
Place Names of Aldabra

D. R. Stoddart

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Place names of Aldabra

BY D. R. STODDART

Department of Geography, University of Cambridge

[Pull-out map]

Place name usage on Aldabra is complicated by the fact that many names have been given by Seychellois fishermen, and are hence of French derivation, while some names have been added by and the atoll is under the administration of English-speaking people. In some few cases only English names are available for topographic features (e.g. Wilson's Well, Abbott's Creek), while in a much larger number of cases locally used French names have no English equivalent. It is not therefore possible to adhere to a toponymy either completely English or completely French. To add to the confusion some hybrid names have appeared on official maps.

The first detailed map of Aldabra showing place names now in use was that made by Wharton in 1878 and published as Admiralty Chart 718. This formed the basis of maps used by Voeltzkow (1897) and Fryer (1911). Additional information is given by Abbott (1893), and by Dupont (1907). Most of the names on Wharton's chart refer to prominent topographic features such as islands and channels, and are mainly of English derivation. Some, such as Euphrates Island (for Ile Esprit) and Cocconut Island (for Ile Michel) are not used by the local inhabitants.

A possible basis for an accepted toponymy was provided by the Directorate of Overseas Surveys map of Aldabra at a scale of 1:25 000 (1964), which incorporated names derived from Baker's (1963) geological survey. This provides many new names for minor topographic features. Unfortunately, many of them have been misapplied, and the names given to dunes on the south coast of Aldabra have been particularly badly confused.

During the Royal Society Expedition to Aldabra members of each phase were asked to record all place names in local use. These were collated at the end of each phase, and draft place name maps were prepared for further checking in the field. Two preliminary versions of a place name map were prepared and circulated for comment and emendation, and figure 1 represents the place names accepted at the end of phase VI (February 1969). This map includes many names for minor features which have not previously appeared in the literature. These names are generally of French derivation, and most of them are of local origin. New names have not been given unnecessarily, and in most cases new names proposed by expedition personnel follow French usage.

In certain cases a choice must be made between French and English names. The French names are used locally, but the English names are embedded in the literature and have been widely used during our own investigations. In some cases the 1964 Directorate of Overseas Surveys map shows French names as subsidiary alternatives to English names. In figure 1, where alternative names exist, both are shown, and no attempt has been made to ensure uniformity of usage. The main cases are those of islands and channels. Alternative names for islands include Ile Picard and West Island, Ile Malabar and Middle Island, Grande Terre and South Island; and for channels Grande Passe and Main Channel, and Passe Houareau and East Channel. Other usages have appeared from time to time in the literature (e.g. Ile

Nord for Ile Malabar by Abbott (1893), and Main Island for Grande Terre by Fryer (1911)), but the meaning is generally apparent from context. Of the lagoon islands, Ile Esprit is used instead of Euphrates Island, which apparently derives only from the name of a visiting ship, and Ile Michel for Coconut Island. There is some controversy about Esprit, for Abbott (1893) refers to it as generally called 'Cipri', and the same observation has been made during this expedition. Esprit is, however, widely known and is retained here.

