Eliza Fraser and the wreck of the *Stirling Castle*

The story of Eliza Fraser is firmly, if somewhat uncomfortably, embedded in Australian folklore. She was the wife of Captain James Fraser, master of the brig *Stirling Castle* which, on her way from Sydney to Singapore via Torres Strait in May 1836, was wrecked on a reef off the north-east coast of Australia.

All on board, with Eliza being the only woman, got away on two boats which, after about three weeks at sea together, reached a rocky island where they parted company. Two weeks later the boat carrying the captain, Eliza, first mate Charles Brown, second mate John Baxter and seven members of the crew came ashore on what was then known to Europeans as *Great Sandy Island*. It was called *Gari* by the local Badtjala people, but its now more-familiar and official name is **Fraser Island**, as proposed by Henry Stuart Russell who visited there in 1842.[1]

Some of the crew left on foot in an attempt to reach Moreton Bay but Fraser, Eliza, Brown, Baxter and one or two others were taken to live with different groups of the Badtjala people who supplied them with food, provided that they did their share of the work and conformed to local customs.

Over the next few weeks Fraser and Brown died in circumstances that have been contested. However, Eliza and Baxter remained with the Badtjala or their mainland neighbours, the Gubbi Gubbi, until the middle of August when they were recovered by a search party from Moreton Bay.

On their return to Sydney in October Eliza and Baxter

provided the press with statements of their experiences, and a well-subscribed fund was established for Eliza's relief. A year later, back in Britain, their stories, by now considerably embellished, were re-told and published in the newspapers. Eliza's tale—a white woman taken by savages, treated with great cruelty, and suffering the unimaginable horror of living and working naked amongst cannibals before being daringly rescued—caused a sensation and led to further generous donations from a sympathetic public.

From the Editor

We've kept those solemn promises from our previous issue: that we'd revisit the epic story of Eliza Fraser (who lent her eponym to that sandy island); that we'd complete Jan Tent's summary of placenames beginning with 'Old' and 'New'; and that we'd say something about whether 'River' precedes or follows its specific element. As it happens, Jan Tent has previously written about such generics (although he regrets not mentioning rivers in the article!):

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00277738.2016.1197646

Further, I couldn't resist adding 'creeks' to 'rivers' (page 13), since these pop up continually as queries in our mail.

David Blair
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Feedback

Early champions of Indigenous-based toponyms

In our March 2021 issue, Jan Tent wrote about T.L. Mitchell's support for the incorporation of Indigenous placenames wherever possible, and suggested that Robert Ramsay and James Dawson were the only other 19th century champions of this approach.

Chester Schultz has reminded us that SA Governor **George Gawler** (1838-41) strongly promulgated such a policy: 'In regard to the minor features of the country to which the natives may have given names, the Governor would take the opportunity of requesting the assistance of the colonists in discovering, and carefully and precisely retaining, these in all possible cases, as most consistent with propriety and beauty of appellation. All information on this subject should be communicated in precise terms to the Surveyor-general, who will cause memorandums to be made of it, and native names, when clearly proved to be correct, to be inserted in the public maps.'

Chester has been working on placenames of the Adelaide-Fleurieu region for many years. Invaluable data from his research can be accessed at the websites listed below:

https://www.adelaide.edu.au/kwp/placenames/research-publ/
https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/handle/2440/5

Footscray local knowledge

We recommend to our Melbourne readers a very useful web-based resource. Titled **Underfoot**, the website is put together by Liz Crash and Jinghua Qian, and has a series of virual audio tours described as 'uncovering the secret histories of Footscray'. Thanks, Liz, for letting us know about this—and, readers, if you know more about the streets of Footscray than is revealed by the audio tours, do let Liz know. Contact her via the website:

https://jinghuaqian.com/underfoot/

***Puzzle** answers - (from page 14)*

1. [Peter] Careys Peak
2. [Marcus] Clarke Island
3. [Eleanor] Dark Beach
4. [Miles] Franklin River
5. [Mary] Durack
6. [Kate] Cape Grenville
7. [Andy] Griffith[s]
8. [Xavier] Mt Herbert
9. [Frank] Cape Hardy
10. [Norman] Mt Lindsay
11. [Di] Morris[s]ey Island
12. [John] O'Gradys Falls
13. [Vance] Palmer Point
14. [Ruth] Park Beach
15. [Hal] Porter Bay
16. [H. H.] Richardson
17. [Neville] Shute Harbour
18. [Kylie] Tennant Creek
19. [Patrick] White Cliffs
20. [Tim] Winton

Two books on the affair soon appeared. The first, a highly colourful account published in New York in 1837, was clearly aimed at the American market with its references to squaws and wigwams, and a picture showing natives with bows and arrows.[2] The second, published in London the following year, was by John Curtis and became the *de facto* official account of events.[3] It was solidly based on statements given by Eliza and Baxter and, despite an abundance of literary and biblical allusions and several imaginative illustrations, it contained additional information obtained through personal interviews and not published elsewhere.

After the initial enthusiasm for Eliza Fraser's story subsided, interest waned until 1971 when Michael Alexander revived it in a new book.[4] Five years later, Patrick White[5] and Kenneth Cook[6] published novels inspired by the events, Cook's rumbustious and tongue-in-cheek tale afterwards being transformed into a bawdy adventure movie.[7] Since then, several journal articles have appeared, examining the events from various angles[8] and the sesquicentenary in 1986 was marked with a book by Dwyer and Buchanan containing valuable archival material.[9] More recently the entire matter has been examined from a different perspective by Indigenous lawyer and writer Larissa Behrendt.[10] It is also worth mentioning that Sidney Nolan was captivated by the story, painting the first of his Mrs Fraser series in 1947 and adding to it over the next twenty years.

However, it is not the purpose of this article to go through the saga yet again. Instead, it is to look at an element which, despite its relevance, has escaped serious examination—where the shipwreck occurred and what the circumstances were that led to it.

The *Stirling Castle* has never been found but it is commonly stated that the vessel was wrecked on Swain Reefs at the southernmost end of the Barrier Reef. This is also the location shown in the *Australasian Underwater Cultural Heritage Database* of the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. However, there are strong reasons for doubting this.

