

KYBO

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Every so often a peculiar word makes itself known and invites further investigation. One such recent word is KYBO. New Zealand Scrabble player John Foster brought KYBO to the attention of longtime *Word Ways* contributor Jeff Grant. In turn, Jeff queried it with me. The remainder of this article describes the results of Jeff's and my searches about the word.

Let's start with how KYBO is treated in standard dictionaries.

KYBO is listed in recent editions of *Collins English Dictionary* where it is defined thus:
"Australian slang: a temporary lavatory constructed for use when camping [said to be an acronym for k(keep) y(our) b(owels) o(pen)]".

Actually, *Collins English Dictionary* seems to have lifted the definition of KYBO almost verbatim from the Australian *Macquarie Dictionary*.

But there are plenty of dictionaries which don't list KYBO. It doesn't appear in any of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, *Webster's Second Edition*, *Chambers Dictionary*, *Random House Dictionary*, *Dictionary of American Regional English* and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*.

But it can be found in various slang dictionaries, including Australian ones.

The *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang* also lists the word, defining it thus:

[origin unknown; perhaps as in 1971 quote] a lavatory or toilet commode, especially at a campground. Also KIBO.

It provides a couple of illustrative quotations:

1971 Keep your bowels open, an expression used in children's summer camps; an outhouse.

1975 What happened to Horse? He flush himself down the kibo?

KYBO is in the 1970 edition of Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (volume 2), where the entry reads:

A privy; a w.c.; low; 20th century Ex Khyber Pass.

The reference to KHYBER PASS is because this is rhyming slang for 'arse' (the British equivalent of the US's 'ass').

Jonathon Green's 3-volume *Dictionary of Slang* lists KYBO, with KIBO as a variant. Green's definition runs as follows:

[Khyber [Pass], noun] (US) a privy

Green gives the same illustrative quotations as the *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, except the 1971 quotation is worded slightly differently, thus:

1971 Keep your *bowels open*, an expression used in children's summer camps; hence, a john at a camp or campground; an outhouse.

Turning our attention beyond printed dictionaries, there's additional information on the internet. There's a long definition-cum-description of KYBO here:

www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=kybo

It runs as follows:

A small wooden structure that serves in lieu of a commode, and is found behind houses in Arkansas, Alabama, and other places where people drawl. The kybo door has a crescent moon carved in it. The purpose of this moon is to provide access for flies. Inside a kybo is a bench with one or two holes in it. A kybo with a single hole in the bench is called a one-holer. A kybo with two holes in the bench is called a two-holer. Hanging on the wall inside the kybo is a Sears Roebuck catalog. Or maybe a big tin can full of corn cobs (from which arose the phrase, rough as a cob). A kybo may have a sheet metal chimney extending above the roof. This is called a fart muffler. Experienced users visit the kybo at mealtimes, when all the flies gather in the dining room.

At its entry for OUTHOUSE, Wikipedia says that KYBO (as well as the term BIFFY) is "unique to the Scouting movement".

Following up the scouting lead takes us to the scouting website www.scoutorama.com which has this definition for KYBO:

A slang term for 'outhouse'. It is an acronym that stands for Keep Your Bowels Open or Kleen Your Bowels Out.

It also has this set of lyrics, apparently sung to the tune of *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*:

A wimba wet

a wimba wet

a wimba wet

In the Scout camp the mighty scout camp the Kybo

calls tonight. I need to go, but i stubbed my toe couldn't find my dang flashlight-

A Weeeee A Weeeee Oh I still need to go,

A Weeeee A Weeeee couldn't find the old Kybo

Now I'm all wet

Now I'm all wet

The www.wadenelson.com website informs us that the *Des Moines Register* announces the "RAGBRAI Adopt-a-KYBO Program", where you can adopt an abandoned KYBO found on the byways of Iowa. It explains that:

Hundreds of worn-out kybos end up abandoned alongside Iowa byways, destined never to relieve another cyclist. Plastered with team stickers, their springs sprung from PVC doors getting slammed thousands of times per night, they hold solitary vigil against the night. Throughout the cold Iowa winter, hundreds of kybos stand at attention in empty corn fields, awaiting a call for dookie duty that never comes.

DOOKIE? Perhaps there's another article there Anyway, it turns out that RAGBRAI is an acronym for the Register's Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa. The *wadenelson* website also informs that:

Some kybos get melted down and recycled into soda bottles without so much as a well-deserved soap and water rinse.

