

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Bully Choop and Yallo Bally

There are several mountains in California which bear Indian names. One of the best known in central California is Tamalpais, high above the San Francisco Bay region. To the local Indians, its name meant "bay mountain."

In Lake County there is a high peak called Kenoktai. That was the Indian word for "woman mountain." Two of the mountains in the Sierra Nevada range that looked down upon the Mono Indians were given the names of Koip and Kuna. It is said that the first meant "mountain sheep," the second, "firewood."

Bully Choop was a tribal name for "mountain peak." In the Shasta Trinity country there is a mountain with the hearty-sounding name of Bully Choop. The Yallo Bally Mountains between Trinity and Tehama counties combine in their name the words for "snow" and "spirit." Many Indian tribes believed that the spirits lived in the mountain peaks.

The natives usually named the rivers along which they lived. In northern California is the Gualala River which means "stream mouth." The Mokelumne River was so called by the Miwok Indians for the "people of Mokol" who probably lived on its banks. Another, the Tenaya River, was named after one of the great Miwok chiefs.

The Mojave River and Desert was given an Arizona tribal Indian name. The Arizona spelling is "Mohave."

Carquinez Strait in the San Francisco Bay is more Indian than Spanish in name origin. Upon its shores was an Indian village named Carquin. The full name of the Strait shows how the early name was given a Spanish ending.

Many a California valley boasts an Indian name. "Wild Goose" is the native meaning for Loconoma Valley in Lake County. At one time there was a Loconoma, or "wild goose" village in the valley.

Petaluma, in Sonoma County, has the Indian meaning of "flatback. Probably the old Indian village was so called because of the level land where it stood.

Even some of the points of land stretching out into the Pacific have kept their old Indian names. Mugu Point and Lagoon, near Ventura, were named from an Indian word meaning "beach."

Near Palm Springs is Tahquitz Canyon. Tahquitz was the name of an evil spirit whom the Indians thought lived above the waterfall in the canyon.

The word "temescal" has been the name of several California communities. One place between Oakland and Berkeley is called Temescal and there is another in Riverside County. "Temescal" meant "sweat house" to an Indian. He used it in his native method of curing disease. The sweat house was a small, hollow mound, built of sticks and clay. There was no smoke hole. It was heated to a high degree by fire and hot stones. The small entrance was closed when the patients had crawled in. Sick Indians would sit inside the temescal until they could stand the heat no longer. Then, dripping with perspiration, they would dive into a nearby stream. This was supposed to cure them of all illness.

Many of the Indian meanings of their place names have been forgotten. It was too many years before Spaniards and Americans realized what they were destroying when they burned Indian villages and forced the natives to speak a different language.

Main highways along the coast pass through Malibu beach, Pismo Beach, and near Lompoc and many other towns with Indian names. Because no one tried to find out why the Indians gave these names, their meaning has been lost forever.

The San Gabriel Indians left many place names still used but not understood. Since we know, however, that "-nga" on the end of their words means village. Shuenga, Tuhunga, Topanga and Cucamonga were therefore old Indian sites. (California History Nugget.) Of the 209 Indian names listed in Prof. A.L. Kroeber's "Handbook of Indians of California" 74 have been preserved in the official title of California land grants, or ranchos, dating from Spanish and Mexican days.

Only one of the Channel Islands has kept its Indian name, Anacapa, one of the wildest of all the Islands.

Some of the Indian place names have a savage sound. Others are musical and pleasant to speak. It is pleasing to say Jamul, meaning "foam." Cuyamaca sounds like its meaning "rain above." The word for "white earth" village was Matajuai. Pala was the word for "water."

In the mountains named after the Washoe Indians one hears another lovely-sounding word, Tahoe, meaning, "lake," "big water," or "water in high place."

California has its share of place names left by American primitive dwellers. And the Indian names live on, although many of their origins are shrouded in mystery.