Swain Reefs has been described as:

> a labyrinth of approximately 370 patches of reefs covering an area of approximately 16,900km[2] lying between 120km and 250km offshore from St Lawrence. They represent the most eastern and southern development of the Great Barrier Reef.[11]

The reefs were first depicted, though not named, on Matthew Flinders' chart of that part of the coast.[12] They were shown lying between 21.6 and 22.8 degrees south and between 152.2 and 152.8 degrees east, with a concavity on the eastern side. A note alongside them on the chart reads 'In 1798, the ship Eliza – Swain ran 20 leagues amongst these reefs before clearing them'. The reference was to Charles Swain, captain of the whaling ship *Eliza*, and by the early 1840s the area had become known as *Swain's Reef*.[13]
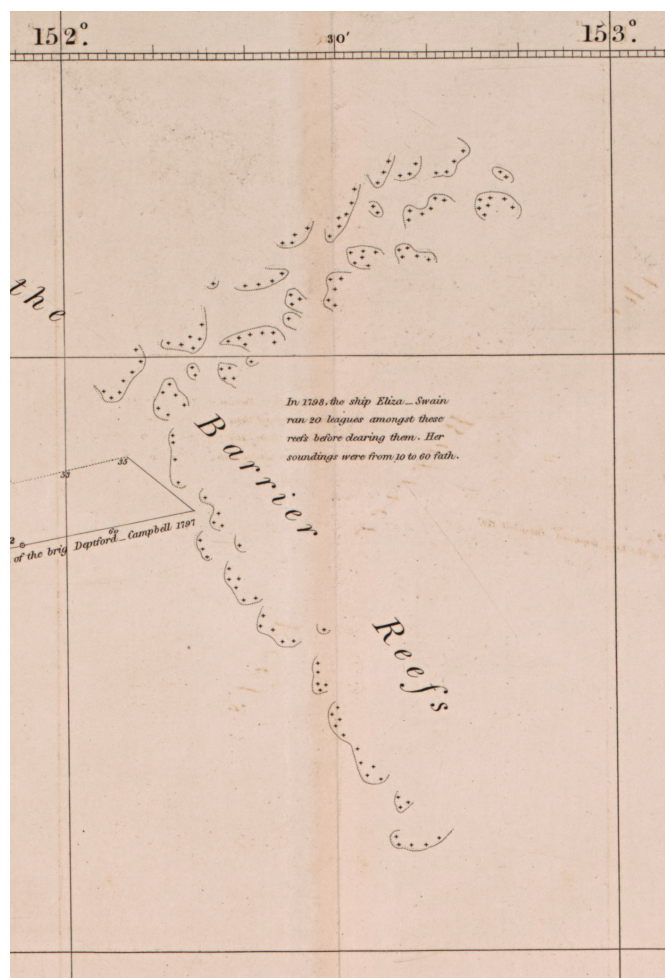
Detail: Matthew Flinders Chart of Terra Australis - East Coast *(1814)*

Bearing this in mind, it is worth considering the likelihood of a ship on its way from Sydney to the Torres Strait striking the reefs.

The strait could be reached by two routes, one lying between the mainland and the Great Barrier Reef and the other lying outside the Barrier Reef. The inner route, first navigated by Captain Cook who discovered its dangers

when the *Endeavour* was severely damaged after hitting a coral reef in June 1770, was better known by the mid-1830s, owing to surveys by Flinders in 1802 and Phillip Parker King in 1819. King promoted its use because of its quieter waters and safe anchorages,[14] and was supported in his view by Captain Francis Price Blackwood of HMS *Imogene*.[15]

However, the outer route, offering a deep-water passage, was generally preferred by merchant ships even though they had to contend with heavier seas, strong currents and several detached reefs including Cato Bank, Wreck Reef, Kenn Reef and Frederick Reef.

Whichever route was chosen, it was common for vessels to sail in small convoys so that if one came to grief another would be there to help. Captain Fraser had cause to be thankful for such precautions when, seven years earlier on his way from Sydney to Batavia as master of the brig *Comet*, his vessel struck Boot Reef near the eastern entrance to Torres Strait and was wrecked. Fortunately, he and his crew got away in boats and reached Meer Island in the Murray Islands group, where they found the *Fairfield* which had been sailing with them but from which they had become separated a few days earlier.[16]

Prior to the *Stirling Castle* leaving Sydney on its fateful voyage Fraser had arranged to sail with the *North Briton* and the *Apprentice*, headed, respectively, for Batavia and Mauritius. Sadly, his departure was delayed because of a shortage of crew and when he sailed two days after the others there was no vessel to accompany him. Had there been, the situation could have turned out very differently and there might have been no Eliza Fraser story to tell.

Yet the question remains as to why Swain Reefs are commonly thought to be the wreck site of the *Stirling Castle*. Located at the southern extremity of the Great Barrier Reef, they lie between the inner and outer routes but are far removed from both. The answer might lie in a confusion over names.

The only survivor to put a name to the wreck site was John Baxter, who called it 'Eliza Reef' although there was no known reef off the Australian coast bearing that name. Curtis acknowledged that 'its exact position is not

laid down in the charts'[17] but nevertheless chose to place it in the same position as the reefs on Flinders' chart which Swain had encountered in 1799. We do not know why Curtis did this but it could have been because the name of Swain's vessel was *Eliza*, coincidentally the same as that of the principal character in the *Stirling Castle* saga. That simple fact could, I believe, have led to a false conclusion as to the location of the wreck.
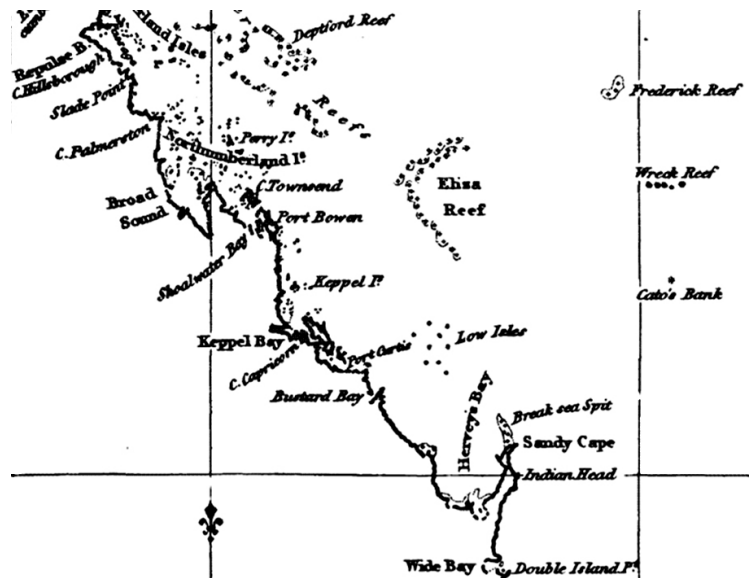
Detail: J. Curtis, Chart of the coast of New South Wales... *(1838)*

