

# Placenames Australia

Newsletter of the Australian National Placenames Survey

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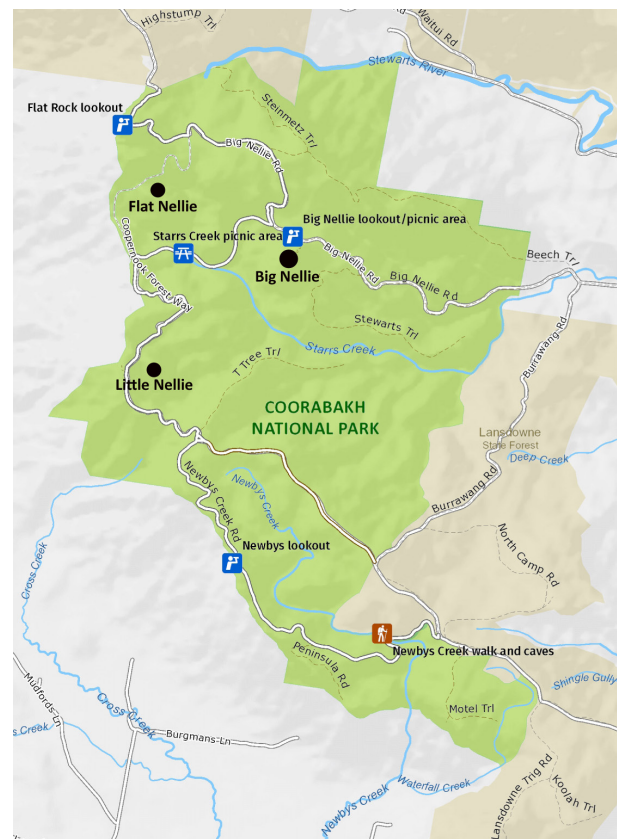
## The 'Nellies'

High above the Lansdowne Valley on the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales three ancient volcanic plugs lie close to the elevated western edge of the Lorne Basin where it falls away steeply, and in parts precipitously, into the valley over 400 metres below. A volcanic plug (also called a volcanic neck or lava neck) is created when magma hardens within a vent on an active volcano, and the three with which we are concerned here bear the names *Big Nellie*, *Little Nellie* and *Flat Nellie*.

The plugs were formed some 16–17 million years ago when the Comboyne Volcano, a shield volcano and one of six central volcanos in what is now New South Wales, erupted from time to time over a one million year period and formed the Comboyne Plateau.<sup>1</sup> Other plugged vents associated with the volcano are located below the escarpment, rising abruptly from the valley floor. They include Mt Goonook, Mt Coxcomb, Olive Hill and Saville Rock, adding further evidence of intense and widespread volcanic activity at that time.

The Nellies (as we shall refer to them collectively) are located in what, in 1999, was originally dedicated as *Big Nellie National Park*<sup>2</sup> but subsequently as *Coorabakh*,<sup>3</sup> the Birpai word for the bloodwood and/or white cedar tree.<sup>4</sup> The Birpai were the first people of the region, their Nation extending southwards from the Hastings River to beyond the Manning River.

Prior to the creation of Coorabakh National Park the



*Coorabakh National Park, showing the three 'Nellies' (adapted from the NPWS online map)*

entire area, apart from 56 hectares set aside as the Big Nellie Flora Reserve in 1988,<sup>5</sup> was part of the Lansdowne State Forest and had been subject to logging for well over a century. As a result most of the large, accessible hardwood trees had been felled and removed. Nevertheless, the existence of the three volcanic plugs,

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## From the Editor



How did your place get its name? Our lead article, by Tony Dawson, shows how a local historian's research can reveal much that was previously unknown about our places and their names. Not that the answers are always cut-and-dried, as Tony's article shows. But the investigative effort is rarely without its rewards.

We are always much encouraged to receive the results

of your investigations—whether they come in the form of articles for publication, or snippets of information to add to the ANPS Database, or just requests for assistance in tracking down a placename's origin.

Don't hesitate to send me an email about such things; it reminds us that we are actually just one small part of a much wider community. (The box at the bottom of page 13 has some other ideas for connecting with us!) *David Blair*  
<editor@anps.org.au>

## Our recent AGM

The 2023 annual general meeting of Placenames Australia (Inc) was recently hosted in Brisbane by our Secretary, Brian Lehner—though most of us participated by videoconference. The key business was the adoption of the financial report, and the election of the Management Committee. The officeholders for 2024 are: Susan Birtles (President), Dale Lehner (Vice President), Brian Lehner (Secretary), Charlie Koch (Treasurer). Other committee members for this year are Glenn Christie, Stuart Duncan and Helen Slatyer.

## From our readers

*Nowhere and other magical places* (Dec '23, p.10)

*From Ian Bevege*

...just letting you know that there is a Nowhere Creek near Ararat in Victoria. This is a small rural community but does have its own postcode 3469. I had friends there for many years.

