

FEW AND FAR BETWEEN

The distribution of mermaid, siren and *sirena* place names across the United States of America

[Received August 26th 2021; accepted August 28th 2021 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.138]

Vaughn Allan

<vaughnallan@gmail.com>

Unlike Australia, another former British country that has close to 40 locations named after mermaids (Fleury and Hayward, 2021), national government place name databases (and additional Google Map and archival searches) reveal that the USA has relatively few mermaid named locations (16).¹ Another 4 locations are named after sirens and 1 named after the Spanish *sirena*. There is also limited information available to provide background on the history for the names. In some cases, such as Siren in Wisconsin, the location has been excluded as its current designation is a corruption of the town's original name – *syren*, Swedish for lilac (Greenerpasture.com, n.d.). No clear associations between mermaid placenames and either settler or indigenous folklore were found in the manner uncovered by Young in his surveys of British and West Indian mermaid place names (2021a, 2021b). See Scribner (2021) for discussion of mermaid place branding for tourism. Spatial coordinates for each of the locations discussed in this research note are detailed in Appendix 1. The place coding numbers for each location refer to the data in the Appendix.

I. The distribution of mermaid, siren, and *sirena* place names across the United States of America

Mermaid named locations in the USA do not conform to any identifiable spatial/geographic patterns. While many of the named places are found in coastal States, and some refer to specific marine locations (such as the tombolo Mermaid's Chair in Saint Thomas – US Virgin Islands [USM16]) other places include parks, inland lakes, mountain tops, and canyons. The following lists each location by state or territory (in declining order of frequency).

- **California (3):** All three of these place names refer to terrain features, including the Three Sirens (USM20) summit in the Sierra Nevada mountains, and the Big Mermaids Canyon (USM01) and Little Mermaids Canyon (USM04) north of Los Angeles.

¹ As Simon Young has identified (p.c. 18th January 2021) there are also some mermaid place names that have fallen into disuse, including Mermaid Gulch and an associated Mermaid Mine in Colorado, recorded in 1883, and a Mermaid Rock off the coast of Long Island, noted in 1899. Due to the lack of any record of these terms being used in the 20th or 21st centuries, these are not itemised in this article.

- **Florida (2):** Lake Sirena (USMo2) in the town of Lake Placid and Mermaid Point (USMo9) which is part of a finger island canal estate development on the western shore of Tampa Bay.
- **Minnesota (2):** Siren Lake (USM18), located on White Earth Reservation and Siren Lake (USM19), West Cook.
- **New York (2):** Three Sirens Island (USM20) in Lake George (Upstate) and Mermaid's Pool (USM17).
- **US Virgin Islands (2):** Two locations named Mermaid's Chair (USM15), a tombolo, and (USM16), an unrelated rocky outcrop (NB these are also discussed in Young 2021b's survey of West Indian place names, where they are location coded as WIM01 and WIM02.)
- **Alaska (1):** Mermaid Island (USMo5) an area on the Kenai Peninsula.
- **Connecticut (1):** Mermaid Rock (USM12) southwest of Hoadley Point (also referred to as Big Mermaid Rock).
- **Hawai'i (1):** Mermaid Ponds (USM10), northeast of Pahoa.
- **Iowa (1):** Little Mermaid Park (USMo2), situated in the town of Kimballton.
- **Maine (1):** Mermaid's Cave (USM14) (also known as Anemone Cave) in Mount Desert Island.
- **Minnesota (2):** Siren Lake (USM18), located on White Earth Reservation and Siren Lake (MS19), West Cook.
- **Ohio (1):** Mermaid's Cave (USM14) located in Lake Erie.
- **Oregon (1):** Mermaid Riffle (USM11), rapids located in the Rogue River near the town of Agness.
- **Pennsylvania (1):** Mermaid Lake (USMo6) and Mermaid Lake Park (USMo8) in Montgomery County.
- **Wisconsin (1):** Mermaid Lake (USMo7) in Vilas County.

