The Somerset hill-range name Mendi is explained, by such recent commentators as have offered an opinion, as a hybrid compound of the Breton type, the first element of which is *men*ed, an anglicized form of Primitive Welsh *menig* 'hill'. There is no independent evidence about whether to expect a 'Welsh' or 'Cornish' form of this word in Somerset (i.e., in this instance, the Welsh raising of pretonic o to u before a nasal, prior to its reduction in unstressed position, leading to the possibility of rendition by a wide range of OE vowel letters). But the attested variation in the vowel of Mendi could well be an attempt to render the reduction of PrW [u] from [o] before a nasal consonant, i.e. would be consistent with PrW rather than with Primitive Cornish developments. (Cf. Jackson 1953: 673-81: Padel 1985: 163-4; s.v. *meneth*; the list of forms quoted below should also be compared with those for Longmynd (Sa) and Mynde (He) in DEPN, where the language of transmission is obviously PrW.)

The second element is said to be OE hop 'valley' (DEPN, s.v.; Romey 1960: 74; and Field 1980). Field notes that it is very odd that such a name should have come to denote the hills themselves, rather than, as he puts it, 'the valley which bisects the Mendips'. (DEPN uses a similar expression. I take it that this phrase could denote the Lox Yeo River gap, or the valley between Wavering Down and Shute Shelve Hill, or the Cheddar Gorge, or most probably the valley which gives Winscombe its name.) Gelling (1984: 172), however, prefers to treat the latter part of the name, at least, as an unsolved problem, and Field (1984) adopts a similar cautious position.

Gelling's and Field's reserve is quite justified, because in addition to being semantically curious, this solution is phonologically unsatisfactory. The early forms, including those cited in DEPN, hardly suggest hop:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Menedup</td>
<td>705x712 (11th)/(13th)</td>
<td>Grant by King Ine to Beorc[t]wald, abbot of Glastonbury (Sawyer, no. 1670); e-11th cent. copy in lost Liber Terrarum, an epitome of which is known from John of Glastonbury (1247; Finberg 1964, no. 374).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menedip</td>
<td>740x756 (14th)</td>
<td>Epitome (14th cent.) of a grant by King Cuthred to Sherborne Abbey, BL Cotton MS. Faustina A ii, fo. 23r; Finberg 1964, no. 386 and cf. Finberg 1951.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menedipp</td>
<td>51150 (14th)</td>
<td>Regesta III, no. 373 (a forgery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menedene</td>
<td>1185</td>
<td>Templar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on the boundary of Peckenhall Forest (VCH, Warwicks., III, 288). It may be that we have to do with an OE word very similar in meaning to the ME/early ModE folly and standing (Crawford 1921: 33-5); an yppe could have been a hunters’ dais or platform before which deer were driven, to judge by the meanings recorded in the OE and Latin glosses to the term quoted above, which are essentially to do with constructed objects (thus weardsteal 'watchtower'; spectacula 'theatre-seat(s)'; pulpitus 'scaffold, platform'; orcestra arguably 'chair', see Latham 1965, s.v.). But then its application in Mendip, Epping and Uppingham would be metaphorical in some way, since 'Mendi-dais' (etc.) obviously makes no literal sense. There is likely to be an allusion to the relatively level, six miles wide, 800' high, plateau top of the Mendips, on the salience of which see D. I. Smith (1975: 95-8). The ancient parish centre of Epping, west of the hamlet of Epping Upland (sic), also appears to be on the edge of a plateau, judging by Chapman and André’s map of 1777 reproduced in VCH, Essex, V and by the current O.S. 1:50,000 map. Note also that Uppingham lies 'for the most part on a tableland' (VCH, Rutland, I, 95).

To make my proposal perfectly clear: Mendip, like other names mentioned, contains the element OE yppe 'hunting-dais', used characteristically in forest districts as a natural metaphor for a plateau. It is, of course, possible that I have got things entirely the wrong way round, and that yppe is a primary topographical term for flatish upland whose usage was extended to mean platforms of various kinds. But that would leave the apparent association of the place-name element with forest districts as an anomaly or a coincidence, for surely not every plateau was a forest. It is also possible that the basic sense of yppe was 'anything raised (and flat?)', and that it had two specific sub-senses 'plateau' and 'dais'. This is a weaker hypothesis than the one I prefer, and the fact remains that the glossary evidence (the only direct evidence available) points to yppe denoting a constructed object. This weaker hypothesis is not, of course, etymologically surprising, and will carry the day if cast-iron evidence for a primary sense 'plateau' or 'upland' in OE is forthcoming.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTES


Crawford, O. G. S. (1921) 'Place-names.' Archaeological Journal LXXVIII, 31-46.

DEPN, see Elswell.


EPN, see Smith, A. H.

EPNS = English Place-Name Society.


PN = county abbreviation = the relevant county volume(s) of the English Place-Name Society.


VHI = the relevant volumes of the Victoria History of the Counties of England.


1. All the primary sources quoted are printed ones, and full bibliographical details are given in EPNS county volumes and/or DEPN. I assume they are familiar enough to most readers not to require elaboration here.

2. Grundy (1925: 37) derives Ipsley from a personal name Ipfa. A strong form of this name is favoured in PNMS (213-14) for the Warwickshire place-name Ipsley.

3. The names Uppingham and Epping presuppose that ype could form a derivative in -ingas, i.e. that it was available very early in the insular history of OE. In both these cases, a secondary -ingas derivative from a primary place-name or topographical word *ypping* "place like an ype; upland?" is also possible. Huggins (1975) argues that wealdhām names also date from early Anglo-Saxon times, and were those of royal forest estates operative before c. 550. It is therefore quite conceivable that the forests with which ype names seem to be associated are of very early origin. If that is so, there is no tension between the requirements (a) that some ype- names or derivatives be early, and (b) that the royal forests with which they are linked be of early origin.

4. Ype may also appear in Ipsitone (St), where the reference may be to the crags of the Millstone Grit. This name could be taken to substantiate the weaker etymological hypothesis offered at the end of the present article, for Ipsitone is associated with no forest. I have not made much of this possibility because the etymology of Ipsitone is not certain; I for OE y as far west as Staffordshire would be somewhat surprising. I have ignored DEPN’s Tipalp Burn (Nb), which is not recorded till the 16th cent. The survival, or restitution, of u in Uppingham is noteworthy in a place so far east. The earliest, 12th cent., Ype shows y, however, and to judge by appearances the modern u must be analogical in virtue of its upland situation.

5. See further the discussion in n. 4, above.