PS And yes, there is a Fairyland in Qld between Chinchilla and Jandowae. Its postcode is 4413. I camped there with Forestry for three months in 1959. Still have a stamped envelope duly postmarked.

## In the media

There's always something of toponymic interest for assiduous readers of *The Age* or the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Recent topics have canvassed the proper pronunciations of Tumbulgum, Wauchope, Tallangatta, Wangaratta, and Towradgi. Readers

reminded us of those wondrous fictional places such as *Kickacanalong* and *Weelabarrabak* (not forgetting our favourite trans-Tasman equivalent, *Waikikamukau*). Perhaps it's time we properly collected some of these for the Survey!

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

- |                     |                    |                        |                     |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Kurrajong        | 6. Wattle Grove    | 11. Willow Tree        | 16. Coolabah        |
| 2. Palm Beach       | 7. The Oaks        | 12. Pencil Pine Bluff  | 17. Mount Grevillea |
| 3. Cabbage Tree Bay | 8. Fern Tree Gully | 13. Lemon Tree Passage | 18. Cedar Party     |
| 4. Casuarina        | 9. Fig Tree        | 14. T-Tree             | 19. Melaleuca       |
| 5. Red Gum Swamp    | 10. Mount Quandong | 15. Banksia Grove      | 20. Hawthorn        |

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as well as the need to conserve plant life, including Big Nellie Hakea (*Hakea archaeoides*), a vulnerable species unique to the area, constituted a compelling case for it to be made into a national park.

As its name implies, Big Nellie is the highest and bulkiest of the Nellies, rising to 575 metres above sea level and up to 218 metres above the surrounding country.<sup>6</sup> It forms a distinct peak which, from most angles, is shaped like a pyramid, perhaps slightly tilted or distorted. Little Nellie, 1.7 km to its south-west, has an elevation of 568m and a prominence of 188 m. (The prominence of a hill is the height of its summit relative to the lowest contour line encircling it.) It also forms a distinct peak, though shaped like a wedge standing upright on its base and with a sharp summit ridge. By contrast, Flat Nellie, 1.4 km to the north-west of Big Nellie, has an elevation of 481 m but a prominence of just 47 m, taking the form of a low, and not easily distinguishable, hill. The names are all officially assigned, the first two in 1978<sup>7</sup> and the third in 1987,<sup>8</sup> although it appears likely that Flat Nellie was known earlier as *Nellie's Flat*.

The first European known to have ventured into the area was Surveyor Henry Dangar in 1825. He had been instructed by Surveyor General John Oxley to trace a course from his station near Muswellbrook on a true north-east by east heading to within 18–20 miles (29–

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32 km) of Port Macquarie, but to go no further as Port Macquarie was a closed penal settlement. Anticipating difficulties with the proposed route, Dangar instead followed the ranges and the rivers until eventually reaching the Manning River and, subsequently, the Lansdowne Valley. Then, again contrary to his instructions, he made his way to Port Macquarie.<sup>9</sup> On this last stage of his journey he crossed Stewarts River and, provided that his view was not obstructed, he must at some point have seen Big Nellie. However, no such sighting was recorded.

On a further visit to the area in 1830, Dangar reached a point on the Lansdowne River from where Little Nellie is clearly visible, projecting above the line of the escarpment, but, as before, there is no record of his having observed it.<sup>10</sup>

After the Port Macquarie district was opened to free settlement in 1830, settlers began to take up land along the lower parts of the Lansdowne and Stewarts Rivers but probably did not reach the upper parts until the 1850s or later. They were preceded by timbergetters who, as they moved into the forests, could hardly have ignored the presence of Big Nellie and Little Nellie, and most likely would have given them names. It is therefore interesting to note that, while Big Nellie and Little Nellie are now well established names, they are not the ones by which the peaks were originally known.



*Big Nellie (right) and Little Nellie (left) from Hannam Vale*

*continued next page*

# The 'Nellies'...

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The first official document on which the two features are marked is an 1897 edition of the map of the Parish of Yarratt (below) where a hill clearly identifiable as Big Nellie is labelled 'Nellie's Rock' while Little Nellie is labelled 'Mt Wedge'. The two peaks had been added to the map subsequent to its publication and there is an explanatory note reading 'For features vide sketch with Sur Beatty's report LB00.44.9'.<sup>11</sup> The report for the Land Board had been submitted by Surveyor Stephen Ramsay Beatty who was attached to the East Maitland office of the Lands Department for almost two decades in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and returned later as District Surveyor.<sup>12</sup>



Upper Stewarts River, and a dominant feature such as Big Nellie could not have remained unnamed for long. Hence we can feel confident that the name 'Mount Nellie' was in common use by the mid-1890s. Evidence for this can be found in a newspaper report from October 1899 describing an expedition from Cooperbrook to Comboyne by a group of seven men, including William Langley, whose tramline was used to haul them to the top of the escarpment before the party set out on foot. Some 6 miles (10 km) from where they had left the tramline, they came to a spot where the scenery was said to be 'beautiful—the ragged rocks, fine foliage, and Mount Nellie looming overhead, formed a picture

not soon to be forgotten'.<sup>14</sup> The casual use of the name by one of the party, William James Edmund Newton of Cooperbrook, suggests that readers were assumed to be familiar with it.

