

# The Nine Sisters and Morro Bay

By Tony Galván

**T**his week we head north of Goleta to check out our local volcano chain and the town of Morro Bay. Volcanoes on the Central Coast, you say? Yes, volcanoes!

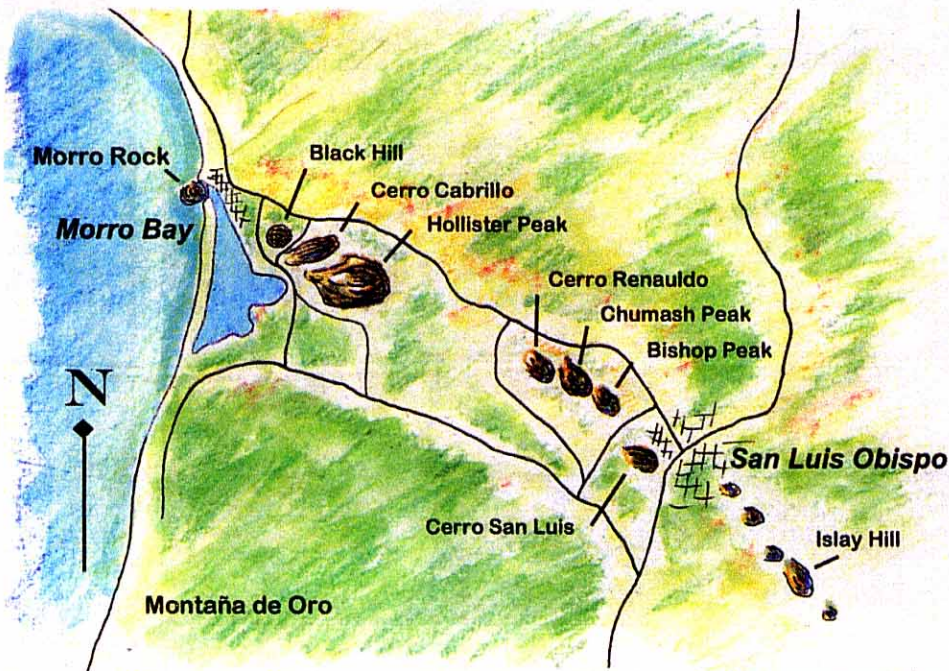
Just two hours north of here are the remains of volcanic plugs or morros of now-extinct volcanoes.

Subhed: During the Cenozoic Era...

The Nine Sisters, as the volcanic chain is known locally, began rising to the surface about 25 million years ago. Today the landscape looks quiet and inviting, but imagine what it was like back in those Miocene days during the Cenozoic Era. Molten magma erupted out of the ground, sometimes like a fountain, and other times slowly oozing out along cracks or fissures.

It was magma that created a series of volcanic cones in an almost perfectly straight line over 12 miles long from the Pacific Ocean to a place just southeast of the city of San Luis Obispo. Over millions of years, water and wind worked their erosion magic on the volcanic ash and lava, exposing a series of rocky peaks with nearly vertical upper slopes and grassy-covered bases. These are the sisters we see today along Highway 101 and California 1.

Approaching the city of San Luis Obispo (named in honor of Saint Louis the Bishop) from the south, you'll begin to notice conical mountains jutting out of the rolling hills on either side of Highway 101. You are



ILLUSTRATIONS © ANTHONY GALVÁN III

about to enter the realm of the Nine Sisters. The sisters range in elevation from 556 feet (Morro Rock) to 1,559 feet (Bishop Peak) above sea level. As you head west onto California 1 at San Luis Obispo, you can't help but see the other sisters along the way to Morro Bay.

Subhed: Nine Sisters to pick from....

