Jamaica's Unusual Place Names Pt 1

Sometimes place-names tell their own stories. And Jamaica's towns, districts, rivers and streets have some really interesting ones – some are misleading, some are derived from family names, and some don't mean what you think they mean!

Often the names denoted a geographic feature or landmark (Above Rocks, Red Ground, Blue Mountains, Corner Shop), or were named after the original landowners (Tommy Bush, Sanguinetti), or were named for the homelands of immigrants who settled there (Dublin Castle, Irish Town, Egypt, Bengal, Skibo, Aberdeen). Some have Arawak names (Jamaica, Liguanea), or Spanish (Oracabessa, Ocho Rios, Rio Grande), or British (Somerset, High Gate).   Many of Jamaica's place names are humorous (Jackass Alley, Beverly Hills); others describe the distance from somewhere else (Three Mile, Four Mile, Six Mile, Seven Mile, Nine Mile and Eleven Mile)! Some are Biblical (Bethlehem, Siloah, Mount Horeb) and some reflect the abundance of a plant or animal in the area (Annotto Bay, Cashew, Hog Hole, Breadnut Bottom, and Soursop Turn).   But many of the names are just purely Jamaican! Jamaicans enjoy naming things and they call it as they see it, so these place-names might describe an incident that happened there or a particular feeling or sentiment they wanted to convey (Rest-and-Be-Thankful, Me-No-Call-You-No-Come, Bad Times, Broke Neck Gully, Half Way Tree, Putogether Corner, Dump, Shambles, Rat Trap, Poor Mans Corner, Sally's Delight, Betty's Hope, Thankful Hill, Boldness, Good Design, Excellent Town, Happy Retreat, Heart Ease, Friendship and Welcome). Yes, those are all the names of real places in Jamaica!

There are stories behind most of these names and it's quite interesting to learn how they originated! While many of the reasons for the names have been forgotten generations ago, here are some of them:

ABERDEEN, in Saint Elizabeth, named for the area in Scotland where owner, Alexander Forbes, came from.

ACCOMPONG (a Maroon settlement) is in Saint Elizabeth. This name is said to be derived from the Ashanti word, Nyamekopon, which means "the lone one, the warrior". This name was also given to one of the brothers of Captain Cudjoe, the second Maroon leader. Accompong was established in 1739.   ADMIRAL MOUNTAIN, near Newcastle, was used by British Admiral Lord Nelson as his country residence while stationed in Jamaica at what is now known as Fort Charles from 1777-79.   ALLIGATOR POND, in Saint Elizabeth: The name is said by locals to derive from the shape of the mountain range, which when seen from the beach, has bumps which look like an alligator's back.

ALLSIDES is so-named because its boundary extends from Trelawny into Manchester; it was on "all sides" of the boundaries.   ALPS, in Trelawny, is situated on a major geological fault which crosses the limestone plateau and which marks the western end of the Cockpit Country. The abrupt landscape and the winding road presumably reminded the British colonists of the European Alps.

ANGELS, in Saint Catherine, was Los Angeles of the Spaniards. The last stop of the first railway line in Jamaica was at Angels when it opened in 1845.   ANNOTTO BAY, in Saint Mary, got its name from the presence of annotto trees, important for dye and food coloring, and once an important export.   ARAWAK, in Saint Ann, was named because of Arawak (Taino) remains found there.   ARTHURS SEAT is in Clarendon and Saint Ann. Arthurs Seat is an extinct volcano in the center of Edinburgh, Scotland, so Jamaica's Arthurs Seat was undoubtedly named by former Scottish settlers and landowners.   AUCHTEMBEDDIE, a north Manchester village, is of German origin. Whether it is named for a person or a place in Germany is unknown.

AUGUST TOWN, in the hills of Saint Andrew, is thought to have been named because freedom came to the slaves of Jamaica on the 1st of August, 1838. Since then, this day has been celebrated as 'Emancipation Day'.

BALLYHOLLY, in Mandeville, is named after a place in Ireland.

BAMBOO TOWN, in Saint Elizabeth, was named for its abundance of bamboo trees.   BANGOR RIDGE, in Portland, was named after Bangor, Wales.

BANNISTER BAY, in Saint Thomas, is named for Colonel Bannister, Governor of Surinam, who brought English and Jewish colonists from Surinam in 1667.   BATH, in Saint Thomas, was named after its mineral springs (bath).

BENGAL, on the border of Saint Ann and Trelawny, is named after a region in India.

BLACK HILL, in Portland, is the site of an extinct volcano.

BLACKNESS, in Trelawny, refers to the rich color of the soil found in this area. The color is said to indicate the richness of the soil as is the case of the red earth in other parts of the island.

BLENHEIM, in Hanover, is a place-name found also in Manchester, and originates from Bavaria, Germany. Blenheim (in Germany) was a site of a great battle, which no doubt led to use of the name in Jamaica.

