

HISTORY CENTER

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

The Nine Peaks of San Luis Obispo County



The Nine Peaks, also known as the Seven Sisters, seen from the air in the 1950s

San Luis Obispo has a natural phenomenon in its midst - the nine volcanic cores which begin with Islay Peak near the airport and end with Morro Rock in the Pacific Ocean. These famous peaks are used by professors of geology, by way of illustration, of volcanic cores and whole classes are brought from California universities throughout the state for observation and study.

Let's start with Islay Peak across from the airport. It uses a Chumash word in its name - "islay" - which means wild cherry, and there were many in the area long, long ago. We have a street named Islay as well as one of the Mexican land grants. This peak is 775 feet high and has an airport beacon on its crown



San Luis Mountain, also known as Cerro San Luis. The "M" stands for Mission Prep High School, not Madonna Mountain as is sometimes

because it is near San Luis Obispo Regional Airport.

claimed. The issue is further confused by the fact that the Madonna family owned a significant portion of the land on the mountain.

The next is known by everyone in town - San Luis Mountain, named for St. Louis, Bishop of Toulouse, France. It is the one everybody climbs, or did when they were young, for after all it is 1292 feet high. Old timers may remember the lemon orchard on its slope.

The next mountain in the chain is Bishop's Peak. Look up at the top and you will see a formation similar to a bishop's mitred cap. This is the highest alp in the nine - measuring 1559 feet. Those who scale this one are the young in heart and limb.

The next one is named in honor of our native peoples - Chumash Peak. This name was selected by your author [Louisiana Clayton Dart] - our county had never named any geographic thing for the Chumash. This mountain has a sharp knob on its northern exposure and one can easily imagine an alert young person standing there long ago, scanning the horizon for friend or foe - or game. It is 1257 feet tall.



The following beautiful, sharp pointed peak, Cerro Romauldo, is named for Romauldo, a Chumash man, who was the only Chumash to receive a Mexican land grant in our county. His grant was the Huerta de Romauldo (Kitchen Garden of Romauldo), the smallest grant of the thirty-five. Cerro Romauldo is in Camp San Luis Obispo as the early camp absorbed the grant. The peak is 1306 high.

The Hollister family And now we come to the most majestic and awesome of the nine, photographed in 1888 though not the highest, for it is only 1404 feet. I refer to Hollister Peak, once called Cerro Alto (High Peak) and so designated on early maps of San Luis Obispo County. The name was changed in honor of a pioneer family who later owned the land.

Your author remembers a magnificent painting of Hollister Peak at the Biltmore Hotel Art Gallery in Los Angeles some years ago. It was entitled "What God Hath Wrought," and sold for \$5,000. Have you ever heard the mountain referred to as The Holy Mountain? This is because of the natural placement of a dozen or more boulders on its top. Driving from San Luis Obispo towards Morro Bay, one perceives Mary with a veil over her head, holding the Christ Child at her knee. Joseph is kneeling behind the Virgin. The illusion is rather good, especially towards evening.

Again, it was [Mrs. Dart's] opportunity to make amends for an historical oversight. We, as a county, had never named anything for Cabrillo. True, Cabrillo Highway runs through our county, but that is a State Highway and was named by the state. So this peak, 911 feet high, was named for the intrepid Portuguese explorer who was sailing under the flag of Spain and the writer was privileged to name this peak.



Black Hill and Morro Rock seen from atop Cerro Cabrillo

Black Hill, 665 feet high, is the last of the peaks on land.

The final one, Morro Rock, 581 feet high, was named by Cabrillo in 1542. He spelled it Moro, with one "R," which means the round turbaned head of a Turk. The spelling was later changed by other generations, with two "Rs," which gives the word an entirely different connotation, a fort. Morro Rock is now State Historical Landmark No. 821.

Take this inspiring drive some day on Highway 1 and at another time, take Los Osos Valley Road, in back of the peaks. They are entirely different from that side. You will see the ugly gash on the side of Bishop's Peak. That is where we quarried the andesite dacite porphyry (stone) to build four buildings in San Luis Obispo in the early 1900s.

Best wishes and happy looking.

Written by Louisiana Clayton Dart in 1978.

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For a very limited time, Left Coast Shirts will be selling tees to support our local institutions, including the History Center.

Half of the \$25 purchase cost will come back to support the History Center, or any other business whose shirt grabs your eye.

[They're only available until June 30th, so act fast! Click here to shop now!](#)



Dallidet Gardens Opening

As San Luis Obispo County finds itself in Stage 2 of reopening, we are starting to stretch our legs and we have an exciting announcement to make: we will be opening the incomparable beauty of the Dallidet Gardens to the public.

Starting Sunday, July 5th, and continuing every Sunday throughout July, the gardens will be open from 11 am to 3 pm. The State's [guidelines for Outdoor Museums](#) will be strictly

followed, so please wear your mask.

Tour the Dallidet Adobe

Even as we prepare to open the Gardens, the house is still closed for now. That doesn't mean you can't tour the Adobe: we're giving virtual tours every Thursday at 1:00 pm.

The Dallidet family lived in San Luis Obispo from the 1850s through the 1950s. Hear their stories while visiting the family home.

Please register by noon on Thursday, and we will email you a Zoom invitation to join that week's tour.

[Click here for more information or to register](#)



Online Research Workshop

Are you looking for new ways to learn about local history and research while our institutions are closed? Join Kaylee Scoggins Herring, History Center's Collections Manager, and Laura Sorvetti, Reference Specialist at Cal Poly's Special Collections and Archives for a FREE webinar on July 7, 2020, from 6pm-7:30pm.

We'll be discussing the various ways to learn about our county's history from your very own home, with time for your questions at the end!



Elsie Louis, granddaughter of Ah Louis

If you are not able to attend the webinar, go ahead and register and we will send out a link to the recording.

[Click here for more information or to register.](#)

Looking for more to do?

- Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#). With posts like Mystery Monday and Throwback Thursday, we'll be sharing photos from our collection.
- Take a [virtual walking tour](#) of historic San Luis Obispo. These video series feature short vignettes about significant local landmarks.

If you have any ideas of content you'd like to see, share it with us! And if you enjoy what we share with you, and if you are able to, would you please consider [supporting us](#)?

Thank you for being a part of our community. Everybody stay healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

Thomas Kessler
Executive Director

History Center of San Luis Obispo County

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