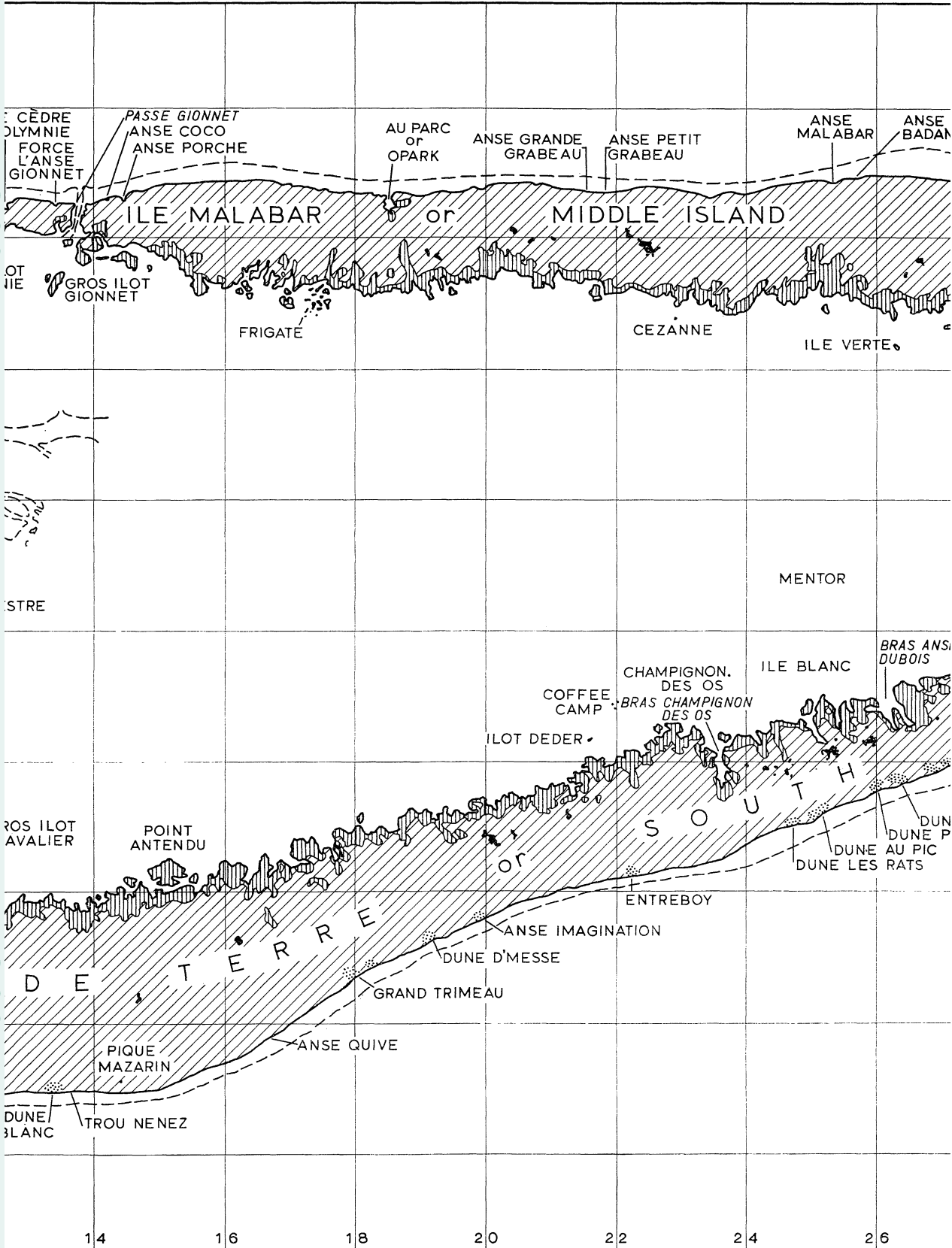
Place names are of only partial value for localizing information on Aldabra, because of the shortage of prominent features which can be given specific names. For this reason, the expedition has made use of the kilometre grid on the Directorate of Overseas Surveys 1:25 000 map (1964). The origin of this grid is at longitude 46° 14' 24.8" E and latitude 9° 23' 22.7" S; the false origin is at 10 000 m easting and 10 000 m northing. Coordinates may readily be obtained from this grid, and where given in expedition reports they refer to it. Unfortunately the false origin of this grid was chosen such that locations on the southernmost part of South Island have negative values for northing. It would be useful to have a grid on which all terrestrial coordinates on Aldabra are positive, and which is also related to an Indian Ocean grid into which observations on neighbouring islands can be fitted.

The names given in figure 1 are still doubtless open to some revision, but it is hoped eventually to have them officially approved and incorporated into official maps. Meanwhile, these names are used in reports of the Royal Society Expedition, supplemented by coordinate locations for un-named points.