Later, in 1906, an adventurous group of five women, eight men and one or two dogs made what was called, somewhat understatedly, 'A Trip to Mt. Nelly'.<sup>15</sup> The excursion was organised by William Lambert of Moorland who acted as guide and must have been well acquainted with the area and with the route to the peak. The party started

Although the report has not been located it is possible that it derived from earlier work conducted by Beatty. In 1898 he surveyed special leases in the parish of Lansdowne for the construction of tramways to convey logs from the forest to the sawmills. One tramway was for William Langley, manager and part-owner of Langley Bros sawmill at Rockville, and while there is no direct reference to either 'Nellie' in Beatty's field book,<sup>13</sup> it is not inconceivable that he got the name 'Mt Wedge' from Langley or one of his men since, as mentioned earlier, the hill is decidedly wedge-shaped.

As to the more prominent peak, it had been known locally as *Mount Nellie* (or *Nelly*) before Beatty had it placed on the map as 'Nellie's Rock'. By the early 1880s a number of farms had been established at Upper Lansdowne and

out from Upper Stewarts River, passing through several farms before making a steep descent to what was then known as the Southern Branch of Stewarts River. (This stream is now known as Starrs Creek, in recognition of Charles Starr whose farm lay on the southern side of the creek near its junction with the main branch of Stewarts River.) After following the creek for a distance they made for the foot of Mount Nellie and began to ascend, all managing the steep and risky climb to the summit to marvel at the expansive 360° view before retracing their steps and returning home safely.

These two accounts confirm that *Mount Nellie* was the accepted name at that time, but placenames are not immutable. For instance, when a postal receiving station was established at Rockville in 1905 the name

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was changed to *Langley Vale* in order to avoid confusion with another place bearing the same name.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in 1907 *Upper Stewarts River*, a name considered too long to fit on a postal office stamp, was changed to *Hannam Vale*,<sup>17</sup> the name of the farm belonging to the postmaster Alfred Redman.<sup>18</sup>

Even so, *Mount Nellie* lived on for some years. James Buttsworth, a retired schoolteacher with land at Hannam Vale, named his farm ‘Nelly View’, while Mrs Mary Tiedeman was inspired to write an ode to the mountain. It was published in 1932 but could have been written much earlier since she and her husband Charles lived at Hannam Vale from 1899 until 1912 when they moved to Johns River. The poem began as follows:

### MOUNT NELLIE

Outlined against the horizon.  
Your noble peak appears;  
Unchanged alike by calm and storm  
Through all the passing years.

The stress of life disturbeth not  
Thy splendid solitudes;  
For seldom on thy lonely heights  
The foot of man intrudes.

This was not the first literary allusion to ‘Mount Nellie’. In March 1899 the report of a debate at Cundletown School of Arts suggested that one speaker’s manner partook ‘slightly of the “Nelly’s mountain soliloquy” order’. Shortly afterwards a poem titled ‘The Last Native Bear on the Lansdowne’ was published in the local press. In it the author, local legend Henry ‘Hawkeye’ Edwards, decried the bear shooters slaughtering koalas for their pelts. However, one koala eluded and mocked them:

But ev’ry night those heroes,  
Out from their restless sleep  
Heard one great bear  
Still growling where  
Old Nelly’s sides are steep.

Far up, whence coos the wonga,  
With cadence sweet and low;  
Where fogs unfold  
O’er “Bulgas” bold,  
When morning zephyrs blow.

He growled a deep defiance,  
For Brennan, Jones and all;  
Until it seem’d  
That each man dream’d  
Of powder, cap and ball!



*Big Nellie from Cooperook Forest Way*

So ‘Old Nelly’ had become the last refuge of the one surviving koala, raising both to almost mythical status. (Hunting of koalas was banned in New South Wales in 1902.)

Although the name *Mount Nellie* remained during the early years of the 20th century, by 1915 its new name had crept in. A reporter from The Sydney Morning Herald who visited the Lansdowne forest and travelled on the Langley tramline to see the timber operations, concluded his article as follows:

From various points of vantage on this area grand views of the surrounding country are to be obtained. To the west are observed the striking peaks known as Big and Little Nellie, to the north the Stewart River with its strip of settlement on either side, to the east can be seen the Pacific Ocean, while to the south is the vast expanse of the valley of the Manning River.

So it seems that by then *Mount Nellie* had been superseded by *Big Nellie*, while *Mount Wedge*, which, as far as is known, existed in print only on the 1897 map of Yarratt, was now *Little Nellie*.

*continued next page*

## The ‘Nellies’...

Big Nellie’s next public appearance was on a topographic map compiled in 1943 by the 6 Australian Army Topographical Survey Company AIF from aerial photographs made by the RAAF. Although the other two ‘Nellies’ are also discernible in the map’s contour lines, neither is named. Surprisingly, perhaps, none of the names or their variations appear in the list of placenames compiled by E. C. Gleeson in 1954.