Driving west, you will see all nine morros as you reach the town of Morro Bay. The names of the morros — or sisters — in order from San Luis Obispo to the ocean are: Islay Hill, Cerro San Luis, Bishop Peak, Chumash

## The Day Tripper

Peak, Cerro Remauldo, Hollister Peak, Cerro Cabrillo, Black Hill and Morro Rock. There is an unseen sister, Davidson Seamount. This underwater plug, located off the shore from Morro Bay, is 7,800 feet high and located 3,600 feet below the surface of the water. Some of the morros are located on private property but some are on public land. Check the Sierra Club Santa Lucia Chapter's website for information about hiking

the Nine Sisters.

Our drive ends at the town of Morro Bay, home of the ninth morro, Morro Rock. Known as the Gibraltar of the Pacific, this morro sits just off the beach within walking distance of the town. Its 556-foot peak is now a protected habitat for peregrine falcons. Legend has it that Portuguese navigator Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo named the rock El Moro, or The Moor because it resembled a turban worn by the Moors on the Iberian Peninsula. But, the Spanish word for knoll or knob is also morro. I'll let you decide

how it got its name. Either way, the name morro has stuck.

Subhed: Morro Bay: decisions, decisions....

Morro Bay is a working seaside village that has something for everyone. Whether it's sports fishing, shopping or hiking, or whether you're a kayaker, birder or artist, Morro Bay's the place to enjoy it. Take an underwater tour of the kelp forests on the Seaview, a semi-submersible vessel that calls Morro Bay its homeport. Or stop for a cup of coffee at the Coffee Pot Café located on the Embarcadero. Stay awhile and check out the coffee pot collection if you're a coffee fan! Then head towards the Embarcadero for some shopping. Maybe you'll see otters in the bay along the walkways posing for photographers.

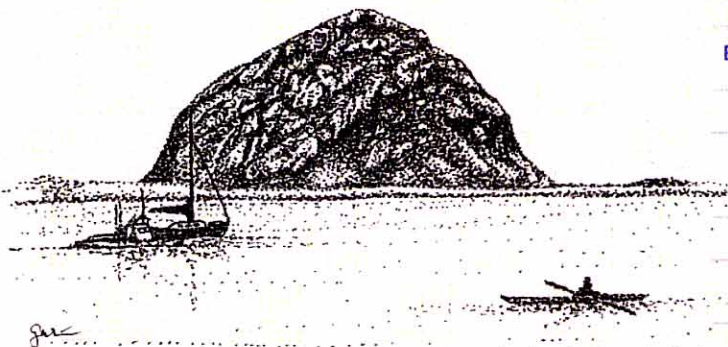
Save Sept. 2-4 for Art in the Park in the old town area. South of town, the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History offers spectacular views of the rock and estuary. Head further south to Montaña de Oro, a state park that is one of San Luis Obispo's County's best-kept secrets. The name means Mountain of Gold, and in the spring California poppies cover the hills in a blaze of gold.

If you spend the night catch the sunset behind the rock and wake up early in the morning to watch the sun kiss it once again. You don't have to go to the Big Island of Hawaii to see volcanoes. They're in your own backyard.

*Tony Galván is a natural history illustrator, photographer and kinda nose-y traveler who lives in Goleta. The Day Tripper appears monthly.*



## Hit the Road: The Nine Sisters and Morro Bay



**Location** Take U.S. Highway 101 north to San Luis Obispo. Take California Highway 1, west at San Luis Obispo to Morro Bay.

**Best season for birding** All year. Fall and spring migration offers a chance to see many transient seabirds on the estuary.

**Wildflowers** Spring, March, April and May — Montaña de Oro State Park

**Hiking the morros** Check the Sierra Club Santa Lucia Chapter's website for information and maps: <http://santalucia.sierraclub.org/ninesis.html#hiking>

**Water sports** Sport fishing and kayaking available at the harbor and estuary

**Other local points of interest** Morro Bay Museum of Natural History, Sweet Springs Nature Preserve, Elfin Forest.

**Special Events** Morro Bay Arts Festival, Sept. 2-4; Morro Bay Harbor Festival, Oct. 7-8; Morro Bay Birding Festival, Jan. 12-15, 2007.