

San Juan Island

National Historical Park
Washington
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

English Camp or British Camp?

County road signs call it "British Camp," while rangers and the latest park literature refer to it as "English Camp." Which *is* the proper name for the northern unit of San Juan Island National Historical Park? And why is there so much confusion over it? Here goes:

When Great Britain and the United States in 1859 agreed to a joint occupation of San Juan Island until the water boundary between the two nations could be settled, it was decided that camps would be located on opposite ends of the island.

The British called It...

The United States Army had already established a post near the Hudson's Bay Company's Bellevue Farm on the southern end of the island during the height of the crisis in late summer 1859. Therefore, in March of 1860, a company of British Royal Marine Light Infantry built a similar-sized post on Garrison Bay, about 15 miles north.

What did the British call their tidy camp, nestled on a placid bay frequented by all manner of seabirds and stocked with an abundance of shellfish? Historical evidence appears to favor the name "British" over "English."

For more than 12 years, the installation appeared in British documents interchangeably as "the British Garrison," the "Detachment of Marines," or "The British Forces at San Juan." It also was referred to as the "British Post" or "British Camp" by its second commander, Captain Delacombe, in his correspondence with Whatcom County's justice of the peace. And it was labeled "British Camp" on an 1872 British Admiralty map.

But in these United States...

However, in 1951 a U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey special report stated that "...this 'historical site' is referred to as 'English Camp' in common usage, and there is evidence that 'English Camp' has been the spoken name in use on the island for the past 100 years..." regardless of what the official name was during the joint occupation. Thus, since 1954, it has been labeled "English Camp" on



all U.S. Geodetic Survey maps.

The Rangers Step in and...

San Juan Island National Historical Park, in an effort to be accurate in interpreting historic events, took a different view. Recognizing official British documents — and also the fact that the marines' ranks were comprised of men from Ireland, Wales and Scotland, as well as England — decided to rename the unit "British Camp" just as it was known to the British Admiralty.

The name change met with a mixed response from the island community. Many familiar with the history and the mixed nationalities of the marines were happy with the change to "British Camp;" while many more, used to calling the site "English Camp" (some for most of their lives), were considerably less enthused.

But finally...

A spirited debate ensued until December 1992 when the Department

of the Interior's Domestic Geographic Names Board decided in favor of "English Camp." As a result, "English Camp" will replace "British Camp" on all signs, interpretive displays, brochures, charts and maps of the area.

Because of the sheer magnitude of the task, a complete switch to the officially approved name will take some time to accomplish. In the meantime we hope you will please excuse the inconvenience and realize that no matter the current name of the camp, it was peacefully occupied from 1860 to 1872 by the *British* Royal Marine Light Infantry — or the Royal Marines.