BLOODY BAY, in Saint James, is said to derive from the killing of whales there.   BOG WALK, in Saint Catherine, was originally the Boca d' agua (water's mouth) of the Spanish, and was corrupted to Bog Walk by the English after their occupation of the island in 1655.   BREADNUT BOTTOM, in Clarendon, is named for the abundance of breadnut trees in the area.   BULL BAY, in Saint Andrew, got its name during the time of the buccaneers or "cow killers". Once known as Cow Bay, the name is a testament to the island's connection to the time when buccaneers roamed the island hunting for wild cattle.   BULL HEAD, in Clarendon, was named for the bull head shape of the 3,600-foot mountain that stands as the parish's highest point.

CALABAR, in Saint Ann, is the name of a place in southeastern Nigeria from which many slaves came.

CANNON BALL GATE, in Saint Andrew, was apparently named after the Cannon Ball monument at the intersection of Arnold Road and South Camp Road. Arnold Road was constructed by 3rd West India Regiment in 1856.   CANOE

VALLEY, in Saint Elizabeth, got its name because, for many years, canoes were made from the trees there. CATHERINE'S PEAK, in Portland, is named for Catherine Long, the wife of famed pirate-turned-governor, Sir Henry Morgan. She is believed to have been the first woman to scale the 5,050-foot high peak. CHAPELTON, in Clarendon, was first known as "Chapel Town", as the village took its name from the church. CHEW MAGNA, in Saint Elizabeth, near Balaclava, was named by the Roberts Family after a place in Keynsham, England from which they came. CINNAMON HILL, near Rose Hall in Saint James, got its name because cinnamon trees once grew there. COCKPIT COUNTRY has two explanations for its name - it reminded British soldiers of cock-fighting arenas: hot, sweaty, bloody affairs, or because of the large limestone craters or pits found in the area.

CORN PUSS GAP, in Saint Thomas, is named for a legend about a hiker who got lost in the hills, caught a cat, "corned" it and ate it there.

DANKS, in Clarendon, was known as "Danke." Sir Henry Morgan, former Governor of the island (and yes, the pirate), was the owner until he gave it to his wife of German nationality. She said danke meaning 'thanks' in German. DOLPHIN'S HEAD, in Hanover, is said to be named because, when looked at from east to west, the 1,789-foot mountain resembles a dolphin's nose, face and fins.

DUNCANS, in Trelawny, was originally a property owned by Peter Duncans in 1784.

DUPPY GATE is in Saint Andrew. (Duppy is a Jamaican ghost.) Legend has it that the gate is haunted by the ghost of an officer from the days when the West India Regiments occupied the base. Soldiers have reported visits from a mysterious officer dressed in period uniform with a sword slapping against his leg, who would suddenly vanish as they were ready to report. FAR ENOUGH, in Clarendon, comes from the phrase "far enough from courts and kings," which is credited to a Scottish landowner. FAT HOG QUARTER, in Hanover, was named because a large number of hogs used to populate the area. FLAGAMAN, in St. Elizabeth, reportedly was named by a British Admiral Ebanks who settled above Great Bay, in an area then called Pedro Plains, and renamed it after his ship, the "Flagaman Escania". FLOG MAN, in Manchester, was named because a man was severely flogged here. Usually punishment could be applied outside the law to wrongdoers. FRIENDSHIP, in Westmoreland, was the site of a Scottish Missionary Society conference in 1837. GIMME ME BIT, in Clarendon, is actually a bird, the Antillean Nighthawk, named for the call it makes. GOLD MINE, in Clarendon: The Spanish are said to have washed gold there. GOSHEN, Saint Elizabeth, was named after a place in Egypt, listed in the Bible as meaning the "best of the land". GRATEFUL HILL, in Saint Catherine, was named by Baptist missionaries in gratitude for having been granted land by an English squire to establish a church. GUTHRIE'S DEFILE, in Saint Elizabeth, was named after an officer of the Jamaica Militia, Colonel Guthrie. He was instrumental in formulating the Peace Treaty with the Maroons in the 18th century. GUTTERS, in Saint Elizabeth, got its appropriate name from the heavy rains that flow through the town from three directions, making it almost impassable. GUYS HILL, in Saint Catherine, was named for the first landowner, Richard Guy, who is said to have taken part in the 1655 Penn and Venables expedition that captured Jamaica for the British. HALF-WAY-TREE, in Saint Andrew, was originally Half-Way-Tree Pen, owned by the Hotchkyn family for 130 years. It is claimed that Half-Way-Tree was named for a cotton tree which was at the junction of four roads. The tree is said to have existed there from before the conquest of the island (1655) and until 1866 it was halfway between two places: Greenwich, a British soldier base, and a fort in Spanish Town. The soldiers always rested at this spot before proceeding to the fort. There are written references to Half-Way-Tree going back to 1696.

HELL BELOW is the name given to a dangerous corner near Dunn's River where there is a deep plunge into the sea. HORSE GUARDS. This place name is found in many parishes and originates from the time that Cromwell ruled Jamaica and used his regiment, the Horse Guards, to protect it. The name stuck to the places where they were barracked. Source: keepitjiggy.com