

BACKGROUND:

Most people who live on Gabriola Island pronounce it “Gaybriolə” or, if you’re cool, “The Gabe” to rhyme with “Babe”. The “ə” at the end sounds like the “a” in “about”.

Most people who don’t live on Gabriola pronounce it “Gabriolə” or “Gabriola”, with “Gab” rhyming with “cab” as in “taxi” and no stress on the final vowel.

If you don’t live here, I’d recommend not trying to pretend you do in spite of the dangers.

JUDGES 12, v.6 “Then they said unto him, Say now *Shibboleth*: and he said *Siboleth*: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordon: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.”

Shibboleth was the dialect of the Gileadites; *Siboleth* that of the Ephraimites.

Flying Shingle, July 16, 2008, p.6

Ah! an “a”

Dear editor

Oh what a phonetic challenge! How to say “Gabriola”. The main ways in English of pronouncing “a” are as in “car”, “cab”, and “gate”. The unclarity is the penalty for not inventing writing before those Latin people who thought five vowels were enough; the Snuneymuxw have similar problems.

The “gab” in Gabriola is Basque. It comes from their word “gabi” which means a blacksmith’s mallet. Probably, though not everyone agrees, it is related to the English word “gavel”. The “ola” means place. In the Middle Ages, water-driven bellows and trip-hammers were used in mills that produced wrought-iron, and like mills for corn, ownership of such mills conferred great wealth, which is how Simon de Gabiola y Zabala’s family, after whom Gabriola is named, attained aristocratic status. So the “a” we should use is the Basque “a”, and I think that’s the “a” in “crabby”.

But then why bother with being historically accurate? If “war” why not “Gorbriola”; if “wasp” why not “Gobriola”, if “aisle” why not “G’briola”, etc. Perhaps, all things considered, “C-gull Eyeland” would be better. I rather fancy being a C-gullian.

Sincerely

Note added January 2015: I think the Basque pronunciation is like “car”, not “crab”.