However, once introduced, the new names stuck and this raises the question – why ‘Nellie’ and why ‘Big’, ‘Little’ and ‘Flat’? The second part is easy to answer; the three features have the same geological origin and the adjectives are simple descriptors of their relative shapes and sizes. It is the first part that presents a unexpectedly difficult conundrum.

Before confronting the question, however, we should observe that the three volcanic plugs were not the only ‘Nellies’ in the district. Below them in the valley at Central Lansdowne was ‘Nellie’s Crossing’ or ‘Nellie’s Bridge’ where the road crossed Koppin Yarratt Creek, a tributary of the Lansdowne River running between the main branch and the escarpment. Also in that vicinity was ‘Nellie’s Brush’; and, to add to the puzzlement, it seems that ‘Nellie’s Creek’ was an alternative name for Koppin Yarratt Creek. In 1907, for instance, the Upper Lansdowne Progress Committee wrote to Manning Shire Council ‘drawing attention to the bad state of the road Lansdowne to Wauchope, via Nellie’s Creek’. The road to which this referred is the Koppin Yarratt Road which leads to Wauchope via the Comboyne Plateau. Even as late as 1939 there was a report saying that a ‘very inconvenient hold-up in the traffic in the road from Lansdowne to Upper Lansdowne and Comboyne has been occasioned by the collapse of the bridge over Nellie’s Creek, near the Koppin Yarratt school.’ And while it cannot be stated categorically that the ‘Nellie’ used in these instances originates from the same source as Big, Little and Flat Nellie, given their proximity it would be a remarkable coincidence if it did not.

The search began with what seemed to be a reasonable assumption; that all the names originated from a single source and that ‘Nellie’ was an eponymous toponym referring to a particular person. This was buoyed by the fact that in cases such as *Nellie’s Crossing* it took the form of a possessive noun.

At that time, ‘Nellie’ was a common enough English name used mostly, though not necessarily or exclusively, as a pet name for ‘Ellen’. It was therefore decided to look at some of the more prominent early settler families on the Lansdowne and Stewart Rivers. They included the Newtons and Hogs of Coopernook, the Lamberts of Moorland, the Murdochs of Oxley Island, the Savilles, Minetts and Cicolinis of Lansdowne, Central Lansdowne and Upper Lansdowne respectively, and the Redmans and Buttsworths of Hannam Vale.

The search, conducted through official registries and several books on the pioneering history of the Manning district, including one with a special emphasis on the Lansdowne Valley, raised a few flags, though none of them convincing. One related to Benjamin Saville, a former convict credited with having been the first settler on the Lansdowne River where the village of Lansdowne is now situated. Saville took up the land in about 1850 and lived there for more than four decades. After his first wife, Mary, died in 1859 Benjamin married Amelia Baker, with Ellen Mary Rebecca, the first of their twelve children, being born in 1861. Saville’s name was already associated with Saville’s Creek (now Cross Creek) and, later, with Saville’s Rock, so it is not impossible that the ‘Nellies’ were named for their daughter who died in 1885 at the age of 24.

Another flag concerned Ellen, daughter of George and Ellen Murdoch, who, in 1904, married Charles Starr of Starrs Creek to whom we were introduced earlier. However, no direct connection with the ‘Nellies’ has been found and by the time the marriage took place the name *Mount Nellie* was well established.

Then there was Ellen (Nellie) Hogg who, with her husband Thomas, moved to Coopernook from Johns River in the early 1870s, and whose second daughter, born in 1876, was named after her. When the older Nellie died at the age of 91 in 1935, her obituary was fulsome in its admiration for her but there was no mention of an association with Big Nellie or any of the other features.

Yet another flag was tentatively hoisted in connection with Emanuele Cicolini whose daughter Olive was probably the inspiration for the naming of Olive Hill, a volcanic plug lying close to the Cicolini farm at Upper Lansdowne. It was thought that, in a quirky way, ‘Emanuele’ might have been the origin of ‘Nellie’ but

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when Cicolini died in 1913, it was observed that he was familiarly known as ‘Bob’.

It had been hoped that these investigations into settler family histories, although cursory, might reveal an obvious candidate but the hope went unrealised. The situation was not helped by the fact that until 1898, close to the time when ‘Nellie’ made its first public appearance as a placename, no local newspapers, often the source of information of this kind, survived for very long. News about events and people prior to that time must, of course, reside in official archives and private records but an approach to the local historical society failed to throw any light on the origin of the name.

From what evidence is available—and it is slim—it may be conjectured that ‘Nellie’ first arose in relation to what is now Big Nellie as it is the most obvious of the features to which the name is attached. The other names could stem from it on the basis of geographic proximity and association. If that is so, the possibility must also be considered that ‘Nellie’ is connected with the district in some broader sense. We might ask, for instance, whether it could have been derived from, or is a corruption of, an Aboriginal word. Something like this could have a bearing on the request from Diane Westerhuis for information on the origin of Koppin Yarratt, which Amanda Lissarrague, author of several books on Aboriginal languages has confirmed as being from the Birpai language.