It would be an easy matter to confirm this if the *Stirling Castle's* log had been saved but unfortunately that did not happen. Again, the only information we have of the ship's position on the day of its being wrecked came from Baxter, who was said to have sent a memorandum to the *Sydney Herald* stating:

> The brig Stirling Castle was wrecked on Saturday evening, the 21st of May, on Eliza Reef, in lat. 34°, and long. 155° 12" east, and steering at the time of the accident N. W. by N. ½ N. with the larboard steering-sails set, under the orders of the Captain, the ship running 7½ knots.[18]

The first thing to note is that the latitude figure was manifestly in error and should have been spotted immediately. Latitude 34°S crosses the Australian east coast just south of Sydney and the position indicated above lies 371km (200 nautical miles) directly east of Botany Bay, obviously not on the route to Torres Strait. Yet the *Herald* article was reprinted in the other Sydney newspapers and, later, in the London press without anyone questioning it.

...the wreck of the *Stirling Castle*

How the error originated is not known, though we must assume that the responsibility lay with Baxter since the same figure appears in the record of statements he made while recovering at Moreton Bay.[19] Why he failed to notice and correct it is hard to understand, though in fairness it should be noted that after arriving in Sydney from Moreton Bay on 15 October[20] he spent only a short time there before signing on to Captain John Austin's barque *Elizabeth*,[21] recently arrived with 161 female convicts.[22] The *Elizabeth* left Sydney for Valparaiso, Chile on 18 November[23] and did not reach London until 27 June the following year.[24]

Accordingly, it was not until the latter half of 1837 that Baxter had the opportunity to correct his earlier mistake, which he did in a written account presented to London's Lord Mayor, Thomas Kelly.

> We left Sydney on the 15th May, 1836, with a fine and steady breeze, and so it continued until May 20, when the breeze began to freshen from the S.E., and continued so until the 21st instant, when, at twelve o'clock, we found ourselves in lat. 21 5 S., and long. 155 12 E., by observation, and from forty-five to fifty miles of the Eliza reef. [25]

If these figures are to be trusted then around nine hours before striking the reef the *Stirling Castle* was 86km (46 NM) east-by-south of Frederick Reef,[26] the reef on which the *Royal Charlotte* had been wrecked in 1825.[27] Although the reef was not shown on the first edition of Flinders' General Chart of Terra Australis in 1814 it did appear on the updated chart published in 1822,[28] and its location was also recorded in the 1827 edition of James Horsburgh's India Directory.[29] Today we know that it is made up of two sections, the small northern section separated from the much larger southern section by a 3km gap.

Curtis accepted Baxter's information about the *Stirling Castle's* position[30] and was obviously aware of Frederick Reef since it appeared on his chart. So why did he not equate Baxter's Eliza Reef with Frederick Reef and instead publish a chart in which even the closest part of Eliza Reef was 250km (135NM) away from the ship's observed position?

It might also be asked why Baxter did not identify Frederick Reef. Although charts were not published regularly, captains would mark newly discovered features on their existing charts in order to keep them up-to-date. The position of Frederick Reef had been known since the

wreck of the *Royal Charlotte* a decade earlier and Baxter's account suggests that it was on Fraser's chart. However, it is possible that either Fraser had failed to insert a name or that Baxter had not taken note of it. In that case, calling it *Eliza Reef* might simply have been a matter of convenience.

It is worth observing that the southern section of Frederick Reef conforms closely to descriptions of Eliza Reef published in Curtis' book. Baxter described it as 'the shape of a horse-shoe',[31] while Captain Alexander John Greene said that 'by the breakers, observable at ebb tide, the reef forms a semi-circle, and something in shape like the moon three days after its change'.[32] Many reefs might match those descriptions but neither could reasonably be applied to Swain Reefs. Greene, whom Curtis interviewed, was master of the *Mediterranean Packet*,
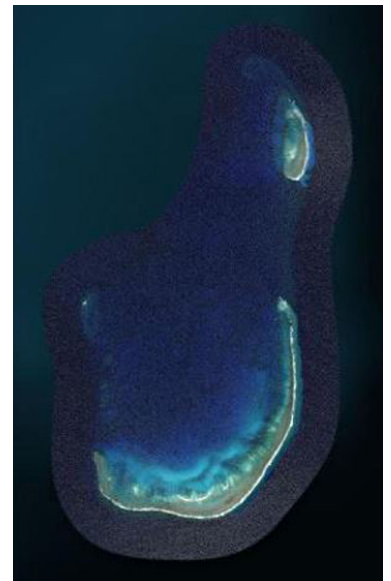
Frederick Reef

the vessel that conveyed Eliza Fraser back to England. He had a personal interest in Eliza's affairs after quietly marrying her before leaving Sydney in February 1837. That, however, is another story.

Of course, given Baxter's initial error with the latitude figure, adherents to the Swain Reefs theory might question whether the longitude was stated correctly. Longitude is calculated from the difference between local time and the time at some other known point, traditionally the Greenwich Observatory, each degree of longitude representing a time difference of 4 minutes. The difference in longitude between Frederick Reef and the most easterly point of Swain Reefs is 1.6 degrees, equating to a time difference of more than 6 minutes. Undoubtedly Captain Fraser would have set his chronometers before leaving Sydney and it is inconceivable that an error of that magnitude could have been made.

