

Palm Tree Place Names in Southern California

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Trees and other forms of native vegetation have provided innumerable place names in all parts of the world. Settlements, streams, springs, mountain ranges, canyons, and other features often have names derived from the vegetation of the immediate area. Such names are given official status when recorded as part of surveying and mapping operations. In some cases subsequent urbanization or agricultural activities may destroy the vegetation which gave the particular place its name. In such instances, place names can provide historical information on the former distribution of certain types of plants:

In southern California, palms are widely cultivated ornamental plants, and many residents and visitors alike assume that palms must be an important component of the native vegetation. However, only the California fan palm (*Washingtonia filifera*) is native to California, and its natural range is restricted to the area of the Colorado Desert which lies in the arid southeastern portion of the state to the west of the Colorado River.

The purpose of this study is to examine place names which contain the word "palm" in southern California, here delimited as the portion of the state below 35 degrees North Latitude, and to determine whether or not they owe their existence to the occurrence of native palms. Place names were collected from the U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps of the scale 1:62,500, and from the larger scale 1:24,000 maps

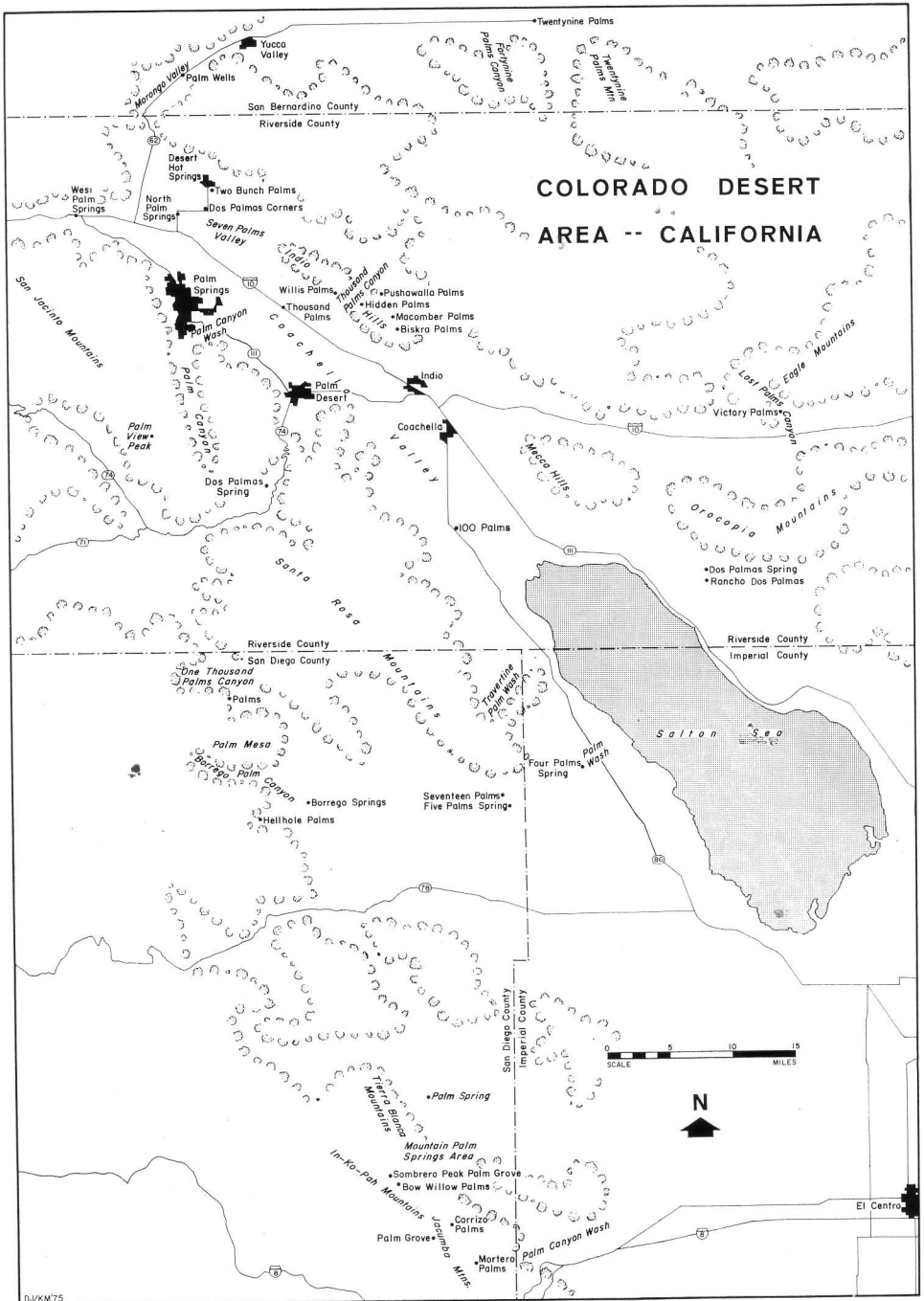
where they have been published. Names of streets, highways, schools, parks, canals, and other such cultural features were excluded from consideration.

