

Mocho Mountain

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THE UNITED STATES COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY is responsible for the fixation and, in many cases, for the bestowing of names of the geographical features along our ocean shores. (See Lewis Heck's articles in *Names*, I, 103 ff.) The establishment of an agency to make a topographical and hydrographical survey of the coast of the United States was the idea of Thomas Jefferson. In 1807 he found in the German Swiss geodesist, Ferdinand Hassler, the right man to start the tremendous undertaking. For many years the work was carried on in a more or less desultory fashion because it was difficult to convince Congress of the practical value of the survey. In 1843 Alexander Bache, Benjamin Franklin's grandson, became superintendent of the Survey and since then it has grown steadily and consistently.

In 1850 the survey of the Pacific Coast was started under the direction of George Davidson. The establishment of names of coastal features, and inland features as far as the survey extended, had been comparatively easy on the Atlantic Coast and the Gulf of Mexico. Fairly good maps existed and most of the names were well established. The situation on the coast of the Oregon Territory and of California was a little more difficult. To be sure, there were names like Cape Mendocino or New Albion as old as any names on the Atlantic Coast. But no systematic geodetic work, (except the survey of San Francisco Bay by F. W. Beechy in 1827) had been done. Hence many features were nameless, other were badly located, or the identity of the name was uncertain.

Davidson and his associates discharged creditably their duty of supplying names for the map makers. They were somewhat conservative and pedantic and spent much time in trying to ascertain previously existing, if possible, original names. Since there were no trained linguists among them some strange and amusing incidents arose in the course of determining names.

When I was sorting the literary estate of Davidson several years ago I came upon such an incident. Although the name itself is of little importance, its story is a typical example of the processes involved in establishing a name of foreign origin. Under date of December 12, 1887, Charles A. Schott, in charge of the computing division of the Coast Survey, wrote to B. A. Colonna, assistant in charge of the Washington office, as follows:

Several communications were received lately in which the spelling of the triangulation station "Macho" has been changed to "Mochó". Up to this time and for many years past the spelling in the records, computations and annual progress sketches since 1883, was Macho. It was known to Assistant Eimbeck that "macho" was "mule" in Spanish, it is also "masculine", "robust", etc.; and "mochó" means "dishonored", "maimed".

Will you please inform this Division officially, which spelling has been adopted?

Assistant Eimbeck introduced the spelling Macho in 1875.

The same day Colonna, quite disturbed, wrote to Davidson:

The enclosed from Schott explains itself. To change a name once adopted, is a very serious matter here. Will you kindly advise me of your opinions and if there is no very urgent reason to change try to stick to the old name. Just to save trouble I enclose you a copy of the Supt's. Circular. I have been in much trouble you will see on account of designs of various persons for change and I find that I have to be very conservative to prevent endless confusion.

William Eimbeck was one of the great men of the Survey, but as Schott's letter clearly shows he was only a dictionary etymologist. When he established a triangulation station on a mountain at the border of Alameda and Santa Clara counties in California and looked for a name for station and mountain, he decided to use the name of the nearby creek, which was called by local people *Arroyo Mochó*. On second thought, he wanted to make sure the meaning of the word and found 'dishonored' 'maimed' in his Spanish dictionary. A "maimed creek" was, of course, as impossible to him as a "dishonored mountain." In looking further through the m's he found a similar word, *mácho*, 'mule' — Macho Creek and Macho Mountain was more logical and quite acceptable.

Davidson, who had obviously changed the spelling in his reports, spared no effort when he was challenged. He found out not only

that *Arroyo Mocho* had been used and recorded since the 1830's but also that *Mocho* is a perfectly legitimate Mexican geographical term. It is applied to streams that have no outlet but disappear in the ground, used like the American terms Cutoff Creek or Lost Creek.

Unfortunately Davidson did not go a step further. While the name Mocho is quite proper for the creek, it is absurd to apply it to the mountain which is neither cut off, nor is it lost. But the men of the Coast Survey, as stated above, were too conservative and not always quite logical. Though it was proper to restore the name of the creek to the original spelling, it did not need to affect Eimbeck's name for station and mountain. There was no "urgent reason" to change the name Macho for Mocho. Yet the name Mocho Mountain has been preserved to the present day.

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Gat and Gut .— In the midst of an informative article by M. F. Burrill, I was surprised to come upon a derivation of the generic *gut* from Dutch *gat* (*Names*, IV, 235.) No one will deny, of course, that *gat* (as in Barnegat or Hellgates) means "passage" or "inlet". But *gut* in the sense of "passage," "channel," etc., is an English word of long standing; the first quotation in the Oxford Dictionary is dated 1538. With *gut* a part of the word stock brought to America by the English, there is thus no need to suggest that this generic — as in Gut of Canso (*New York Colonial Documents*, III, 553), etc. — is an importation from another language. When it comes to non-English layers in our nomenclature, let us give the Dutch language its due, but no more than its due.

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