For the time being, therefore, the question of why the various features described acquired the name ‘Nellie’ remains wide open and any further intelligence on this would be most welcome.

**Tony Dawson**

## Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales* 26 February 1999 [Issue No. 25] p. 1425
- <sup>3</sup> *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales* 12 March 1999 [Issue No. 32] p. 2228
- <sup>4</sup> *Coorabakh National Park Plan of Management*, p. 6. NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2007
- <sup>5</sup> *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales* 9 December 1988 [Issue No.180] p. 6304
- <sup>6</sup> <https://peakvisor.com/peak/big-nellie.html> - accessed 16 July 2023
- <sup>7</sup> *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales* 5 May 1978 [Issue No.48] p. 1689
- <sup>8</sup> *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales* 20 February 1987 [Issue No.36] p. 995
- <sup>9</sup> Alan E J Andrews. *Major Mitchell's map 1834*. Blubberhead Press, Hobart, 1992. pp. 258-264
- <sup>10</sup> Surveyor General's Crown Plans 1792-1886. NSW State Archives [SG Map M.1166; Item No. 3881]
- <sup>11</sup> NSW Land Registry Services – Historic Land Records Viewer (online at <https://hlrv.nswlrs.com.au/>; accessed 3 June 2023)
- <sup>12</sup> *Dungog Chronicle: Durham and Gloucester Advertiser* 25 May 1923 p. 4
- <sup>13</sup> Surveyor-General's Field Books. NSW State Archives [NRS-13889-23-20-O6149]
- <sup>14</sup> *The Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of New South Wales* 28 October 1899 p. 7
- <sup>15</sup> *The Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of New South Wales* 13 October 1906 p. 3
- <sup>16</sup> *The Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of New South Wales* 7 October 1905 p. 4
- <sup>17</sup> *The Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of New South Wales* 9 November 1907 p. 3
- <sup>18</sup> *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales* 14 July 1909 [Issue No.94] p. 3877
- <sup>19</sup> *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales* 2 March 1910 [Issue No.31] p. 1286
- <sup>20</sup> *The Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of New South Wales* 6 January 1932 p. 4
- <sup>21</sup> *The Wingham Chronicle and Manning River Observer* 29 March 1899 p. 3
- <sup>22</sup> *The Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of New South Wales* 12 April 1899 p. 4
- <sup>23</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald* 26 July 1915 p. 7
- <sup>24</sup> Camden Haven, New South Wales/reproduction 6 Aust Army Topo Svy Coy AIF, Nov'43 (online at <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2849251894/view> ; accessed 9 July 2023)
- <sup>25</sup> E. C. Gleeson. *An alphabetical list of names of cities, towns, villages, public schools, localities, rivers, creeks, gullies, mountains, mountain ranges, railway stations & platforms, public watering places, bores, lakes, lagoons, etc.* (1954) (online at [https://www.gnb.nsw.gov.au/publications/place\\_names\\_book](https://www.gnb.nsw.gov.au/publications/place_names_book) - accessed 9 July 2023)
- <sup>26</sup> *The Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of New South Wales* 19 November 1904 p. 5
- <sup>27</sup> *The Wingham Chronicle and Manning River Observer* 7 September 1917 p. 2
- <sup>28</sup> *The Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of New South Wales* 10 May 1905 p. 2
- <sup>29</sup> *The Wingham Chronicle and Manning River Observer* 20 February 1907 p. 2
- <sup>30</sup> *The Manning River Times and Advocate for the Northern Coast Districts of New South Wales* 21 June 1939 p. 4
- <sup>31</sup> Wilfred F. Connors. *Pioneering days around Taree*. (1985)
- <sup>32</sup> *The Northern Champion* 4 September 1935 p. 2
- <sup>33</sup> *The Northern Champion* 17 December 1913 p. 5
- <sup>34</sup> *Placenames Australia*. March 2022 p. 2
- <sup>35</sup> Amanda Lissarrague. *A grammar and dictionary of Gathang : the language of the Birrbay, Guringay and Warrimay*. Muurrbay Aboriginal Language & Culture Co-operative, 2010

# Collecting Norf’k placename ephemera...

Norf’k is a contact language which stems from the language that emerged on Pitcairn Island from 1790 in a small community comprised of Polynesian and English speakers. All the Pitcairn Islanders were moved to Norfolk Island in 1856, and that translocation to a new environment saw the beginning of Norf’k as a distinct language in its new context.

Like any toponyms, Norf’k placenames are an important element of the language’s lexicon; they demonstrate the relationships between people, language, and place within the specific natural, social and linguistic tapestry of Norfolk Island. I have previously in *Placenames Australia* (Nash, 2022) noted how the internal structure of Norf’k placenames reflects and is reflected by the physical environment and spatial relationships on the island. This time, however, it is the contrast between English toponyms and their Norf’k counterparts which is of interest.