Information on the origin of place names was obtained largely from Gudde's *California Place Names* (1969), books on the desert areas of southern California by Jones (1911), Chase (1919), and Henderson (1961), an article on the California fan palm by Smith (1958), U.S. Geological Survey Water Supply Papers by Mendenhall (1909) and Brown (1920), and numerous articles in *Desert Magazine*, published in Palm Desert, California.

The place names collected were divided into two groups. Those found in the Colorado Desert area are shown on the map in Figure 1 and listed on Table 1. In those instances where similar place names are located in the same area, only the most important is included on the map, but all names appearing on topographic maps are listed in Table 1.

The second group of place names includes those found elsewhere in southern California. They lie beyond the limits of Figure 1, but are listed in Table 2.

Riverside County has 26 palm place names which appear on topographic maps. Best-known is the City of Palm Springs, which is located east of the San Jacinto Mountains at a site of hot mineral springs and native palms, and whose official name dates back to 1890 when a post office was established there.



1. Map of Colorado Desert Area, California.

Table 1. Palm tree place names in the Colorado Desert area

Place name	Location	Grid reference*
Riverside County		
Biskra Palms	Indio Hills	T.4S., R.7E.
Dos Palmas Corners	S. of Desert Hot Springs	T.3S., R.5E.
Dos Palmas Spring	E. of Palm Canyon	T.6S., R.5E.
Dos Palmas Spring	S. of Orocopia Mts.	T.7S., R.11E.
Hidden Palms	Indio Hills	T.4S., R.6E.
Lost Palms Canyon	Eagle Mts.	T.5S., R.12E.
Lost Palms Oasis	Lost Palms Canyon	T.5S., R.12E.
Macomber Palms	Indio Hills	T.4S., R.7E.
North Palm Springs	N. of Palm Springs	T.3S., R.4E.
100 Palms	S. of Coachella	T.7S., R.8E.
Palm Canyon	S. of Palm Springs	T.4,5,6,7S., R.4E.
Palm Canyon Wash	S. of Palm Springs	T.4S., R.4,5E.
Palm Desert	W. of Indio	T.5S., R.6E.
Palm Springs	E. of San Jacinto Mts.	T.4S., R.4E.
Palm View Peak	San Jacinto Mts.	T.6S., R.4E.
Pushawalla Palms	Indio Hills	T.4S., R.7E.
Rancho Dos Palmas	S. of Orocopia Mts.	T.8S., R.11E.
Seven Palms Ranch	Seven Palms Valley	T.3S., R.5E.
Seven Palms Valley	N. of Palm Springs	T.3S., R.5E.
Thousand Palms	E. of Palm Springs	T.4S., R.6E.
Thousand Palms Canyon	Indio Hills	T.4S., R.6E.
Thousand Palms Oasis	Thousand Palms Canyon	T.4S., R.6E.
Two Bunch Palms	S. of Desert Hot Springs	T.2S., R.5E.
Victory Palms	Lost Palms Canyon	T.5S., R.12E.
West Palm Springs	NW. of Palm Springs	T.3S., R.3E.
Willis Palms	Indio Hills	T.4S., R.6E.
San Diego County		
Borrego Palm Canyon	W. of Borrego Springs	T.10S., R.5E.
Bow Willow Palms	In-Ko-Pah Mts.	T.15S., R.7E.
Carrizo Palms	Jacumba Mts.	T.16S., R.8E.
Five Palms Spring	E. of Borrego Springs	T.11S., R.8E.
Hellhole Palms	W. of Borrego Springs	T.11S., R.5E.
Mortero Palms	E. of Jacumba Mts.	T.17S., R.8E.
Mountain Palm Springs Area	Tierra Blanca Mts.	T.15S., R.7E.
One Thousand Palms Canyon	NW of Borrego Springs	T.9S., R.4,5E.
Palm	Mountain Palm Springs Area	T.15S., R.7E.
Palm Grove	Jacumba Mts.	T.16S., R.7E.
Palm Grove Bowl	Mountain Palm Springs Area	T.15S., R.7E.
Palm Mesa	NW. of Borrego Springs	T.10S., R.5E.
Palm Spring	E. of Tierra Blanca Mts.	T.14S., R.7E.
Palms	NW. of Borrego Springs	T.9S., R.5E.
Seventeen Palms	E. of Borrego Springs	T.10S., R.8E.

