

The name element *bonde(n)* in names of natural landmarks in western Sweden

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Summary

Natural landmarks with names containing the element *bonde(n)* are discussed here with reference to a number of names in western Sweden. It is noted that almost all the localities in question are natural landmarks of great importance for shipping in their respective areas. All the features named but one – the rock *Lille-Bonden*, in the sea close to the island of Käringsön in Bohuslän – are rock formations of considerable height that can be seen far out across the water in or by which they are located. Most of them have a broad base and relatively gradually sloping sides. Some, such as *Kullabonden* and *Bonden* or *Kinnabonde*, have a flat, plateau-like top. The typical silhouettes of these elevations are visible far out at sea, enabling mariners to obtain a reliable fix on their position.

Names containing *bonde(n)* have been considered by a number of scholars, most recently Nils-Gustaf Stahre (1986) and Sigurd Fries (1989), both of whom point out that such names are to be found in several coastal areas of Sweden, citing as examples *Bonden* or *Högbonden* in the Bothnian Sea, the Bohuslän names mentioned, and *Bonden* or *Kinnabonde* by Lake Vänern. Sigurd Fries regards *Bonden* as a coast name of the same type as the form *Röko* referred to in Stahre 1986 (p. 29), that is to say, ‘a kind of vogue name that spread along our coasts and was given to small islets and shoals with a characteristic position in fairways’. Fries assumes that some of these names may have come into existence as noa words for conspicuous islands far out at sea, and subsequently spread along the country’s coasts.

The name element *bonde(n)* may be assumed to be of a personifying character, cf. *Bonden i skogen* ‘the peasant in the forest’, a name given to a boundary stone (OGB 5, p. 173, ‘solitary large stones are often given personifying names’). Rocks and rocky eminences with a particular appearance may, for some reason unknown to us today, have suggested to the people who named them the word *bonde* ‘peasant’, a theory that was also advanced by Hjalmar Lindroth (1922, p. 17). Subsequently, the names in question may in certain contexts have been used as noa names. The names given to some of the smaller features, closer inshore, could well have been inspired by those of the larger and more significant landmarks. One explanation why larger landmarks of greater importance for shipping at scattered locations along the coast have *Bonden* names could of course be that, as Fries suggests, such names became fashionable and were spread round Sweden’s shores by sailors. Another possibility is that the names arose spontaneously and independently in different coastal communities. Perhaps it seemed natural to the people living in these different places to associate an elevation or rock of a particular appearance with the word *bonde*. Whether names of this kind were spread along the country’s coasts by shipping and through sailing directions, or arose spontaneously among the local populations of different coastal communities, is thus an open question.

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