



Bald Mountain Botanical Area

Sequoia National Forest

Kern River Ranger District



About the Area:

The Sequoia National Forest contains some of the most diverse botanical regions in California with over one-quarter of the State's flora occurring within its boundaries. Because of this diversity, several noteworthy botanical areas are identified in the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), with one of them being the Bald Mountain Botanical Area located on the Kern River Ranger District.

The Bald Mountain Botanical Area, consisting of 440 acres, has been recognized by the scientific community as a most unusual botanical and geological island located in the southern Sierra on the Kern Plateau. Bald Mountain is comprised of pre-Cretaceous metasedimentary rock while the surrounding area for miles is Mesozoic granitic rock. Over 100 species of plants have been recorded on the rocky summit, including the largest known population of the rare Kern Plateau Horkelia (*Horkelia tularensis*). Diversity among the conifer trees is extraordinary on Bald Mountain with 5 pine tree species, 2 fir species, and the Western Juniper occurring here.

Why is it Called Bald Mountain?

As you face the east ridge, the vegetation is dominated by shrubs. Some of these shrubs are actually low-growing trees such as the Juniper or Limber Pine. The combination of steep slopes, extreme temperatures, and high winds, plus the lack of protective snow pack on the 8,000 + mountaintop, creates a harsh environment in which trees cannot reach their normal height. Many of the plants on the summit take a low to the ground "cushion" form, which is an adaptation to the sub-alpine conditions. All of this creates the impression of a "Bald Mountain".

Island in the Sky:

The rocks and soil are different on Bald Mountain than the surrounding area. Ages ago, intense heat and pressure hardened mud, sea shells and sand on the bottom of a vast ocean, forming layers of dark slate, white dolomite and sandstone.

Now, 200 million years later, erosion and uplifts have left only a few of these metasedimentary formations. The soil made from these ancient rocks is richer in minerals and holds water more efficiently than the surrounding granitic soils. This results in the diverse and abundant plant life found on Bald Mountain.

Lookout Tower:

In 1951, the Sequoia National Forest took advantage of this "island in the sky" for use as a fire lookout point. Bald Mountain Lookout scans over 1,000 square miles with a view of the Dome Land, Golden Trout and South Sierra Wildernesses, as well as Olancho Peak and Mt. Whitney, and the headwaters of the Kern Wild and Scenic River. Elevation is 9,430 feet. The present tower, built in 1955, was packed-in in pieces by mule train from what was then the end of the road at Kennedy Meadows. The Lookout became accessible in 1967.

Thank you for your help in making forest visits enjoyable and safe! Plan ahead by obtaining a National Forest map at one of the following offices:

Kern River Ranger District

**11380 Kernville Rd.
Kernville, CA 93238
[760-376-3781](tel:760-376-3781)**

Forest Supervisor's Office

**220 E Morton Ave
Porterville, CA 93257
[559-784-1500](tel:559-784-1500)**



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