

**CALIFORNIA PLACE
NAMES OF
INDIAN ORIGIN**

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California place names of Indian origin by A. L. Kroeber

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The origin of many place-names in California which are of Indian derivation is very imperfectly known, and has often been thoroughly misunderstood. There is no subject of information in which rumor and uncritical tradition hold fuller sway than in this field. The best literature dealing with the topic—and it is one of widespread interest—contains more errors than truths. The present compilation, in spite of probably embodying numerous misunderstandings and offering only doubt or ignorance on other points, is at least an attempt to approach the inquiry critically. It is based on fifteen years of acquaintance, from the anthropological side, with most of the Indian tribes of the state. In the course of the studies made in this period, geographical and linguistic data were accumulated, which, while not gathered for the present purpose, serve to illuminate, even though often only negatively, the origin and meaning of many place-names adopted or reputed to have been taken from the natives. Authorities have been cited where they were available and known. If they are not given in more cases, it is because unpublished notes of the writer are in all such instances the source of information.

The present state of knowledge as to place-names derived from the Indians is illustrated by the following example. There are nine counties in California, Colusa, Modoc, Mono, Napa, Shasta, Tehama, Tuolumne, Yolo, and Yuba, whose names are demonstrably or almost demonstrably of Indian origin, and two others, Inyo and Siskiyou, that presumably are also Indian. Of these eleven, Maslin in his officially authorized list, cited below, gives two, Mono and Yuba, as being Spanish; he adds Solano and Marin, of which the first is certainly and

the latter probably Spanish, as being Indian; and the only etymologies which he mentions—those for Modoc, Napa, Shasta, Tuolumne, and Yolo—are all either positively erroneous or unverified. The lists by other authors, which include the names of less widely known localities, are as a rule even more unreliable. The prevalent inclination has been to base explanations of place-names of Indian origin not on knowledge, or where certainty is unattainable on an effort at investigation, but on vague though positively stated conjectures of what such names might have meant, or on naive fancies of what would have been picturesque and romantic designations if the unromantic Indian had used them. It is therefore a genuine pleasure to mention one notable and recent exception, the *Spanish and Indian Place Names of California* of Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez, a really valuable work which unites honest endeavor and historical discrimination with taste and pleasing presentation.¹

To avoid an array of foot-notes, most references have been cited in the text in a simplified form, which will be clear upon consultation of the following list.

MASLIN: Prentiss Maslin. I have not seen this work, printed for or by the State of California, in the original. It may be more accessible to most readers as reprinted as an appendix to John S. McGroarty's *California*, 1911, pages 311 and following. As the names follow one another in alphabetical order, page references are unnecessary.

GANNETT: Henry Gannett, "The Origin of Certain Place-Names in the United States." U. S. Geological Survey, Bulletin 197, 1902. As this is also an alphabetic list, page references have again been omitted.

BAILLY: G. E. Bailey, "History and Origin of California Names and Places," in several instalments (the pages indicated in the table of contents for the volume are in part erroneous), in volume 44 of the *Overland Monthly*, San Francisco, July to December, 1904. The Indian section is arranged alphabetically and begins on page 564.

POWERS: Stephen Powers, "Tribes of California," being *Contributions to North American Ethnology*, volume 3, Washington, 1877.

MERRIAM: C. Hart Merriam, "Distribution and Classification of the Mewan Stock of California," *American Anthropologist*, new series, volume 9, pages 338-357, 1907.

BARRETT, POMO: S. A. Barrett, "The Ethno-geography of the Pomo and Neighboring Indians," being pages 1 to 332 of volume 6 of the present series of publications. Page citations follow the title, in references in the present text made to this and the following works.

BARRETT, MIWOK: S. A. Barrett, "The Geography and Dialects of the Miwok Indians," pages 333 to 368 of volume 6 of the same series of publications.

¹ San Francisco, A. M. Robertson, 1914.

KROEBER, MIWOK: A. L. Kroeber, "On the Evidences of the Occupation of Certain Regions by the Miwok Indians," pages 369 to 380 of the same volume as the last.

KROEBER, SHOSHONEAN: The same, "Shoshonean Dialects of California," volume 4, pages 65 to 165, also of the present series.

KROEBER, CAHUILLA: The same, "Ethnography of the Cahuilla Indians," pages 29 to 68 of volume 8 of the present series.

Several important original sources, such as Hugo Reid in the *Los Angeles Star* of 1852, and Alexander Taylor in the *California Farmer* of 1860 following, are referred to or partly extracted, so far as Indian place-names are concerned, in the above works.

The number of California place-names taken from the several California Indian languages varies greatly. In general, Spanish occupation has been more favorable than American settlement to preservation of native designations of localities. The distribution of positively and probably identified names, according to their source from the various families of speech, is as follows:

Shoshonean	33	Maidu	7
Chumash	28	Yuki	6
Miwok	26	Athabasean	4
Wintun	25	Salinan	2
Yurok	16	Shastan	2
Yuman	15	Washo	1
Pomo	13	Lutunani	1
Yokuts	9	Wiyot	1
Costanoan	7		

Karok, Chimariko, Yana, and Esselen have furnished no terms to modern California geography.

Such obviously imported names of Indian origin as Cherokee, Seneca, Mohawk, Oneida, Tioga, Sequoya, and Maricopa, have not been discussed in the present account.