...Eliza Fraser and the *Stirling Castle*

A further point in favour of Frederick Reef as the wreck site is the fact that it was initially recorded as such. On 6 September 1836 it was reported that the brig *Adelaide* had been wrecked on Frederick's Reef and that some of the crew had arrived at Moreton Bay.[33] However, that intelligence was quickly corrected and the wreck identified instead as the *Stirling Castle*.[34] Why this information has been overlooked or ignored it is difficult to say.

On the weight of the evidence presented here I would contend that the *Stirling Castle* was most likely wrecked on Frederick Reef, not Swain Reefs as commonly stated. While to some it might seem a rather inconsequential matter, it was nevertheless the point at which Eliza Fraser's epic tale began.

Tony Dawson

Endnotes

[1] Henry Stuart Russell. Exploring excursions in Australia. *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* Vol. 15 (1845), pp. 305-327

[2] *Narrative of the capture, sufferings, and miraculous escape of Mrs. Eliza Fraser.* New York: Charles S. Webb, 1837

[3] John Curtis. *Shipwreck of the Stirling Castle, containing a Faithful Narrative of the Dreadful Sufferings of the Crew, and the Cruel Murder of Captain Fraser by the Savages, also, the Horrible Barbarity of the Cannibals inflicted upon the Captain's Widow, whose unparalleled Sufferings are stated by Herself, and corroborated by the other Survivors.* London: George Virtue, 1838

[4] Michael Alexander. *Mrs Fraser on the fatal shore.* London: M. Joseph, 1971

[5] Patrick White. *A fringe of leaves.* Lodon: Jonathan Cape, 1976

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[8] J S Ryan. The several fates of Eliza Fraser. *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, *11*(4), 1981-1982; Yolanda Drummond. Progress of Eliza Fraser. *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, *15*(1), Feb. 1993; Elaine Brown. The legend of Eliza Frazer – a survey of the sources. *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, *15*(7), May 1994

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[10] Larissa Behrendt. *Finding Eliza: power and colonial storytelling.* St Lucia, Qld: Queensland University Press, Brisbane, 2016

[11] *Swain Reefs National Park and adjoining State Marine Park Management Statement.* Brisbane: Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing, 2013

[12] *Chart of Terra Australia by M. Flinders Commr of H. M. Sloop Investigator 1802. East Coast, Sheet IV.* [London]: G. & W. Nicol, 1814 (National Library of Australia - MAP T 580)

[13] *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 21 November 1843, p.2

[14] *The Australian,* 28 December 1832, p.3

[15] *The Sydney Herald,* 22 May 1834, p.2

[16] *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser,* Monday 19 October 1829, p.2

[17] Curtis, p.16fn

[18] *The Sydney Herald*, 17 October 1836, p.2

[19] Dwyer & Buchanan, Appendix 6, p. 33

[20] *The Australian,* 18 October 1836, p.2

[21] Curtis, p.96

[22] *The Sydney Herald*, 13 October 1836, p.2

[23] *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser,* 22 November 1836, p.2

[24] *Morning Post,* 28 June 1837, p.7

[25] *Morning Post,* 23 August 1837, p.4

[26] Frederick Reef was said to have been discovered by a ship of that name in 1812. This could have been the *Frederick*, Captain Bodie, which left Norfolk Island for the Malaccas in April 1812 or, with a small allowance for the year, a ship of the same name which left Sydney for Calcutta in May 1813 under the command of Captain Joseph Savigny

[27] *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 11 August 1825, p.3

[28] *The Sydney Monitor,* 1 Nov 1828 p.1; *The Australian,* 24 April 1829, p.4

[29] James Horsburgh. *India Directory, or Directions for Sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, and the Interjacent Ports.* Vol. 2, p. 576. London: Kingsbury, Parbury, & Allen, 1827

[30] Curtis, p.16

[31] Curtis, p.136fn

[32] Curtis, p.17fn

[33] *The Australian,* 6 September 1836, p.2

[34] *The Australian,* 9 September 1836, p.2

## New from ANPS

The most recent publication by the Survey is:

Occasional Paper No.11
A namescape of the Australian Antarctic Territory, by Jan Tent

The paper contains an analysis of the 2892 official toponyms of the Australian Antarctic Gazetteer. It can be accessed from the Publications page of our website, or by clicking this link:

https://www.anps.org.au/upload/ANPSOccasionalPaper11.pdf
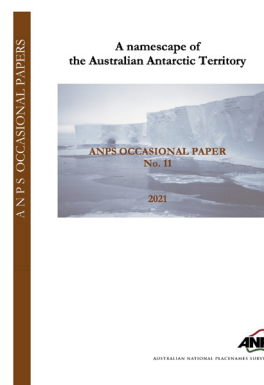
Norfolk Island road names

Road names often provide a contemporary reflection of a place's history, and the road names of Norfolk Island are no exception. The naming of roads began very soon after British forces arrived on the island in 1788. Since this time, Norfolk Island has had a long history of land use changes which have affected its road names, although many roads remained unnamed until a process of community consultation was established in 2008.

There have been five major settlement periods on Norfolk Island, and four of those are clearly remembered in road name toponymy: (1) a combined history of the First and Second Settlements, (2) the names associated with Pitcairn Island and events post 1856, (3) the history of the Melanesian Mission, and (4) modern road names.

