

Sugarloaf

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THE AMERICAN OF THE PRESENT GENERATION associates the term "sugarloaf" with a conical or conoidal hill or mountain. The reason for this strange generic topographical term is unknown to most people because the object from which the name is derived has long since disappeared from the typical American scene. It is still found in some foreign countries and in a few foreign communities in our own country.

In my boyhood in eastern Europe a sugarloaf was still a familiar object wrapped in heavy blue paper and tied with a strong cord. Since the beginning of the sugar industry in the middle ages crystallized sugar seemed to have been formed into a conoidal shape for export, the loaf about three feet high and weighing around twenty pounds. Even sugar prepared for retail trade imitated this form; in China (and even in San Francisco's Chinatown) these small conoids for family consumption can still be bought in stores. In most countries, however, granulated or cube sugar has now replaced the "loaf."

Since the form of the "sugarloaf" differs from what is and was generally known as a "loaf," it is quite possible that sugar was originally packed in the shape of a loaf like bread. But since the middle of the sixteenth century we have evidence of the conoidal shape of the loaf. (See the reproduction of a Flemish painting in E. O. von Lippmann, *Geschichte des Zuckers*, Berlin, 1929). All western European languages seem to use the equivalent of "loaf" for this shape, except the Germans. In older German the word *Zuckerbrot* (literally "sugar-bread," but here referring only to the shape into which bread is formed) can be found occasionally, but the generally accepted term is *Zuckerhut*. Before paper could be manufactured at a reasonable price sugar loaves were packed in palm leaves, and the wrapping was called *cappello di palma*, a 'hat made of palm leaves.' Hence the German applied the name of the outer shell to the content itself.

A sugarloaf among the grocer's wares was so conspicuous and became so familiar that people soon applied the term sugarloaf to all kinds of objects which resembled its shape. The Oxford Dictionary lists no less than nineteen such objects, from sugarloaf button to sugarloaf yew. A very common application was the one to a conical hat, which was the fashion in various periods and in various countries. Among the strangest applications is the one to the little peaked waves on a calm sea, which English sailors called (or still call) sugarloaves and French sailors *pains de sucre*. Practically all of these transfer names are now obsolete except one — the toponymic term used both as a specific as well as a generic. We find isolated examples of this in practically all countries, but in the United States it has become a widespread and still actively used name for orographic features. Our topographical maps are dotted with sugarloafs, i. e. hills and peaks which resemble (with the necessary dose of imagination) the old shape of bulk sugar. When the name is used alone it is often spelled Sugar Loaf, but when it is used with a generic like hill, mountain, creek, point, etc., the spelling is ordinarily Sugarloaf. Among our members who are at present engaged in the study of American toponymic generics — Burrill, McMullen, Zelinski and others — one will doubtless soon present us with a contribution concerning the frequency, geographical distribution, and spelling variations of our many sugar loafs.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word "Sugyrlaffe" is mentioned as early as 1422. The oldest known reference to its application to an orographic feature occurs in Richard Eden, *The decades of the newe worlde or West India in 1555*: "Teneriffa is a greate hyghe pike lyke a sugar lofe." Since then Tenerife, as well as similar peaks such as Gibraltar and Cotopaxi, have been repeatedly likened to a sugarloaf.

Of the peaks which actually bear the name the best known is of course the *Pão d'Açúcar* at the harbor of Rio de Janeiro. The highest, as far as I could ascertain is the *Zuckerhütl*, rising about 10,500 feet in the Stubai Alps in Austria. The Italians, who can see the peak across the border, call it *Pan di Zuccherò*. The best known peak bearing the French version of the name, *Pain de Sucre*, is the famous mariner's landmark on Haiti. Many of our sugarloafs from Maine to California are well known, and some

have interesting stories behind their naming. But the elevation which became dear to the American heart during the second world war is not within the borders of the United States. It is Sugar Loaf Hill in Okinawa, stormed after severe fighting by the Marines on May 19, 1945.

It seems strange that our reference works fail to give us any information concerning the topographical name Sugarloaf. Only the *Century Dictionary and Encyclopedia* (1913) defines the name as "a high conical hill." All other dictionaries and encyclopedias which I consulted either fail to list the word at all, or they define it as a conical shape, or they give one or several isolated instances of peaks called Sugarloaf. This is also true of the leading encyclopedias of France and Germany. The *Grande Encyclopédia Portuguesa e Brasileira* mentions a peak called *Pão de Açúcar* on the island of Santo Antão but ignores the mighty "sugarloaf" at Rio!

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