THE NAMES

Acalanes, a land grant in Contra Costa County, in the vicinity of the present town of Lafayette, is probably named from a Costanoan Indian village of the vicinity, *Akalan* or something similar, which the Spaniards dignified into the *Acalanes* "tribe." The ending occurs on many Costanoan village names: *Saela-n*, *Olho-n*, *Bolbo-n*, *Mutsu-n*, etc.

Aguanga, in Riverside County, has no connection with Spanish *agua*, "water," but is a place or village name of the Shoshonean

Luiseño Indians. The meaning is not known, but the word is derived from the place-name proper, Awa, plus the Indian locative case ending *-nga* (Kroeber, *Shoshoncan*, 147).

Ahpah creek, entering the Klamath River from the south just above Blue Creek, in Humboldt County, is named from its Yurok designation, O'po.

Ahwahnee, in Madera County, is situated forty miles from the original Awani, which was the Southern Miwok name of the largest village in Yosemite Valley and therefore of the valley itself. The Indian name of American Ahwahnee was Wasama (Merriam, 346, and Barrett, *Miwok*, 343). It is of interest, though perhaps of no bearing in the present connection, that a similar name, Awaniwi, appears among the far-distant but related Coast Miwok Indians of Marin County as the appellation of a former village in the northern part of the city of San Rafael.

Algomah, in Siskiyou County, is of unknown origin, and suggests coinage, or borrowing from the Eastern place-name Algoma, also coined, given by Gannett.

Algootoon, which does not appear on most maps, is given by Bailey as another name of Lakeview, Riverside County, and as derived from Algoot, the Saboba (*i.e.*, Luiseño) hero who killed "Taquitch" (see Tahquitz). The name Algut sounds Luiseño, but does not appear in the Sparkman Luiseño dictionary in possession of the University of California. It is probably a Spanish spelling of Alwut, "raven," who is one of the most important traditional and religious heroes of the Luiseño, and into whom Tukupar, "Sky," turned himself when he went to visit Takwish on Mount San Jacinto preparatory to killing him.² This etymology, however, does not account for the last syllable of "Algootoon." Were it not that guesses are already more numerous in these matters than knowledge, the writer would be tempted to hazard the suggestion of a possible American corruption from Spanish *algodon*, "cotton."

Aloma mountain, in Ventura County, has an unidentified name.

Anacapa, the name of the island off Ventura County, is absurdly given by Bailey, page 360, as Spanish for "Cape Ann." The Chumash original is Anyapah, recorded by Vancouver as Ennecapah, misspelled Enecapah by the map engraver, and then Spanicized into Anacapa (Sanchez, 351, *fdé* George Davidson).

² Journ. Am. Folk Lore, XIX, 318, 1906

Anapamu, the name of a street in Santa Barbara city, is said locally to be of Indian origin³ and has a good Chumash ring.

Aptos, in Santa Cruz County, is given by Bailey as the name of a "tribe." If this is a fact, the village was Costanoan; but the derivation from Spanish *apto* seems not impossible.

Arcata, in Humboldt County, is said by Gannett to mean "sunny spot" in Indian. Such a place-name would be very unusual in any California Indian language, nor does the sound suggest a word in the Wiyot language, which is the idiom spoken in the vicinity.

Aukum, in Eldorado County, is, if Indian, which seems doubtful, of Northern Miwok origin.

Ausaymas, a land grant in Santa Clara and San Benito counties, is obviously named after the Ausaymas or Ansaymas Indians mentioned in Arroyo de la Cuesta's *Phrase Book of the Mutsun Language* as speaking a dialect somewhat different from that of the Mutsunes. Evidently Ausayma and Mutsun were both Costanoan villages near Mission San Juan Bautista.

Awawatz mountains, north of Lindlow in San Bernardino County, have a name that sounds like good Shoshonean. Southern Paiute or Serrano tribes lived in the neighborhood.

Azusa, or *Asuza*, in Los Angeles County, was a Gabrielino Shoshonean village, Asuksa-gna in Gabrielino⁴ or Ashuksha-vit in the neighboring Serrano⁵ dialect. According to a correspondent,⁶ the word means "skunk hill."

Bally, or *Bully*, mountain, in Shasta County near the Trinity line, has its name from Wintun *bolí* (o like English "aw"), "spirit." See Bully Choop and Yallo Bally. There is also a Bully Hill in Shasta County between the Pit and McCloud rivers.

Beegum and Beegum Butte, in Tehama County, are names of unidentified origin.

Bohemotash mountain, in Shasta County, bears a northern Wintun name. *Bohem* is "large," but the second part of the word is not known.

³ J. P. Harrington, *American Anthropologist*, n. s. xii, 725, 1911.

⁴ Hugo Reid, originally in the *Los Angeles Star*, quoted by A. Taylor, *California Farmer*, xiv, 1861, and by Hoffman, *Bulletin Essex Institute*, xvii, 1885.

⁵ Present series, viii, 39, 1908.

⁶ Mr. C. C. Baker of Azusa, quoting Mr. W. A. Dalton, whose godfather was Hugo Reid: Azunesabit, "skunk hill," the skunks being of the small or polecat variety, and the name applied by the Indians to the hill, east of the present town, where the ranch house of the grant stood. As -bit is the regular locative ending in Serrano, the literal meaning was probably "skunk place" rather than "hill."