Figure 1 presents a map of well-known Norfolk Island roads, and Figure 2 (overleaf) shows an enlarged map of roads in the Burnt Pine and Middlegate area.
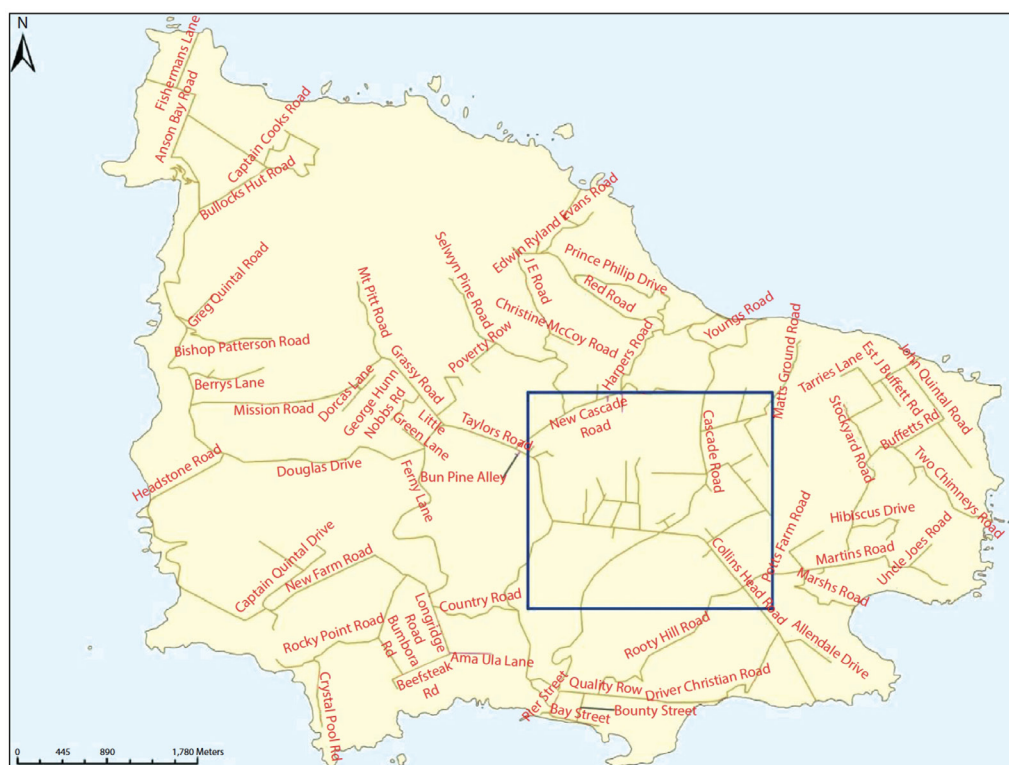
Norfolk names on the Edgecombe (1999, p. 102) map because these names were first coined by the Pitcairners and are generally only used by Norfolk speakers. Although these names contain English lexemes, these names are pronounced in Norfolk, i.e. [hæʊz rɜːd] (House Road) and [stɔː rɜːd] (Store Road).

By supplementing the list of current road names of Norfolk Island (Administration of Norfolk Island, 2008) with other sources (e.g. Varman, 1984), a fairly comprehensive dataset can be established and the following patterns emerge:

1. Commemorative naming is prominent; e.g. *Bligh Street*, *Queen Elizabeth Drive*. The latter is one of the few roads named after women. And, as it happens, Queen Elizabeth Drive and Prince Philip Drive are the only roads with the 'drive' generic on the island.

Figure 1: Norfolk Island road names (source: the author, and Administration of Norfolk Island, *2008)*

2. Although the number of road names commemorating the Pitcairn descendants seems roughly equal to those commemorating the First and Second Settlements, it is difficult to determine for certain, based on the available data, whether a name commemorates a Pitcairn descendant or not.

3. Several names describe the natural environment and local and/or introduced flora: *Two Chimneys Road* (the name *Two Chimneys* probably originates from the two old chimneys left in the area from the Second Settlement), *Rooty Hill Road* (named because of the large number of tree roots encountered when building this road), *Country Road, Bay Street, Mulberry Lane, Ferny Lane, Grassy Road, Little Green Lane, Cutters Corn* (possibly named because corn used to be grown in this area) and *Hibiscus Drive*.

Road names in Norfolk (the Norfolk Island language) are similar to English names. There are five Norfolk road names in the sample. Only three of these, i.e. *Ama Ula Lane, Bun Pine Alley* and *Yorlor Lane*, actually contain Norfolk lexemes. The other two Norfolk road names are *House Road* and *Store Road*. They are acknowledged as

Figure 2: Enlargement of road names in Burnt Pine and Middlegate (source: the author and Administration of Norfolk Island, 2008*)*

strongly depicts its connection to its Pitcairn past. It also heralded the beginning of the celebration and honouring of the Polynesian ancestry of Norfolk Islanders. Until this time, there was a great deal of shame associated with the events that took place in Polynesia and on Pitcairn Island. It appears that similar naming habits were initially employed by the Pitcairn Islanders on Norfolk Island. Such practices involved racist names, e.g. *Dar Nigger Head*; dangerous names, e.g. *Parloo Park* (*Masturbation Park*); few topographical names with Polynesian lexemes; and a distinct lack of placenames commemorating women.

4. Several names point towards their destination, e.g. Beefsteak Road leads to Beefsteak, Bumboras Road leads to Bumboras, and Store Road leads to the old store in Kingston.

5. There are several examples where road names are missing generics altogether: *Cutters Corn, Little Cutters Corn*, and *The Village*. This suggests that some road names are as much pointers to past events (such as land use) as they are locators and direction indicators.

6. Some road names were considered taboo and were sanitised to avoid inappropriate connotations: for example, *Dead Rat Lane* was changed to *Mitchells Lane*—in the same way as the topographical name *Murderers Mound* was changed to *Dar Cemetery*.

The community consultation process that took place in 2008 made 53 streets, roads and easements official. Many of these were well-known and accepted by the Norfolk Island community but needed official acknowledgement. From the 1960s or thereabouts, there has been a greater acknowledgement and appreciation of the Tahitian heritage of the Pitcairn descendants on Norfolk Island. Since this time, names such as *John Adams Road, Fletcher Christian Road, Edward Young Road* and *Pitcairn Place* have been established officially as road names. The appearance of these names on the Island's road signs

However, in 2008 this was ameliorated with the naming of Tevarua Lane, in honour of Tevarua, a Polynesian woman who arrived on Pitcairn Island with the *Bounty* mutineers in 1790. She died around 1799 and was the consort of Matthew Quintal. Her name is entered as 'Te Walua' in the Pitcairn Register, which also lists 'Sarah' and 'Big Sullee' as her other names (Ross & Moverley, 1964, p. 52). The officialising of *Tevarua Lane* as an iconic road name marks an acceptance within the community of the Norfolk Islanders' Polynesian heritage which began in the 1960s. The recognition of this ancestry by road naming is just one example of the renaissance of Polynesian cultural symbolism on Norfolk Island, epitomised in this instance by Tevarua Lane.