Table 1 (*continued*)

Place name	Location	Grid reference*
Sombrero Peak Palm Grove	In-Ko-Pah Mts.	T.15S., R.7E.
Travertine Palms	Travertine Palms Wash	T.9S., R.8,9E.
Travertine Palms Wash	Santa Rosa Mts.	T.9S., R.8E.
	San Bernardino County	
Fortynine Palms Canyon	SW. of Twentynine Palms	T.1S., R.8E.
Fortynine Palms Oasis	Fortynine Palms Canyon	T.1S., R.8E.
Palm Wells	Morongo Valley	T.1S., R.4E.
Twentynine Palms	NE. of Palm Springs	T.1N., R.9E.
Twentynine Palms Mountain	SE. of Twentynine Palms	T.1S., R.10E.
	Imperial County	
Four Palms Spring	Palm Wash	T.10S., R.9E.
Palm Canyon Wash	E. of Jacumba Mts.	T.16S., R.8,9E.
Palm Wash	W. of Salton Sea	T.10S., R.9,10E.

* San Bernardino Base Line and Principal Meridian

The City of Thousand Palms, east of Palm Springs, also owes its name to a sizeable grove of native California fan palms. The settlements of Palm Desert, North Palm Springs, and West Palm Springs to the southeast, north and northwest, respectively, are of post World War II origin and reflect the urbanization of the desert and the choice of attractive names for real estate development rather than the occurrence of native palms in those locations. A small settlement located on the highway south of Coachella is 100 Palms, which was named for the date palms cultivated in

that area. The Coachella Valley is the predominant date-growing area of the United States, but there is only this single place name in the valley related to that activity. The reason, of course, is that date cultivation began early in the present century, well after the naming of natural features and the establishment of many of the settlements.

Of the natural features in Riverside County bearing palm place names, most prominent is Palm Canyon, directly south of the City of Palm Springs. The stand of native palms in that canyon is said to be the largest in California, con-

Table 2. *Palm tree place names outside the Colorado Desert area*

Place name	Location	Grid reference*
Date City	Imperial County	T.16S., R.16E.
La Palma	Orange County	T.4S., R.11W.
Palm City	City of San Diego	T.18S., R.2W.
Palmdale	Los Angeles County	T.6N., R.12W.
Palms	City of Los Angeles	T.2S., R.15W.