‘Creole toponyms’ is an overarching term for those placenames which have developed and are used in pidgin, creole, and language contact environments. Documenting creole toponyms through fieldwork shows the importance of human informants and observations in the field for gathering toponymic information, and seriously questions the reliability of the axiom that toponyms gathered from maps and other secondary sources are the only reliable evidence of past landscapes and land use practices.

Perhaps more importantly, the examples in Table 1 suggest that Norf’k toponyms and their distinctiveness from English forms and semantics could play an important role in further lexical and grammatical analyses of the language. The fieldwork approach which produced these examples, presented in a more detailed longitudinal study of Norfolk Island toponymy (Nash, 2013), shows that dealing intimately with speakers of the (contact) language in question can be at least as productive as text-based inquiry: asking the right questions can shed a great deal of light about the role that insider, lesser-known and esoteric toponyms

play in the social and ecological functions of Norf’k.

In a small language contact situation, toponyms and processes of placenaming serve an orientation purpose, as a memory of past events and people, as a protest against official toponyms, an entertainment, fun- and pastime-based function, or to reflect changes in individual and societal affluence, e.g. an increase in tourism, the creation of new housing developments and accommodation which are most often named.

Norf’k toponyms contribute, at least in part, to a description of the social memory of a language, which has had to adapt to a specific ecology and create ecological links to place through language after the Pitcairners were moved to Norfolk Island.

**Joshua Nash**  
*someislands.com*



*Offshore view looking west to Norfolk Island’s north coast.*  
(photo: author, 2000)

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- (2013). *Insular toponymies: Pristine place-naming on Norfolk Island, South Pacific and Dudley Peninsula, Kangaroo Island, South Australia*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

**Joshua Nash** is at *Some Islands*, a collective and journal based in Adelaide. The second issue of the journal, *Some Islands 2*, has been released. It contains much about language, islands, place, history, and naming.



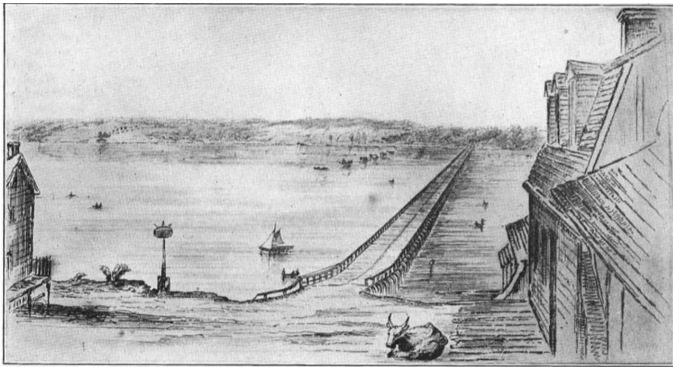
## .....Norf’k ephemera

Name	Notes
Ama’ula Lane	<i>Ama’ula Lane</i> is one of only a few road names using Norf’k words (ama’ula < Tahitian ‘clumsy, careless, slovenly’). Norf’k road name generics can take nouns, verbs, and adjectives.
Dar Coop (The [Chicken] Coop)	A rock fishing area at Steels Point on the extreme northeast of Norfolk Island, named such because the area is shaped like a chicken coop. The form <i>DET + (generic) noun</i> is productive, e.g. <i>Dar Cabbage</i> , <i>Dar Mustard</i> (both coastal locations), <i>Dar Por-pay Side</i> (literally ‘The Cherry Guava Place’).
Dar House fer Ma Nobbys (Ma Nobby’s House)	A fishing ground to the northwest out past the Captain Cook Monument. It was named such because local Norfolk Islander Ma Nobby’s house is used in lining up the marks. It is approximately three miles offshore and it was named by some of the old fishermen in the early 1900s.
Out ar Mission (Out at the Melanesian Mission)	This placename and general area close to the western coast of Norfolk Island refers to the buildings and surrounding area where the Anglican Melanesian Mission once stood and where St. Barnabas Chapel and Bishops Court still remain. The Mission was stationed on Norfolk Island from 1867 to 1920. The pool near Anson Bay Road is known locally as <i>Mission Pool</i> and as <i>The Kerapai</i> in Mota, the lingua franca used by the Melanesian Mission. Other forms such as <i>Out ar Station</i> (Out at the Cable Station) and <i>Out ar Target</i> (Out at the Shooting Range) have also been documented.
Fata Fata	<i>Fatafata</i> is a common name for islets formed in the middle of streams and creeks and comes from the Tahitian meaning ‘to flatten out’. There is a large fatafata on the top of a valley in the Shortridge area. This fatafata became known by the proper name <i>Fata Fata</i> . It is one of only a few placenames containing only Norf’k words. The only other example of a reduplicated Tahitian form functioning as a Norf’k toponym is the diving site name <i>Tai-Tai</i> (taitai < Tahitian ‘salty, brackish, bitter, flat, tasteless’).
Johnny Nigger Bun Et (Johnny Nigger Burnt It)	This is an area on the cliff face in the north toward Red Stone. It was named after one of the several African-American whalers who came to the island. There used to be a lot of grass and bracken fern in this area. Johnny was looking for pigs, possibly in a group, and they burnt the bracken to aid their hunt. This form is uncommon although it appears to be productive. Other Norf’k toponyms with predicates are <i>Side Eddy Find ar Anchor</i> and <i>Side ar Whale Es</i> .
Parloo Park	<i>Parloo</i> (<Tahitian ‘to masturbate’) is an example of a Tahitian word in Norf’k used to describe taboo things, concepts, and actions. Parloo Park is located in the extreme southwest of Norfolk in the Old Hundred Acres Reserve. The name is known to very few people and mainly to the older generation. It is the place young boys and girls used to get up to a bit of mischief, particularly on their first date. The form ( <i>Tahitian/Norf’k</i> ) <i>specific + generic</i> is productive in at least two more cases— <i>Gudda Bridge</i> (gudda < Tahitian ‘to fuck’), <i>Horsepiss Bend</i> (horsepiss < Norf’k ‘name of a weed so named because the flowers smell of horse urine when squashed’).
Side ar Whale Es (literally, ‘place the whale is’)	A land feature known to few people which when looked at from a distance resembles a whale. This is not a common form, although similar names such as <i>Side Monty Drown</i> (‘The Place Where Monty Drowned’) and <i>Side Eddy Find Ar Anchor</i> (‘The Place Eddy Found an Anchor’) have been documented.

