

Remember Christmas Island? It's Now Kiritimati



Name in December 1979

Countries*

Republic of Upper Volta
United Republic of Cameroon
Republic of the Ivory Coast
Ethiopia
Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
Ireland
People's Republic of Kampuchea
Socialist Republic of Burma
Hungarian People's Republic
Polish People's Republic
Socialist Republic of Romania
Czechoslovak Socialist Republic

Year of Change

1984
1985
1986
1988
1988
1988
1989
1989
1989
1989
1989
1990

Name in October 1990

Burkina Faso
Republic of Cameroon
Republic of Cote d'Ivoire
People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Republic of Afghanistan
Republic of Ireland
State of Cambodia
Union of Myanmar
Republic of Hungary
Republic of Poland
Romania
Czech and Slovak Federative Republic

Colonial Status

Southern Rhodesia (UK)
Canton I. (US)
Antigua (UK)
Greenland (Denmark)
British Honduras (UK)
Federation of St. Kitts-Nevis (UK)
Brunei (UK)
South Georgia (Falklands)
South-West Africa (South Africa)
State of Kuwait

1980
1981
1982
1982
1982
1983
1984
1985
1990
1990

Zimbabwe
Kanton I. (Kiribati)
Antigua and Barbuda
Kalaallit Nunaat (Denmark)
Belize
Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis
Brunei Darussalam
South Georgia (UK)
Republic of Namibia
Kuwait (Iraq) (unrecognized)

Break-Ups and Mergers

Republic of Cyprus

1983

Republic of Cyprus,
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
(unrecognized)

Netherlands Antilles

1986

Netherlands Antilles [Curaçao, Bonaire];
Aruba (Neth.)

US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

1986

US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands [Palau]
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana
Islands (US)
Federated States of Micronesia [FSM] (US)
Republic of the Marshall Islands (US)

Yemen Arab Republic; People's Democratic
Republic of Yemen
Federal Republic of Germany [FRG]; German
Democratic Republic [GDR]; Berlin

1990
1990

Republic of Yemen
Federal Republic of Germany [FRG]

Physical Features

Mount McKinley (Alaska)
Christmas I. (Kiribati)
Pagulu I. (Eq. Guinea)
Formosa Strait
Ponape I. (US)
Black, Red and White Volta rivers (Upper
Volta)
Truk Is. (US)
Moen I. (US)

1980
1981
1981
1984
1985
1986
1990
1990

Denali (Alaska)
Kiritimati I. (Kiribati)†
Annobón I. (Eq. Guinea)
Taiwan Strait
Pohnpei I. (Federated States of Micronesia)†
Mouhoun R., Nazinon R., Nakanbe R. (Burkina
Faso)
Chuuk Is. (FSM)†
Wenn I. (FSM)†

SOURCES: Geographic Names (US State Department), Cartactual (International Cartographic Association), Political and Name Changes (Rand McNally), Atlas Annual (National Geographic), Defense Mapping Agency Names Branch, news reports

* In 1990, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Armenia, and Georgia were among those administrative regions within the USSR changing their names from "Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR)" to simply "Republic." The Moldavian SSR changed its name to the SSR of Moldova. In Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia both changed from "Socialist Republic" to "Republic." The region of Kosovo declared itself a Yugoslav "Republic" separate from Serbia.

† Names of many towns and physical features have been indigenized (or changed to local language and spelling); check Bureau of Geographic Names updates.

Mapping out cafe chitchat

Around the first of the year, The New York Times published a list of geographical name changes that took place over the past decade — the change in 1984, for example, that transformed the Republic of Upper Volta into Burkina Faso — and I've been studying the list ever since. I may have lost interest in the names of the Bush-administration Cabinet secretaries by now, but when it comes to geography I



**CALVIN
TRILLIN**

like to be up to the minute.

As you must have realized, geography is my best subject. I've often mentioned how upset I get every time some

survey-taker comes back with strong indications that many American high school students would probably identify Alabama as the capital of Chicago. If a survey-taker asked me to identify Alabama, I would not just identify it. I would name its capital. I would tell him the names of rivers that run through Alabama, plus their tributaries. If I happened to be in a showoffy mood, I would toss in major mineral resources.

The list in the Times was credited to Zoltan Grossman, Mapping Specialists Ltd. of Madison, Wis. (Madison is, of course, the state capital, and had a 1980 population of 178,180.) I have no idea how the company is organized, but in my mind it exists as a man named Zoltan Grossman — a man with a cosmopolitan air and a slight Middle European accent and a feeling for geography so instinctive that the very mention of Burkina Faso causes him to mouth the word Ouagadougou (the capital) and maybe even the word manganese (the major mineral resource).

Going over the list, I sometimes carry on a sort of imaginary conversation with Zoltan Grossman. In my mind, we are sitting at a sidewalk cafe in some unnamed European city — population, we both know, 864,362. I congratulate him on catching the change of Brunei to Brunei Darussalam, a change a lot of geography hounds missed, and I somehow work into that compliment a reminder of my observation some years ago that South Yemen was not, in fact, south of Yemen — an observation that, I like to think, may have had something to do with their eventual union. Grossman smiles, and nods almost imperceptibly, and tips his cup of espresso to me in an ironic little salute.

Sometimes, in those conversations, I allow myself an occasional small complaint about how the list of name changes was presented. Although I appreciated being told that in 1986 the rivers in Burkina Faso that were formerly called the Black, Red and White

Volta Rivers became the Mouhoun, Nzinon and Nakanbe Rivers, I tell Grossman, I would have appreciated it even more if I had been told whether this was in tribute to some Burkina Faso patriots ("General Nzinon is a loyal supporter of President Mouhoun") or simply a translation of the colonial names into some other language, perhaps the language of the Mossi, Burkina Faso's largest tribe. ("If the general attacks on a mouhoun night the Nakanbe will run nzinon with blood!")

"Perhaps you're right," Grossman says. "And perhaps we should have offered the same sort of explanation concerning the change of the name of Greenland in 1982 to Kalaallitt Nunaat."

"Touche, Monsieur Grossman," I say. Grossman, that sly devil, is obviously aware that in a column in 1987, a full five years after the official change, I referred to Kalaallitt Nunaat as Greenland — an embarrassing mistake that made me feel like some kalaallitt reporter who had just nunaated his first job.

In general, though, Grossman and I do not try to catch each other in error. We sit for hours at the cafe, chewing over such questions as whether the presence of so many double letters in the Greenlandic language might mean that an appropriate place for the annual conference of the twins society would be the Kalaallitt Nunaat capital of Nuuk.

We might spend some time talking about how Cambodia changed to Campuchea and then, before some of the atlas people could catch up, back to Cambodia again.

Grossman, as I imagine him, is constantly disappointed in the United States, his adopted home, where names hardly ever change. When he gets nostalgic, he talks of how Hot Springs, N.M., changed its name to Truth or Consequences, N.M., in 1950.

"Perhaps they'll change back some day," he sometimes says, in a reflective moment.

"I'll believe it when I see it, Herr Grossman," I say. "I was raised in the Show Me State — Missouri."

"Jefferson City," Grossman says quietly. "Zinc and lead."

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