Thus far, the dictionaries and websites suggest that KYBO is an acronym. Although this certainly seems likely, there are internet mentions of another possible derivation from Kybo Coffee tins, which were apparently filled with powdered lime and kept in outdoor scout toilets in US to 'freshen' the air. Check out this info at the *scoutmastercg.com* website:

The Kybo, that humble wooden facility elemental to our camping memories, can be a little terrifying at first. Eventually all of us must go at one time or another. Kybo is a common name throughout world Scouting. A moniker that may hark back to filling Kybo brand coffee cans with powdered lime sprinkled in the facility to alleviate odor and promote decomposition. Have you heard toilet paper called "Kybo Tape" or "Kybo Wrap"?

And the coffee connection appears in the following piece from the *www.50miler.com* website:

KYBO = Scout Toilet. The term "kybo" is popular within the Scout Movement worldwide. The term "kybo" may have originated at the Farm and Wilderness Camps in Vermont where it came from the coffee cans (Kybo brand coffee) that held the lye or more often lime used to keep odor to a minimum. It was only after Kybo coffee was no longer available and the cans were no longer used that folks began to come up with other possible reasons for the term "kybo". The word is believed by some to have originated as an acronym for "Keep Your Bowels Open" although this may be a backronym. An interesting aside is that toilet paper is often referred to as "Kybo Tape" or "Kybo Wrap". The term appears in a popular summer camp song as a parody of *Downtown*.

And here's the lyrics to the tune of *Downtown*:

When you are sleepy and it's time to go peepee there's a place to go... kybo
When you are droopy and it's time to go poopy there's a place to go... kybo
Just listen to the rhythm of the froggies in the toilet,
Even though it's smelly I am sure you will enjoy it
The lights are not on in there, but you forget all your worries,
Forget all your cares in the kybo
Is not it fun to go... kybo

Although there are the various US references in the dictionaries and websites mentioned above, KYBO possibly sounds like an Australian slang term, what with its -O ending. There are various other slang words with -O endings which are supposedly Australian. Examples include: AGGRO, AMBO, ARVO, AVO, BOTTLE-O, COMPO, DERO, DOCO, EVO, JOURNO, REGO, RELO, SERVO and VEGO. Check out this website:

www.australiablog.com/culture/favorite-australian-slang-add-an-o.html

On balance, though, KYBO is more likely to be American slang, particularly originating from the outhouses at scout and Farm & Wilderness camps in Vermont and Iowa 'in the old days'. The popular 'folk derivation', deriving it from phrases such as "keep your bowels open", is probably a backronym (or bacronym), like those for SOS (save our souls), POSH (port out, starboard home), FUCK (for unlawful carnal knowledge), GOLF (gentlemen only, ladies forbidden), etc.

Eric Partridge's and Jonathan Green's assertions that it's American slang, deriving from 'khyber', short for 'Khyber Pass', certainly seem likely, although there are the internet mentions of the possible derivation from Kybo Coffee tins. It's interesting that two of the slang dictionaries listing KYBO both use the illustrative quotations from the years 1971 and 1975, yet Volume 2 of the Eric Partridge slang dictionary already contains the word; Volume 2 was first published in 1960, and my copy of Volume 2 is a 1970 printing. The word doesn't appear in Volume 1 of Partridge, published from 1937 onwards. So, KYBO was known to Partridge pre-1970, and possibly even pre-1960.

As arse is the part of the body that has closest connection to KYBO, the Khyber Pass derivation is reasonable on the face of it. However, rhyming slang is essentially British, so how could it explain the origin of a purportedly American term? So did KYBO originate in Australia, US, Britain or even New Zealand? And did the name come from an acronym, a brand of coffee, rhyming slang, or something else? Not only is the word not listed in major works (variously listed above), it can't be found in any New Zealand dictionary, general or slang.

John Foster's memory of KYBO in 1950 is the earliest Jeff and I know of, but we believe that John is right and the word originated in YMCA-type camps in America, probably in the mid-to late-1940s. Until research turns up something more convincing, the jury is out on KYBO.

That's probably enough of definitions and origins of KYBO. How about KYBO in other forms of wordplay?

In the Scrabble world, KYBO is listed in *Collins Official Scrabble Words*, along with the plural form KYBOS. KYBO doesn't appear in the latest editions of *Official Tournament and Club Word List* (2014 edition) and *The Official Scrabble Players Dictionary* (5th edition). So, KYBO isn't allowed in most regular North American Scrabble play, but is allowed elsewhere in the world where the standard Scrabble authority is Collins.