**Table:** A select corpus of Norf’k placenames (author’s fieldnotes, 2012)

# Kayuga

In recent *Placenames Australia* articles I have commented that it is sometimes difficult to tell, just by looking at it, the origin of an Australian placename: did it originally come from one of our Indigenous languages or from some other source? Some look as if they are Indigenous-derived, but in fact are not; others seem at first glance to have no Aboriginal connection at all, but actually do have an Indigenous history. We've previously noted some examples of these unexpected etymologies: *Jabiru* (< Tupi-Guarani, a South American language family), *Goanna Bay* (< Spanish), *Collector* (Indigenous-derived), *Tom Groggin* (Indigenous-derived).



*Cayuga Long Bridge*

(photo: <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=143042>)

Near Muswellbrook (NSW, north-west of Newcastle), there is a locality bearing the name *Kayuga* which looks suspiciously like an Indigenous-derived name, though it is not. The traditional owners of the land are the Wonnarua and Gamilaraay peoples. Documentation on the origin of this name is not easy to find; however, I have been able to gather the following information.

The Register of the NSW Geographical Names Board notes that it is 'A village on the Hunter River about 5 km west of south from Aberdeen. Boundaries within Council of Muswellbrook shown on map marked GNB3790'. Nothing of its naming is mentioned.

The Newsletter of the Upper Hunter Museum of Rural Life (March 2015, p.2) provides some history to the name. In 1825, Peter McIntyre from Perthshire (Scotland) secured a property at the junction of Dart Brook and the Hunter River which he named 'Blairmore'. He corresponded with his brother, Donald, who had migrated to the United States in 1818 and had secured a property in New York State on Lake Cayuga. Donald returned to Scotland before also moving to the Hunter region of NSW in 1827; he then took possession of land at Dartbrook (to the west of his brother's property 'Blairmore') and named it 'Kayuga', presumably after Lake Cayuga. Donald later moved to Pymont Bridge Road, Glebe Point, and named his residence there *Kayuga House*.

Lake Cayuga (NY) /kah-yoo-guh-kee-yoo-guh/ derives its name from the indigenous Cayuga people (*kayokhó:no* or *kayokhwehó:no*, literally 'People of the Great Swamp') of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Nation. On the northern end of the lake is also a village bearing the name *Cayuga*, situated between Buffalo and Syracuse, in the Finger Lakes district.

The lake at one stage was crossed by the mile-long Cayuga Long Bridge (left), built in 1800. It lasted for just five or six years before it collapsed, but during that time it was the only significant route for the pre-Civil War migration to the West.

**Jan Tent**

## References

- Upper Hunter Museum of Rural Life, Newsletter (2015) <http://www.aberdeenmuseum.org.au/Newsletter/2015/March%20%20pg%202.pdf>
- Bright, William (2004). *Native American Placenames of the United States*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
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# Birdum

In the Northern Territory, off the Stuart Highway south of Larrimah, there was once a township called **Birdum**. It was the rail terminus of the never-completed Transcontinental Railway Development. Here road, rail and air transport converged to supply the developing region's needs. The township basically consisted of railway worker's homes, storage yards for engines, rail trucks, and carriages, and (of course) a pub. During World War II, Birdum performed several important functions. After the bombing of Darwin, many of the civilian population were evacuated to Birdum before being transported by army convoy to Alice Springs.

