

US placenames from American Indian languages: The NAPUS project after five years

William Bright, COGNA, Baltimore, July 2002

1. Progress report

2. Indian names of places: True placenames, or merely descriptions?

Gudde, 1969: "The original inhabitants [of Calif.] had very few geographical names, and practically all of these were descriptive."

Ashley, 1996: "What we think of as placenames may differ considerably from names Amerindians put upon the land. The red man [sic] considered himself a part of nature, not the master of it ... The names he gave were more like descriptions: any large river might be 'big river'." [Cf. Algonquian "Massachusetts" = 'big hill'; "Connecticut" = 'long (tidal) river'; "Mississippi" = 'big river'.]

English examples: Long Island (NY), Great Falls (MT), Grand Canyon (AZ), Little Rock (AK), Long Beach (CA)

Karuk examples: *píptaas, kíinik, útkee, tíih, kíuyiv, tíuyvuk, vúpam*. [Cf. Eng. *Rome, London, Paris*.]

3. Pronunciations of American placenames

Random House Dictionary pronunciation key, vowels: act, cāpe, dāre, pārt; set, ēqual; if, īce; ox, ōver, ōrder, oil, bōōk, bōōt, out; up, ūrge; ə = a as in alone.

California examples

Guejito (S. Diego Co.) [wā hē ´tō]
Guenoc (Lake Co.) [gwen ´ok]
Guilicos (Sonoma Co.) [wil ´i kōs]
Honcut (Butte Co.) [hon ´kut]
Kashia (Sonoma Co.) [kə shī ´ə]
Keluche (Shasta Co.) [kə lōō ´chē]
Sanel (Mendocino Co.) [sə nel ´]
Ukonom (Siskiyou Co.) [yōō ´kə nom]
Weitchpec (Humboldt Co.) [wich ´pek]

Colorado examples

Apishapa (Otero Co.) [ə pish ´ə pä]
Arickaree (Washington Co.) [ə rik ´ə rē]
Colorow (Rio Blanco Co.) [kəl ə rō ´]
Curecanti (Gunnison Co.) [kōō ri kan ´tē]
Guajatoyah (Las Animas Co.) [wā hə toi ´ə]
Haynach (Grand Co.) [hā ´nak]
Hiamovi (Grand Co.) [hē ə mō ´vē]
Morapos (Moffat Co.) [mō rap ´əs]
Piceance (Rio Blanco Co.) [pē ´ans]