* San Bernardino Base Line and Principal Meridian

sisting of over 3,000 trees strung along fifteen miles of canyon in individual groves. The canyon is part of the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation and the palms are protected. Visitors may pay a fee to hike and picnic in the canyon. Extending eastward from the entrance of Palm Canyon is Palm Canyon Wash.

Directly west of Palm Canyon in the San Jacinto Mountains is 7,000-foot-high Palm View Park. Located about four miles from Palm Canyon, it should be possible to see the palms from the peak and that probably accounts for its name. Just east of the upper portion of Palm Canyon is a watering place called Dos Palmas Spring.

The Indio Hills east of Palm Springs have six locations named for native palms. Most noteworthy is Thousand Palms Canyon, within which is located Thousand Palms Oasis. To the west of the canyon is a small group of palms known as Willis Palms; to the east are similar places called Hidden Palms, Pushawalla Palms, Macomber Palms, and Biskra Palms.

North of Palm Springs are four locations with authentic palm place names: Seven Palms Valley, with Seven Palms Ranch within it; Two Bunch Palms, just south of Desert Hot Springs, and Desert Hot Springs.

Riverside County has a second Dos Palmas Spring, south of the Orocopia Mountains, which was once an important watering place on the old road between San Bernardino, California, and Yuma, Arizona. Immediately south of the spring is Rancho Dos Palmas.

Lost Palms Canyon, a fairly isolated group of native palms, is located in the Eagle Mountains. Within the canyon can be found Lost Palms Oasis and Victory Palms. Lost Palms Canyon lies within Joshua Tree National Monument and therefore the trees are protected.

Within Riverside County there exist some historical palm place names not included on topographic maps. The valley area around Palm Springs, for example, was once referred to as Palm Valley. In the late Nineteenth Century, a settlement named Palmdale was laid out a few miles southeast of Palm Springs, but an inadequate water supply forced the abandonment of the site. In the Indio Hills, Curtis Palms is reportedly located near Biskra Palms, but does not appear on topographic maps, nor does Burnt Palms Spring in the Mecca Hills, nor Lone Palm at the entrance of Andreas Canyon, off Palm Canyon.

San Diego County topographic maps contain eighteen palm place names, all within Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. All the names refer to landscape features and appear related to native California fan palms.

Borrego Palm Canyon, west of the settlement of Borrego Springs, is the best-known of the county, and near its mouth is the main camping area in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. North of Borrego Palm Canyon is One Thousand Palms Canyon, a name found on the 1939 topographic map of the area, but changed to Salvador Canyon on the later edition. The name change may have been effected to avoid confusion with the canyon of nearly the same name in Riverside County.

Other place names in San Diego County are Palm Mesa, north of Borrego Palm Canyon, and, farther north, a location simply called Palms. Hell-hole Palms is located in the next canyon south of Borrego Palm Canyon. In the extreme northeastern corner of the county is Travertine Palms Wash wherein lies Travertine Palms. To the south of that location are two small groups of palms which bear the names Seventeen Palms and Five Palms Spring.

Southeastern San Diego County has nine places named for palms. Palm Spring, located east of the Tierra Blanca Mountains, figures in the history of California as a watering station on the Butterfield stage line. Mountain Palm Springs Area in the Tierra Blanca Mountains is made up of seven palm groves; only two, however, have names containing the word "palm"; Palm Bowl Grove and Palm.

The In-Ko-Pah Mountains have locations called Sombrero Peak Palm Grove and Bow Willow Palms; the Jacumba Mountains, farther south, have three named palm groves—Carrizo Palms, Palm Grove, and Mortero Palms.

A historical place name in San Diego County, not included on the topographic maps, is Una Palma, one mile west of Five Palms Spring.

San Bernardino County has only five palm-related place names. The City of Twentynine Palms takes its name from the northernmost native palm group in California, and the same name is applied to the mountain southeast of the city. In the Morongo Valley is the settlement of Palm Wells, a post World War II desert development whose name is not related to a natural occurrence of palms. A few miles southwest of the City of Twentynine Palms are Fortynine Palm Canyon and Fortynine Palms Oasis which were named for native palms. This canyon is also protected since it lies within Joshua Tree National Monument.