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University of South Australia

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Toponyms 'Old' and 'New' -- Part 2

In Part 1 of this article, we looked at toponyms in Australia and New Zealand with the pre- and postnominal adjective New. *In this second part, we take a look at toponyms beginning with* Old. *(Perhaps surprisingly, there are no toponyms that end with* Old.*)*

Once again, I have omitted toponyms such as *Old Womans Head* and *Old Toms Creek* because the adjective modifies the specific, not the generic, i.e. [(Old Toms) (Creek)], not *[(Old) (Toms Creek)]. I have also omitted simple cases of copied toponyms that already contain the adjective, e.g. *Old Adaminaby Cemetery < Old Adaminaby*, *Old Bonalbo Public School < Old Bonalbo*, and *Old Junee Railway Station < Old Junee*. However, I have included names such as *Old Katherine Railway Station* because there is no locality named *Old Katherine*. And, as with the 'New' toponyms, there are some in this dataset that are ambiguous, e.g. [(Old) (Horse Waterhole)] or [(Old Horse) (Waterhole)], and [(Old Macdonald) (Downs)] (HMSD) or [(Old) (Macdonald Downs)]? In such cases, I have decided to err on the safe side and omit them from the analysis.

Australia has 723 toponyms containing what I might dub 'the antediluvian adjective', while New Zealand has only five (see Tables 1 and 2). As with 'New', there is a wide variety of geographic features with this characteristic, most of which only have one or two examples. I have therefore included in Table 1 only those that have five or more examples. And once again, most of the features (13/18) in the Table are non-natural. This seems quite reasonable, because it appears somewhat incongruous to confer upon a natural geographic feature either the adjective 'Old' or 'New'. Non-natural, constructed features are far more likely to receive these adjectives, because they often fall into disuse.

Feature Type	Number
BORE	187
HOMESTEAD	124
STREAM	59
RUIN	54
DAM	51
LOCALITY	46
RESERVE	37
BUILDING	22
YARD	17
MINE	16
TANK	15
WATERHOLE	10
SCHOOL	9
SUBURB	8
HILL	8
SPRING	6
CEMETERY	5
SWAMP	5

Table 1. 'Old' toponyms in Australia

Feature Type	Number
AREA	1
BAY	1
POINT	1
RESERVE	1
STREAM	1

Table 2. 'Old' toponyms in New Zealand

Once again, most of the 'Old' toponyms in the dataset are bores (26%), whilst 17% are homesteads. Unsurprisingly, many of the latter are no longer occupied premises. Twenty of the BORE toponyms have the uninspiring designation of *Old Well*. Similarly, ten of the 50 DAM toponyms are simply named *Old Dam*. In such cases, the adjective functions as a noun because it has become the sole specific element.

The mystery of Ovalau...

It is a pleasure to resume my thoughts on the names of the islands of Fiji in descending order of size. First, an apology: the last island I had a stab at was Koro in Lomaiviti (central Fiji), saying it was number six in size. In fact, it is number seven, by a small margin, but it was convenient to treat it along with Gau, number 5, since I claimed that their names reflected their contrasting topography, Gau *meaning a 'log' or 'trunk' and* Koro *a 'mountainous place'...*

Paul Geraghty

Ovalau, the real number six, is situated to the east of Vitilevu and west-ish of Gau and Koro and other smaller islands of Lomaiviti such as Nairai and Batiki. It is important historically because, for much of the nineteenth century, the town of Levuka in the middle of its east coast was the capital of Fiji until Suva was given that status in 1882.

Incidentally, the fact that Levuka is in the middle of the east coast of Ovalau is no coincidence. In the language of the Lapita ancestors, thought to be the first inhabitants of Fiji some three thousand years ago, *levuka* meant something like 'middle'. Many other descendants of Lapita people have similar words: *livuga* in the Gitua language of north coast New Guinea, *livua* in Kuanua of New Britain, *levuʔa* in Kwaio, Malaita in the Solomons, *lopok* in Mokil (a small island near Pohnpei in Micronesia), *nuka* in Kiribati and so on—all refer to the midsection of something long, usually the waist of a person or the trunk of a tree. In Western Fijian, the word is either *levuka* or *luvuka*, and the meaning the same.

In Eastern Fiji, *levuka* has lost its original meaning and survives only as a placename, but it is easy to see how the places it refers to were so named. Not only does Levuka on Ovalau lie bang on the mid-point of the eastern coast of the island, its nearest neighbour of the same name,

Levuka on Gau, also lies approximately half-way along the western coast. The two villages named *Levuka* in Kadavu also lie in the middle of their respective districts, and in Matuku the village of Levukaidaku is situated in the middle of the district of Daku, the part of Matuku reputed to be closest to the mythical island of Burotu (also known as *Burotukula*).

A variant of *Levuka* is *Levukana*, which means simply 'its middle', the additional *na* being a possessive suffix meaning 'its'. The best known instance of this name is a village in northern Lau, in the middle of the east coast of the long island of Vanuabalavu (the name of which means simply 'long land'), and there is another in the middle of the Tailevu coast of eastern Vitilevu. A Western Fijian equivalent is the island of Eluvuka, also meaning 'its middle', because it is in the centre of a group of three small islands lying west of Viseisei in the Vuda district, and now best known to tourists—and increasingly to locals—as 'Treasure Island'.

Ovalau appears to have been an enormous volcano in the distant past, long before human presence in Fiji, and the extensive hollow in the middle where the crater was is known as *Lovoni*, now the site of a number of villages belonging to the *vanua* of Lovoni. This is an example of a 'truncated' placename: *lovo* means 'a pit, earth oven',

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...Toponyms 'Old'

'Old' toponyms stand apart from the 'New' toponyms in one particular respect, and for obvious reasons: they have rarely been copied from overseas. The few examples that exist illustrate how they might come about—they are usually derived from an adjoining feature, or they stand as a feature now replaced by a 'newer' toponoym: *Old Bohemia Valley < Old Bohemia* (RUIN), *Old Brighton* (LOC, adjoining Brighton and North Brighton in SA), *Old Devon Downs* (HMSD, SA), *Old Hong Kong Well* (SA) *< Hong Kong Well*.

