. Bear right past a near trail junction and then come to an actual junction with a trail kiosk. Bebee Trail descends to the left, connecting to Oats Peak Trail. Bear right to proceed on Valencia Peak Trail.

A short distance ahead, and 1.15 miles from the start, come to a junction with Badger Trail, which parts to the right. On the left, find a picnic table that offers a good spot to rest before the second section of the ascent. Continue straight up Valencia Peak Trail to hike another 1.1 miles to the summit, gaining 820 feet. Another picnic table can be found at the summit.

Looking southwest toward Point Buchon

A quarter mile of switchbacks take you up to the ridge that leads to the peak. The emblematic Morro Rock becomes visible to the north along with Cerro Cabrillo, while another Central Coast landmark Point Buchon can be seen to the south.

Enjoy an easing of the ascent as the trail goes up a ridgeline straddling two sylvan canyons. Islay Creek Trail is visible in the canyon to the north, followed by the 1,076-foot summit of Hazard Peak. A saddle at the end of the ridge offers a beautiful view down the canyon to the southwest toward the blue waters below.

Valencia Peak Trail along the ridge below the peak Hiking up the ridge toward Valencia Peak

Stay to the right through a final junction, a third of a mile from the top. This connection trail also heads down to Oats Peak Trail for those continuing deeper into Montaña de Oro. Push up the mountainside switchbacks to a sign reading, "Valencia Peak – Elevation 1,347 Feet." You've made it! Take either of two routes that ascend a short distance above the sign to the round open summit of Valencia Peak.

The ocean views you've enjoyed on the way up are augmented by new views over the interior of Montaña de Oro. To the east is Oats Peak, the second highest point in the park, and a full 26 feet taller than Valencia Peak (but with less ocean views).

Valencia Peak sits at the center of a beautiful stretch of the California Coast, and the 360-degree summit views make it one of the essential hikes in the San Luis Obispo area. Return down Valencia Peak Trail, which is perhaps more picturesque on the descent, and return to the trailhead for a 4.5-mile round trip trek.

If you are looking for a cool down, the Bluff Trail beginning on the other side of the parking lot is an easy level trail with great ocean views. Dogs are not allowed on any trails in Montaña de Oro State Park. Don't forget sunscreen. The hike has little shade. No fee or permit is required to hike Valencia Peak Trail, so get out and enjoy.

To get to the trailhead:

From San Luis Obispo, exit Highway 101 at Los Osos Valley Road and drive a total of fifteen miles northwest toward Montaña de Oro State Park. After 11.2 miles, Los Osos Valley Road becomes Pecho Valley Road and turns sharply to the south. Continue the final 3.8 miles, entering Montaña de Oro State Park and passing through a eucalyptus grove before reaching the parking area for Valencia Peak on the left side of the road just past the visitor center.