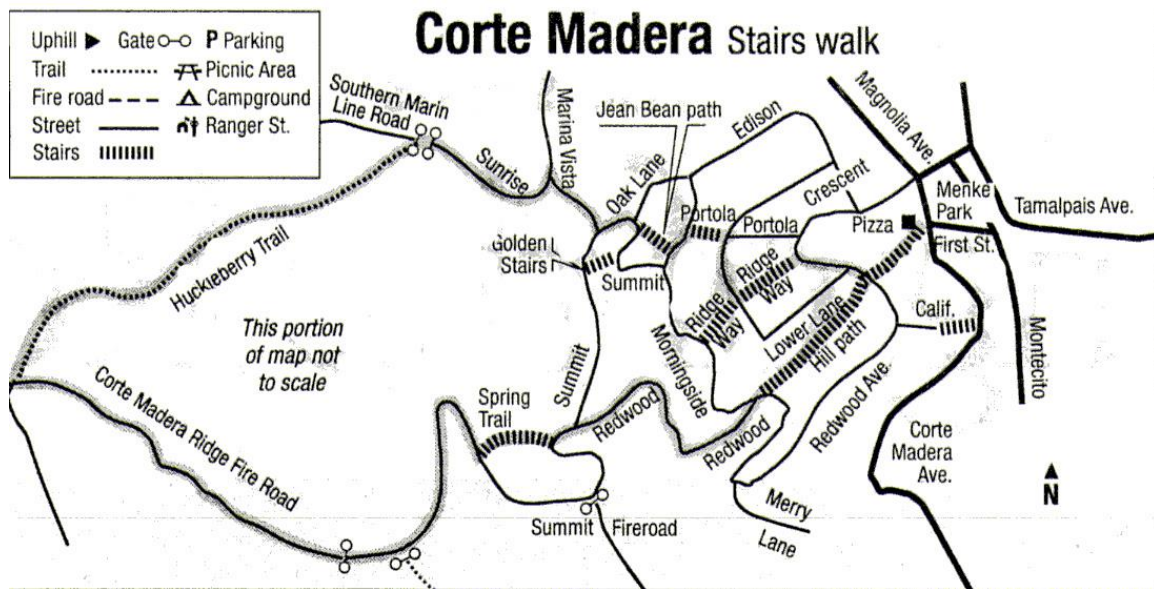


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Climb Christmas Tree Hill stairs for Corte Madera's expansive views

Tacy Dunham for the Marin IJ

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Start to the left of Stefano's Pizzeria.

In the early 1900s, stairways were constructed to connect the homes high on the hills of Corte Madera with the train station, school and businesses. The stairways are still used today by residents, exercise walkers and hikers.

The combination of stairways and streets create a moderately strenuous exercise walk about 1.5 miles in length. The stairways also provide access to fire roads and trails on Corte Madera Ridge.

Climbing a series of stairways and hiking on the Corte Madera Ridge Fire Road and the Huckieberry Trail create an adventurous five-mile stair walk-hike combo.

Park at Menke Park, the site of the old Corte Madera train station. Cross Corte Madera Avenue and head up the sidewalk beside Stefano's Pizzeria at 225 Corte Madera Ave. Continue up the Hill Path stairs, and then walk along Redwood Avenue. At the Summit-Redwood intersection, turn left and walk uphill on Summit. The Spring Trail stairs start right beside a home. Look for the sign. You can see the stairs angling sharply up the hill.

At the top of the Spring Trail stairs, you'll be puffing for breath and a ready for a break. Take a breather because the next segment of the hike is a steep uphill walk on Summit. At the end of Summit continue on Corte Madera Ridge Fire Road, which is a welcomed long downhill grade. The oak and madrone tree shade the ridge. Views include Mount Tamalpais' summit, Mill Valley, Richardson Bay and the Marin Headlands.

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At the intersection of fire roads, locate the Huckleberry Trail on the right. This footpath angles downhill through a grove of redwood trees then descends over rocky terrain lined by huckleberry bushes. The tiny berries are still forming. They won't be ripe until autumn. Views include Kentfield, Corte Madera Creek and Larkspur Landing. Turn right and walk briefly on the fire road before joining Sunrise. Follow Sunrise as it weaves steeply downhill.

Turn right onto Marina Vista and continue downhill. Watch for the sign marking the Jean Bean Path and walk quietly down the stairs, which pass between parcels of private property.

Turn left and walk down the Portola Way stairs. Walk right on Crescent to locate Ridge Way and the stairway. At the bottom of the steps, turn right and walk on Redwood Avenue to Hill Path, then down Hill Path to Corte Madera Avenue.

Use caution; the narrow residential streets do not have sidewalks. If you have trouble finding a stairway or lose your way, just walk downhill on the streets and you'll come out at the Corte Madera Avenue intersection.

Tracy Dunham is the author of several trail guide books. For more information about her books, e-mail cottonwoodpress4ca@hotmail.com. For past columns and maps, go to www.marinij.com/outdoors.

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