There are at least three transposals of KYBO. *The English Dialect Dictionary* has BOKY, an adjective defined as 'soft'; the *Oxford English Dictionary* has BYOK, an obsolete spelling of BAJOCO, a small 19th century Italian copper coin; and KOBY is a boy's name with various instances findable on the internet.

How about transadditions of KYBO, words formed adding one letter to KYBO, and then transposing the five letters? Some of the following are dredged up from the internet, and some are from printed dictionary sources:

- +A BAYOK a timber tree of the Philippines (*W3*)
- +A BOAKY a 16th century spelling of the adjective BULKY (*OED*);

		also, inclined to vomit (<i>English Dialect Dictionary</i>)
+A	BOKAY	a vulgar pronunciation of BOUQUET (<i>OED</i>)
+D	BODKY	Erwin Bodky is a German author whose work <i>The Interpretation of Bach's Keyboard Works</i> , published 1960, is quoted several times in the <i>OED</i> – see, for example, OVERDOTTED
+E	BOKEY	an unofficial name for Sanford, Florida (www.thebokey.com)
+H	HOKBY	a populated place in Sweden (www.geonames.org)
+I	BOIKY	a corvette of the Russian Navy, laid down in July 2005 (<i>Wikipedia</i>)
+L	BLOKY	like a bloke or man (doing a Google search for “bloky” will throw up lots of Czech language websites, as “bloky” is Czech for “blocks”; but searching for an English term such as “very bloky” does indeed find English language examples where “bloky” simply means “like a bloke”)
+L	KOLBY	the name of various populated places in Denmark, Norway and Sweden (www.geonames.org)
+M	KYMBO	a populated place in Sweden (www.geonames.org)
+O	BOOKY	bookish (<i>W3</i>)
+R	KORBY	Korby Lake is in Orange County, New York (www.geographic.org)
+S	BOSKY	wooded, like a forest; also, tipsy, drunk (<i>W3</i>)
+V	BYKOV	a common Russian surname, with many notable people listed on <i>Wikipedia</i> , such as Anatoly, Artem, Dmitri and Vladimir (<i>Wikipedia</i>)
+W	BYKOW	a village in south-west Poland; prior to 1945 it was in Germany (<i>Wikipedia</i>)
+Y	BOYKY	the name of at least two populated places in Ukraine (www.geonames.org)
+Z	KOBYZ	an ancient Kazakh string instrument, with two horsehair strings & a resonating cavity usually covered with goat leather (<i>Wikipedia</i>)

How many words and names can be found containing the KYBO sequence in order? Here are some that we've found:

KYBOSH, KYBOSHES (*W3*)
 KYBOSHING (*OED* – ‘credit crisis’ 2008 quote)
 KYBOSHED (source ought to be findable)
 SKYBOARD, SKYBOARDS (*OED*)
 SKYBOARDER, SKYBOARDERS (*OED*)
 SKYBOARDING, SKYBOARDINGS (*OED*)
 SKYBOLT (*OED* – ‘contingency’ 1963 quote)
 SKYBORN (*Chambers Dictionary*, 12th edition)
 SKYBORNE (*W3*)
 SKYBOX, SKYBOXES (*W3*)

There are 24 different arrangements of the letters in KYBO. Here are the easy dictionary-findable ones:

BOKY: **boky** (= soft; *English Dialect Dictionary*), **bokyll** (an obsolete spelling of ‘buckle’, *OED*)
 BOYK: **boykin** (*OED*)
 BYKO: **bombykol** (*OED*)

BYOK: **byok** (obsolete spelling of 'bajocco', *OED*)
KBOY: **blackboy, jackboy, linkboy** (all *W3*), **Oakboy** (*OED*)
OKBY: **bookbynder & bokbynder** (obsolete spellings of 'bookbinder', *OED*); **Rookby**
(place in Cumbria, England, *Ordnance Survey Gazetteer of Great Britain*)
YBOK: **rhybok** (18th century spelling of 'rhebok', *OED*)

The remaining 17 can probably all be found via internet searches, probably existing in foreign placenames and personal names. Here are some of them:

KOBY: **Koby** (a boy's name, various websites)
OBYK: **Lysobyki** (village in Poland)
YBKO: **Novozybkov** (a town in Russia, *Wikipedia*)
YKOB: **Nykøbing** (various locations in Denmark, *Wikipedia*)

We notice, too, that US country singer **Toby Keith** has the reverse **KYBO** sequence in his name!

The last word on **KYBO** can go to John Foster who originally posed his **KYBO** query to Jeff Grant. John says that he first came across the word, about 1950, at a YMCA camp, in New Zealand presumably, where its use was compulsory. More details in New Zealand camp life are in John's following article.