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THE NAME *INYO* is applied to a mountain range, a county, and a national forest, all in east-central California along the Nevada border. I intend here to consider the known history of this name, and to subject the widely accepted etymology to critical examination. The result of such examination will be, I think, to discredit that etymology. Whether the alternative suggestion which I have to offer has merit I leave to the reader's judgment.

The ultimate source of the current etymology is a passage in the well-known regional history written by W. A. Chalfant, a member of one of the area's pioneer families: *The Story of Inyo* (Chicago, 1922). The mountain range currently called "Inyo," which borders Owens Valley on the east and which appears on maps of the 1850's without a name, was the scene, in April, 1860, of a mining district organized by a party of some 20 men led by a Colonel H. P. Russ of San Francisco. Chalfant tells us (p. 83), "Chief George (who became a leader in the Indian war) told them [the members of this party] that the name of the mountain range to the eastward was 'Inyo,' meaning, as near as could be ascertained 'the dwelling place of a great spirit.' This is the origin of the county's name, and the occasion was the first time it had come to the whites' attention." The word whose first occurrence is thus recorded quickly became popular; it was used to name the new county which was created on March 22, 1866, and was well established by the 1870's. Part of its popularity is no doubt to be attributed to its shortness, its euphony, and the easy integration into English articulatory habits of its phonetic elements.

Chalfant's etymology receives the approval of Erwin G. Gudde, the leading authority on California place-names (*California Place Names*, 2nd edition, 1962 s.v., p. 143; unchanged in the third edition of 1969, p. 152). His approval is manifested by a reference to his article *Bally* (*ibid.*, pp. 20-21, 3rd ed.). There we read that a group of like-looking words which appear in place-names of the interior northern coastal ranges is confined to territory once occupied by aborigines of the Wintun linguistic stock. Gudde takes issue with the statement of A. L. Kroeber, a profound student of California Indian languages and cultures, that Wintun *buli* "peak" and *bola* "spirit" are quite unrelated, and continues, "The assumption may be permitted that these Indians, like other primitive people, identified 'spirit' with 'mountain' and that both words are derived from the same stem and originally had the same meaning."

It is well known that particular mountains (not, however, ranges, so far as I know) played a part in the mythologies of some California Indian

groups. Instances with which I happen to be familiar are Mt. Diablo (Contra Costa co.), Mt. Umunhum (Santa Clara), and Pico Blanco (Monterey). It is one thing, however, for a mountain to appear in an aboriginal creation myth (as the three peaks just mentioned do), and another to assert an original identity between the concepts of "spirit" and of "mountain." Spirits, or other divine or mythological creatures, may be supposed to dwell on, or be otherwise associated with, mountains; but I know of no unambiguous evidence from any "primitive people" which supports the identity of the two notions, and therefore, presumably, of the words which designate them. It is quite possible that some prominent peak in the Inyo Range (e.g., what is known locally as Paiute Monument, conspicuous along the eastern skyline from Independence, the Inyo county seat), if not the whole range itself, may have played a part in the mythology of the Owens Valley Indians. But if it did, we have no record of it; and as we shall see in a moment, there is not a shred of linguistic support for it. To claim, as Gudde does, that "primitive people identified 'spirit' with 'mountain,'" and then to generalize that assertion into a widely-applicable onomatological principle, needs more underpinning than the surface similarity between Wintun *buli* "peak" and *bola* "spirit." I cannot regard such a principle as proved.

The Owens Valley Indians, in whose territory the Inyo mountains lie and one of whom was the "Chief George" of Chalfant's account, were called variously the Eastern Mono or the Paiute. The language of those people belonged to the Mono subdivision of Western Numic, of which it was about the southernmost member; Western Numic was essentially uniform in vocabulary over a large area including much of eastern Oregon, the northwestern third of Nevada, and the southern half of Idaho, as well as the eastern fringe of California. It belonged in turn to a larger group now called Numic, spread over much of the Great Basin and adjacent Rocky Mountain country and beyond; and Numic in turn was but a part of one of the major linguistic families of North America, the Uto-Aztec. It is within Western Numic, if not in Eastern Mono itself, that we must seek the linguistic evidence which will either prove or disprove the statement that *Inyo* means "dwelling place of a great spirit." Although much work has been done of recent years on these languages, very little of it has been published. One of these workers, however, is Michael Nichols, now assistant professor of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico and formerly a graduate student of linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, who upon request supplied the following information, which I quote:

"The term [*Inyo*] has no retrievable meaning in any available sources on either the Mono or the closely related Northern Paiute language. Further, the phonological shape of the word is anomalous since no palatal

nasal, no nasal plus glide, and no underlying vowel clusters are present in native words in these languages. Thus neither /inyo/ nor /inio/ is possible, in fact after /i/ the expected allophone of /n/ is more toward dental articulation than palatal. The closest possible match with any 'great spirit' extension would be /i-naa/ 'my father,' which is a strictly unsupernatural, normal kin designation." Mr. Nichols also supplies the following words, all occurring in Northern Paiute.

co'api	ghost (Mono co'ape)
pa'oha'a	waterbaby spirit
niniditi	any supernatural being, "something strange"
kani	house ("dwelling place")
nobi	house (Mono nobi)
kaiba	mountain (Mono toyabi)

I think that none of these words possesses a phonetic shape even minimally similar to *Inyo*, that none of them is its etymon. It is, to be sure, conceivable that the local Eastern Mono dialect of Owens Valley may have had some other term within this general semantic field with greater phonetic resemblance to *Inyo*, a word not immediately suggested by the gloss Chalfant gave it. On the other hand, it seems altogether likely that the general Western Numic constraints governing phonetic combinations, which Nichols points out above, forbid prosecuting a search in those languages for the source.

What then are we to say of Chalfant's story? We know that the first printed occurrences of the name are in the 1860's, and that the published account upon which we depend for the etymology comes only 60 years later. Chalfant was either drawing on oral tradition, or he was relying upon a written record. But he does not cite a written source, and such a source, if it exists, is unknown. Since he was therefore likely to have used a family or a local tradition, it is hardly necessary to point out the strong possibility of distortion, produced by the natural desire to supply an origin which might appeal to popular fancy. Such reflections are occasioned by the practical certainty that Chalfant's story cannot be literally true; a name of more prosaic origin may, then, have been given an attractive etymology.

At this point we may do one of two things. The essential piece of historical information, the record of the actual act of naming, and the identity of the namer and his motives are unknown to us, since the ostensible account, having palpably been tampered with, is unreliable – and we can therefore refuse to speculate further, since we can never "know" in any objective sense. The other alternative must be frankly recognized for what it is – an imaginative attempt to reconstruct a piece of the past, using what is known and reconstructing the rest. I hope that the

main purpose of this study has already been achieved, the demonstration of the dubious nature of the "standard" account. What follows is intended as a guess, as one among what well may be several possible solutions.

We may take it as established that *Inyo* is neither an English nor a Spanish word, and that a derivation from some Indian language must be sought. In a number of such languages there exists a term of the phonetic shape /inyu/ or /inyo/, with the meaning "Indian." One such language is the Chumash of the Santa Barbara region, with which I have worked; and there are others. This word represents there an adaptation to Indian articulatory habits of the Spanish < indio > "Indian"; the aboriginal languages of course had no terms designating the different races of mankind. Now it is likely that neither the Owens Valley Indians nor the members of the Russ party had much more than a mere smattering of each other's languages, creating a situation in which misunderstanding is to be expected on both sides: the reported contact occurred at the very beginning of intensive white occupation of this area. The tradition has preserved some memory of a failure to reach a satisfactory mutual understanding, in the phrase "as near as could be ascertained." The process here suggested, then, is that a word like /inyo/ "Indian" had by 1860 been diffused from the coastal regions to this transmontane area, and was heard by the whites in their linguistic exchange with the natives. The meaning which came to be assigned to it, quite different from the true one, may be due to an expectation, or a desire, on the part of some of the whites to find some such semantic content, an expectation possibly generated by a familiarity with the Costanoan (of the San Francisco bay area) associations, referred to earlier in this paper, of mountains and figures in the native mythology. The Russ party did come, after all, from San Francisco.

The story of the name *Inyo* illustrates a set of problems frequently encountered in the study of place-names, particularly those derived from imperfectly known languages. Ordinarily, information is lacking on the key event, the first bestowal of the name and the motives governing the name-giver's choice. Sometimes such lack of information can be partially compensated for by subsequently acquired knowledge of the source language, when that can be identified. When both kinds of information fail us, we can either say "non liquet" and go no further; or we can speculate, without much historical or factual foundation. A result of such speculation may produce the uninspiring solution presented here, which is no more attractive than the etymology deriving the name *America* from the same source as the name *Henry*, which was studied in the first issue of this journal (*Names* 1 [March, 1953], 1-14).