Jan Tent

and *ni* 'of', so *Lovoni* means 'pit or earth oven of...'—and because it has been truncated, we do not know what the alleged contents of the pit or earth oven are or were. Whatever they were, it seems to be an apt name for a volcanic crater.

*The south-western side of **Ovalau** (photo: Wikimedia Commons)*

Just south of the island of Ovalau is the considerably smaller island of Moturiki. As I pointed out in these columns a number of years ago, this is an example of a placename that was coined probably three thousand years ago when the ancestral language, Proto Central Pacific, was spoken in Fiji. Composed of *motu* 'island' and *riki* 'small', it simply meant 'small island'—as any speaker of a Polynesian language could probably guess. Since then, the Fijian words for 'small' and 'island' have changed, so that modern Fijians no longer recognise this island name as having that meaning.

Now to the meaning of *Ovalau*. Well, let me do the easier bit first! The suffix *-lau* has a very long history in Austronesian languages, originally meaning 'sea' or 'seawards', a meaning it retains in, for instance, Nggela and Malaita in the Solomon Islands. Indeed many of the Solomon Island labourers who came to work on cotton and sugar-cane plantations in Fiji in the mid-nineteenth century were from Lau, the artificial islands off the coast of Malaita. In Fiji, the word appears to have acquired a slightly different meaning, 'east' or 'windward'—which amount to the same thing in Fiji—so that the name of the group of eastern islands, those closest to Tonga, is *Lau*. This slight shift in meaning may be due simply to the fact that from the perspective of Vitilevu, the largest

island, most of the other islands are in the sea to the east, that is, to windward.

The suffix *-lau* is therefore a component of a number of placenames with such a meaning. For example, *Kubulau* is the name (based on *kubu* 'headland) of two places in Vanualevu and one in Nairai which are headlands facing the east; and Namukalau is an island off the north coast of Vanualevu to the east of the *vanua* of Namuka. In Western Fiji, Sawailau is a small island to the east of the island of Yasawa, famous for its caves and their petroglyphs. The suffix *-lau* also formed part of the ancient word *tokalau* meaning 'east wind', which changed its meaning slightly to 'north wind' or 'north' in Far Eastern Fiji and Polynesia, giving rise to such placenames as *Tokelau* for the islands north of Samoa, *Tokerau* for an islet on the northern rim of the atoll Penrhyn in the Cook Islands, and *Ko'olau* for the north-east coast of the Hawaiian islands. So, being immediately east of the main island of Vitilevu, *Ovalau* would seem to be, at least partially, an apt name.

Which leaves us with the question: what is the meaning of *Ova* in *Ovalau*? Let me simply say at this point that it has no obvious meaning that I am aware of—it does not mean 'island' or 'land', nor has it ever had such meanings. So we will have to move on to the realm of speculation. There are a couple of candidates, although they might be regarded as rather long shots. But a possible answer to the question 'Ovalau is an eastern what?' will have to wait till next time!

Historical Guide to New South Wales

In our previous issue we recommended Phillip Simpson's recent magnum opus, the Historical Guide to New South Wales. *Our Editor, David Blair, asked Phillip if he'd tell us a bit more about the work and its background...*

DB: *Phillip, what's this book about?*

PS: Essentially it's a gazetteer or geographical dictionary about places in NSW—from 'lost' or abandoned ones to major regional cities, including towns, villages, hamlets and localities. There are 9,780 places in all. (It doesn't include Sydney and its suburbs because there's so much information readily available on the area.)

Basically, the book succinctly notes where a place is, when it was established, its main products and industries, and lists its public buildings and infrastructure, churches and cemeteries, factories and mines, etc., and who designed and built them (even though many are now gone), between 1788 and 2020.

DB: *Has anything like this been done before?*

PS: The only similar book was published over 150 years ago, in 1866, but it covered neither the history of the places included nor any details of their buildings, such as architects, builders and dates. It was only a snapshot of the town's facilities when the author, Robert Whitworth, visited them on a particular day. The other big difference, of course, is that it only included places established before 1866.

Simpson, P. (2020). *Historical guide to New South Wales*. xiii, 835 pages. North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing   ISBN 9781922454003

DB: *Why hasn't it been done since 1866?*

PS: The simple answer is, it's much too hard—that's why it has taken me over 30 years to research and write, and that included personally inspecting the buildings and infrastructure of over 900 towns.

DB: *What might a typical town entry include?*

PS: Well, towns used to be very self-sufficient. For instance, they often made their own bacon, butter, bricks, buggies, cheese, cordial, flour, leather and furniture and supplied their own gas, water and electricity.

My book lists all these industries as well as public buildings such as court houses and police stations, fire stations and hospitals, schools and tech. colleges, lock-ups and gaols, and post and telegraph offices. It notes who designed and

built the buildings and when they were opened. All sorts of infrastructure are also included—airports, bridges, dams, railway stations, water works, marinas, wharves and viaducts.

DB: *Where did you get all this information?*

PS: The initial challenge was to identify all the places in the State, then work out where they were. Most of the smaller 'lost' places could only be found on old maps. All that took 8 years.

I also read over 1,800 local history books, researched hundreds of government annual reports, metallogenic surveys, Government Gazettes and hundreds of thousands of old newspapers.

At the same time my wife and I undertook numerous trips all over the State doing fieldwork, including photographing many of the structures described in the book. We'd also spend many hours in country libraries researching rare books.

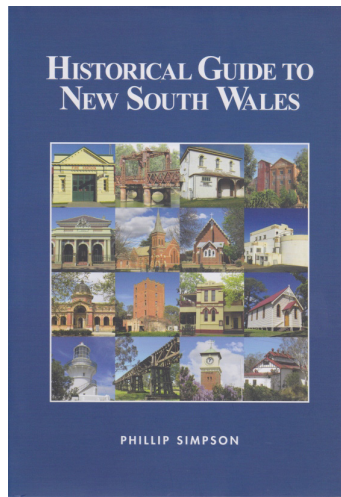**DB**: *You mentioned some country town industries which are now rather uncommon.*

PS: Yes—the more obvious ones would be butter factories, coach factories, cordial works, flour mills and sawmills. There were also boiling-down works for rendering sheep and cattle, particularly during economic depressions. The tallow produced was used to make soap and candles.