Imperial County topographic maps contain but three native palm place names. In the northwestern part of the county, Palm Wash drains eastward toward the Salton Sea. Four Palms Spring is located within the wash. To the south is the similarly named Palm Canyon Wash which extends eastward from the Jacumba Mountains and is partially in San Diego County.

In general throughout the Colorado Desert area, other place names associated with native palms have been used but remain a part of desert lore and are not of sufficient stature to be included on topographic maps.

The place names listed in Table 2 are clearly not related to native California palms. The small settlement of Date City, located about five miles southeast of Holtville, was no doubt named for the date cultivation carried on to a limited degree in Imperial County.

To the northwest of the Colorado Desert, in the Mojave Desert, is the City of Palmdale. The place name, although chosen to reflect vegetation, was incorrect, for the German settlers of the 1880s who founded the settlement mistook the native Joshua trees of the area for palms.

Along the coast of southern California are three palm place names which derive from cultivated palms. Palms, located a few miles south of the University of California, Los Angeles campus, is a neighborhood name within the City of Los Angeles; La Palma, a small Orange County city situated twenty miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles; and Palm City, a neighborhood designation in the southern part of the City of San Diego.

In conclusion, the study of vegetation-related place names is an interesting aspect of both plant geography and botanical history. As shown in this paper, place names can, in certain instances, contribute useful information toward the determination of natural vegetation distribution, especially in areas where vegetation maps have not been compiled.

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NEWS OF THE SOCIETY

Ralph Velez has sent the following about the first 1976 meeting of the Southern California Chapter which was held at Dr. Mardy Darian's place and was very successful. It is always a treat to survey the many rare and unusual palms in the Darian collection. There was no auction but many palms were purchased from Darian and others. Pauline Sullivan brought 30 *Syagrus weddelliana* and sold them at cost to her. In the best future interest of the local chapter, it is felt that if a member sells plants for personal gain at a meeting the Chapter should receive 20% of the sale, especially as these private sales may have an adverse effect on our auctions, which are the main source of our Chapter funds. Four Northern California members attended the meeting and said they now have carte blanche to plant palms anywhere in the San Francisco Golden Gate Park. Their main obstacle is the lack of palms and money. We wish them every success. In our own area we have finally been given the green light to start a palm garden in the Orange County Mile Square Regional Park in Fountain Valley. The proximity of the park to the coast allows for a wide range of the more tender palms. Hopefully, the thousands of people using the park will learn a little more about palms and the role they could play in landscaping. Plans for developing a committee to handle the landscaping of public parks will be discussed at the next meeting. We regret to inform our members of the

sudden death on December 17, 1975 of John Brunton. It was mostly due to his efforts that The Palm Society was able to participate in the Los Angeles County Fair, a most successful exhibit during which many new members joined the society. Some of our members may not know that Joe Sullivan, who, with his wife Pauleen, was on a trip to the far East last spring, died unexpectedly in Malaysia. Both these men who were very active members will be sorely missed by the society.

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On May 25, 1975, all Florida members were invited to see the magnificent and large palm collection of Bill Bidlingmayer just south of Vero Beach. This collection is already mature though Bill keeps adding new plants. His wife Moffie collects bromeliads, beds of which add greatly to the landscaping. Bill has promised us an article about his place to which we look forward since he has an outstanding collection in an unusual setting. After a noon picnic lunch and a short business meeting, the group moved on to the fascinating property of Joe Michael at Wabasso, a few miles north of Vero Beach, along the Indian River. The effect of the plantings and buildings is of a tropical island since it is really surrounded by water and swamps. An area that had been filled with mulch showed how differently palms grow when they have good soil and moisture as against another group growing on poor soil nearby. Joe regaled the group with historical tales about the property and all