I thank all those members of the Expedition who provided names for the place-name map, and who checked successive versions of it. I also thank Mr M. Young, Department of Geography, Cambridge, and other members of the Department, who drew these versions.

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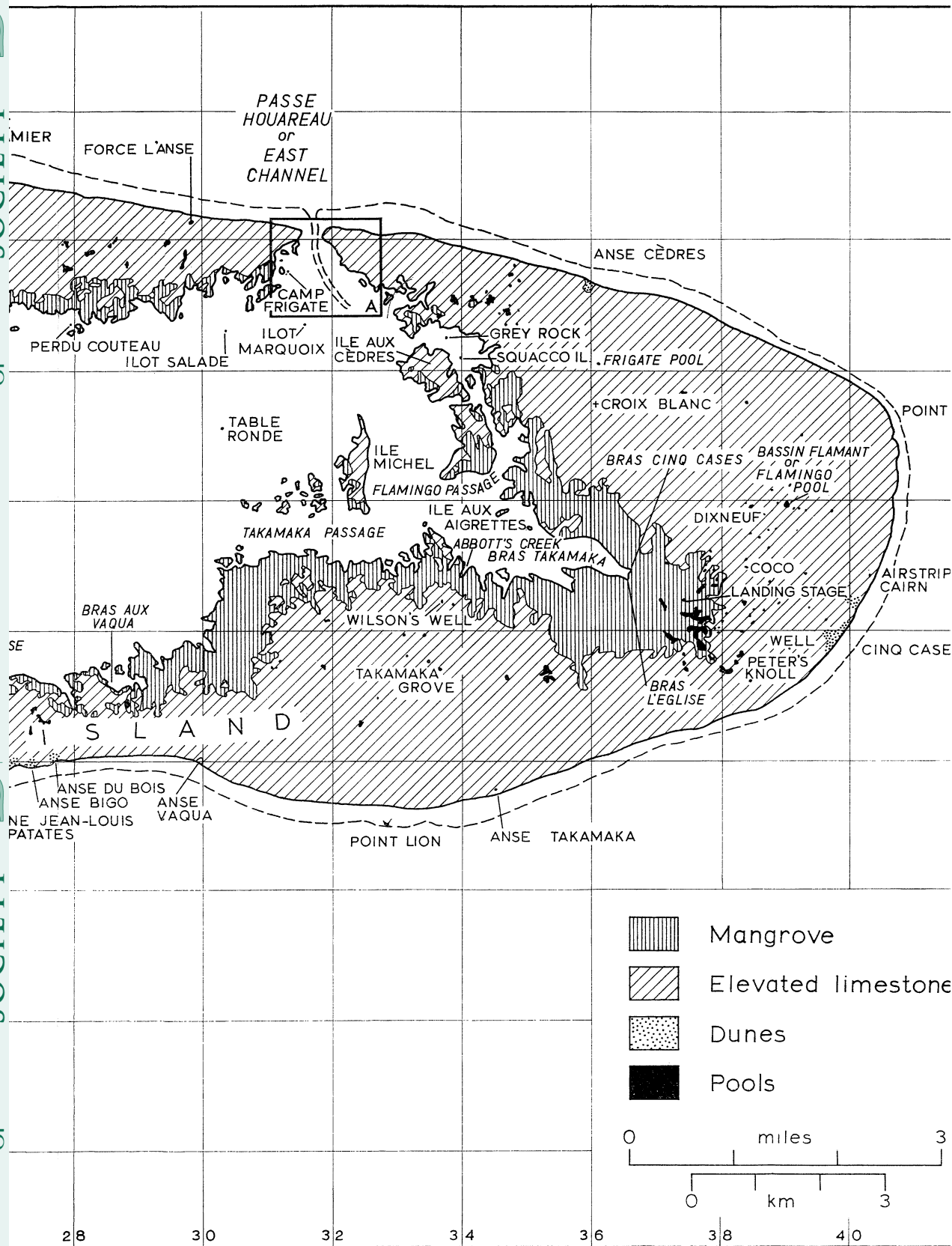


FIGURE 1