II. Discussion

There is no readily available information on the motivation for the naming of the majority of sites identified above and it might be conjectured that the terms mermaid, siren and *sirena* have been affixed to locations to convey a general sense of romance in a manner similar to that which Scriber (2021) identifies with regard to the naming of Mermaid's Cave on Mount Desert Island (USM13) and Mermaid's Pool in upstate New York (USM17) as tourism attractions in the late 1800s. Mermaid Lake (USMo7) and its associated park (USMo8) in Pennsylvania owe their designations to an artificial lake developed as a commercial enterprise in the 1940s that was acquired by Whitpain town council in 2020 after falling into disuse (Puleo, 2020). Little Mermaid Park in Iowa (USMo3) was named

after a reproduction of Edvard Eriksen's famous Copenhagen mermaid statue that was erected in 1978 (see Roadside America, n.d.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Greener Pasture (n.d.) 'Are you from Siren?':

<https://greenerpasture.com/Places/Details/1902#:~:text=Siren%20is%20a%20village%20in,now%20Siren%20in%20the%201880s>. - accessed 28th August 2021

Fleury, C and Hayward, P (2020) 'Shipped Ashore: The origins and deployment of mermaid place names in Australia and related visual representations', *Shima* v15 n2: 239-256

Puleo, M (2020) 'Mermaid Lake running dry; sold to Whitpain township', *The Times Herald* 28th July: https://www.timesherald.com/news/local/mermaid-lake-running-dry-sold-to-whitpain-township/article_4fd83436-d042-11ea-97cf-ef88d4b3c842.html - accessed 28th August 2021

Roadside America (n.d.) 'Little Mermaid, Kimballton, Iowa':

<https://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/2080> - accessed 28th August 2021

Scribner, V (2021) 'From sailor traps to tourist traps: Mermaid-themed tourism destinations in the United States of America', *Shima* v15 n2: 4-24

Young, S (2021a) 'Mermaids, Mere-maids and no maids: Mermaid place names and folklore in Britain', *Shima* v15 n2: 176-201

Young, S (2021b) 'Mermaid toponyms in the West Indies', *Shima* v15 n2: 202-220

Appendix – Mermaid, siren and sirena place names in the USA (and ID numbers used in article)

ID	Location name	State/territory	Coordinates
USM01	Big Mermaids Canyon	California	34° 14' 48" N - 117° 53' 55" W
USM02	Lake Sirena	Florida	27° 17' 09" N - 81° 22' 24" W
USM03	Little Mermaid Park	Iowa	41° 37' 46" N - 95° 04' 21" W
USM04	Little Mermaids Canyon	California	34° 14' 50" N - 117° 54' 17" W
USM05	Mermaid Island	Alaska	59° 32' 28" N - 151° 24' 04" W
USM06	Mermaid Lake	Pennsylvania	40° 04' 46" N - 75° 11' 06" W
USM07	Mermaid Lake	Wisconsin	46° 13' 54" N - 89° 44' 00" W
USM08	Mermaid Lake Park	Pennsylvania	40° 04' 46" N - 75° 11' 06" W
USM09	Mermaid Point	Florida	27° 49' 22" N - 82° 35' 36" W
USM10	Mermaid Ponds	Hawai'i	19° 32' 35" N - 154° 51' 11" W
USM11	Mermaid Riffle	Oregon	42° 33' 34" N - 124° 03' 31" W
USM12	Mermaid Rock	Connecticut	41° 15' 16" N - 72° 44' 34" W
USM13	Mermaid's Cave	Maine	44° 23' 09" N - 68° 18' 43" W [approx.]
USM14	Mermaid's Cave	Ohio	41° 38' 33" N - 82° 50' 15" W
USM15	Mermaid's Chair	St John	18° 21' 12" N - 64° 46' 37" W [approx.]
USM16	Mermaid's Chair	St Thomas	18° 21' 10" N - 65° 02' 24.2" W

Allan – Few and far between

USM ₁₇	Mermaid's Pool	New York	42° 22' 29" N - 76° 52' 24" W
USM ₁₈	Siren Lake	Minnesota	47° 14' 06" N - 95° 28' 14" W
USM ₁₉	Siren Lake	Minnesota	48° 02' 46" N - 90° 58' 52" W
USM ₂₀	The Three Sirens	California	37° 04' 50" N - 118° 41' 06" W
USM ₂₁	Three Sirens Island	New York	43° 36' 34" N - 73° 33' 43" W