Creameries separated milk into cream to make butter, wool scours cleaned fleeces of dirt and burrs, while straw envelope factories made special bags to safely transport bottles overland.

As well as the old industries and buildings I've included the new 'boutique' breweries and many recently-built factories fabricating metal items and producing plastic products.

DB: *As well as structures, what else do you include in each place?*

Rivers and creeks

Cheek to Cheek is one of Irving Berlin's most popular songs, but whenever I hear the fourth verse my mind switches from dancing to toponymy.

Oh, I love to go out fishing
In a river or a creek.
But I don't enjoy it half as much
As dancing cheek to cheek.

The reason is that two of the perennial questions our readers ask are about **creeks** and **rivers**.

The first question asks 'What's the difference between a *creek* and a *river*?' The answer is deceptively simple: it's a matter of size—a creek is a smaller stream than a river. But there's more to it than that: often our reader is enquiring because they have detected that in British English, *creek* seems to have a different meaning. Indeed it does: a creek is 'an inlet from the shore'. All the other terms for a stream contrast with it: they are not thought of as being related to the shore, to a delta, or to the sea. So *river, rivulet, brook, rill* do tend to reflect the size of the stream, and all contrast with *creek*.

In the colonies (both here and in North America) the first sighting of such streams was from the point of view of the coast. And that seems to have resulted in *creek* being the first term applied, because from the sea they all looked like inlets in the shore. It then became generalised in its use to a stream anywhere that wasn't large in size. In Australia, the primary distinction turned out to be 'rivers = large', 'creeks = small'.

The second question is specifically about *river:* how come sometimes it's 'River X' and sometimes 'X River'?

Again, there's a dialect difference in play. In British English, both for local rivers and for some historically important ones (like the Nile, Rhine, etc.), 'River' comes first. The other usage, with 'River' second, seemed to start in North America in the mid- to late-17th century. By the time Australian colonies were being settled, it was the usual pattern. So that's normally what the explorers and surveyors used.

The exceptions are interesting, though. *River Murray, River Yarra*—why? I'd suggest simply because they're easier to say that way. And Tasmania's *River Derwent / Forth / Dee / Clyde*?—my guess is it's because they're all existing names of British rivers, transported unchanged.

Nothing is simple, however. It just so happens that the formally registered name of the Murray differs depending on which State you're in: SA—*River Murray*; VIC and NSW—*Murray River* !

David Blair

...from previous page

PS: I've listed when lots of calamities beset the towns and their inhabitants, such as diseases, droughts, earth tremors, epidemics, fires, floods, heatwaves, and even caterpillar and grasshopper infestations. The cemeteries are listed, often with the number of graves, together with the populations of places over time, which not only indicates their size, but also their decline or growth.

DB: *What are some of the more unusual placenames in the book and the favourite places you've visited?*

PS: NSW has some quirky and unusual names, such as *Abrahams Bosom, Bergen-Op-Zoom, Bowling Alley Point, Cob o' Corn, Come By Chance, Day Dream, Dum Dum, Finger Post, Frying Pan, Goodnight, Happy Jack, Hells Hole, Jawbone, Jinglemoney, Kickabil and Micketymulga.*

There's also *Badger Brush, Frog Hollow, Glow Worm Glen, Green Pidgeon, Magpie Hollow, Monkey Jacket, Mother of Ducks* and *Possum Power Tank*. Just to make it confusing, there are 13 *Apple Tree Flat* and 13 *Back Creeks*.

DB: *And your favourite places?*

PS: From a historical perspective, probably our favourite town is Braidwood, because it is so architecturally unspoilt—followed by Molong, which has retained a wide range of its original buildings.

DB: *Who's this book for, Phillip?*

PS: Anyone who's tracing their family history in NSW will find it a mine of information. It gives the names of builders and owners of factories. It'll let family historians find the location of a 'lost' village where their ancestors lived or, through the extensive cross references, uncover the earlier names of places, schools and railway stations that otherwise may be difficult to find.

The book will be an essential reference in every library in NSW. Most importantly, it will be an essential starting point for heritage consultants, researchers, local councils and journalists, for all sorts of topics.

Placenames Puzzle Number 78

Australian novelists

These toponyms share their name with Australian novelists. Example—(author of) The Silver Brumby + (QLD) rural town 500km north-west of Brisbane: [Elyne] Mitchell

1. *Illywacker* + (NSW) mount in Barrington Tops NP
2. *For the Term of his Natural Life* + (NSW) a small island in Sydney Harbour
3. *The Timeless Land* + (NSW) strand in Murramarang NP
4. *My Career Goes Bung* + (TAS) major river
5. *Keep Him My Country* + (QLD) an outer south-west suburb of Brisbane
6. *The Secret River* + (QLD) small promontory on the east coast of Cape York peninsula
7. *The Thirteen Storey Treehouse* + (NSW) city in the MIA
8. *Seven Emus* + (WA) a hill south of Kalgoorlie
9. *Power Without Glory* + (SA) headland on the east coast of Eyre Peninsula
10. *Age of Consent* + (TAS) a peak, and the site of a tungsten mine
11. *Heart of the Dreaming* + (WA) an islet in Cascade Bay between Herbert and Pecked Islands
12. *The Things They Do to You* + (TAS) cascades on Mt Wellington
13. *The Big Fellow* + (QLD) a small promontory between Cairns and Innisfail
14. *The Harp in the South* + (NSW) a beach suburb of Coffs Harbour
15. *The Tilted Cross* + (TAS) a small bay in the Derwent
16. *Australia Felix* + (ACT) a suburb of Canberra
17. *The Far Country* +(QLD) a port, the gateway to the Whitsundays
18. *The Battlers* + (NT) a central town
19. *The Eye of the Storm* + (NSW) an opal mining town
20. *Breath* + (QLD) an inland town

[Compiled by **Jan Tent**
Answers on page 2]

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Supporting photographs or other illustrations are greatly appreciated.

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