Birdum became an important post in Australia's northern defensive operations. It was for a short while the headquarters of the American air force deployed to the Territory; it accommodated the U.S. Army's 135th Medical Regiment evacuation hospital; the RAAF constructed a Base Personnel Staff Officer and Telecommunications Camp nearby (the 9 Wireless Telegraph Station operated by the RAAF No. 11 Signals Unit). The W/T Station handled the main weather reports for the South West Pacific area.

After the war, trains terminated at Larrimah. Subsequently, Birdum lost not only its *raison d'être* but also its pub, which was relocated to Larrimah. Today, the township site contains floor slabs of past structures, the relatively

intact bottle floor at the hotel site, scattered artefacts, derelict fencing, and refuse pits. The railway terminus site contains remnants of buildings, the rail line, and the only intact structure, a tin overhead water tank.

Today, Birdum is little known to most Territorians; even some locals in the district have not heard of the place. But the Territory's Place Names Register and the Australian Heritage Database give us the following information:

NT ID 22323: Locality

Latitude: -16° 13' S, Longitude: 133° 12' E

*This locality is named after the feature stream which flows north through the locality. Birdum Creek is believed to have been named during the construction of the Overland Telegraph (OT) Line in the early 1870s.*

*According to F Clune in "Overland Telegraph" Birdum Creek was named by RC Patterson during the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in 1872 after his wife. Birdum being the pet name for his wife.*

NT ID 23303: Historic Site

Latitude: -15° 38' S, Longitude: 133° 13' E

*In 1930 a townsite consisting of 32 lots was surveyed on the eastern side of the railway siding. (see Survey plan DIA 118). The townsite took its name from the Railway siding.*

**Jan Tent**

## At the United Nations...



**UNEGN**

United Nations Group of Experts  
on Geographical Names

*We recently supported the attendance of our President, **Susan Birtles**, at the New York meeting of the **UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names**. She reports on a most gratifying development at that meeting:*

Australia has now joined the UNGEGN Working Group on Toponymic Terminology.

The group was established in 1989 and formally endorsed in 1992 to produce and then periodically update a glossary of terms used in the standardisation of geographical names. By 2002 a 'Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names' had been published, which included 375 terms and their definitions in the six official UN languages. An additional 23 terms were included as an addendum in 2007. Today, the glossary is maintained in an online format at [http://ortsnamen.at/ungegn\\_glossary/](http://ortsnamen.at/ungegn_glossary/).

With some well-regarded toponymists amongst us and an interest in working toward terms that were relatable to Australian situations, I sought our involvement in that Working Group. At the most recent session of UNGEGN last May, I attended my first meeting of the Group.

Although it was essentially a short business meeting, with no discussion on specific terms, some key recommendations were made. One was to re-establish a close connection with **International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS)** terminology efforts. Another was to examine the possibilities and benefits of linked data. And it was noted that changes since 2007 have been updated in English only at this stage and are awaiting translation.

I am grateful for the expert support of Jan Tent and David Blair in this international initiative. We will continue to monitor discussions and coordinate contributions as necessary. If you're a user of this glossary and have identified errors or omissions you can send them to [pa@anps.org.au](mailto:pa@anps.org.au)

**Susan Birtles**

# Beqa, island of firewalkers...

Followers of this series of articles will know that we have attempted to explain the names of the larger islands of Fiji—two very large, and five middling—and are now ambling through the third rank: those under 100 square kilometres, all but one of which have ten villages or fewer. Rabe (officially misspelt *Rabi*, 67 km<sup>2</sup>) has come under the microscope, as have Muala (officially misspelt *Moala*, 65 km<sup>2</sup>), Lakeba (60 km<sup>2</sup>), and Vanuabalavu (57 km<sup>2</sup>, and the only one with more than ten villages), these last three all in Lau, the eastern islands.

You may recall that in the most recent in the series, on Vanuabalavu, I promised that next in line for dissection would be the ‘firewalking island of Beqa’, and indeed it will be; but first, an apology to Rotumans. In terms of land area, Rotuma, at 45 km<sup>2</sup>, should be next in line. However, while it is politically part of Fiji, it is culturally and linguistically (hence toponymically) distinct, so I propose to leave it to a later date, after we have strolled through the islands of Fiji that are culturally and linguistically Fijian. The next, then, at 37.5 km<sup>2</sup>, is Beqa.

First, the pronunciation of *Beqa*: following Fijian spelling conventions, it is pronounced /<sup>m</sup>be<sup>g</sup>a/. Older maps and writings intended for use by people not familiar with Fijian spelling, mostly tourists and visiting sailors, sometimes spell it ‘Mbengga’ to make it simpler for English speakers.

Beqa is well known in Fiji, even among urbanites, not only because it is the home of the firewalkers, but also because it is visible from the capital, Suva. It is only about 30 km from Suva, to the south-west, and looms large wherever you are on the western flank of the Suva peninsula or the nearby coast of southern Vitilevu, where it is visible from much of the Suva-Nadi highway.

Beqa is volcanic and roughly oval, but differs from other similarly shaped islands in having a long bay originating from the north-east coast, creating a peninsula to the east. The bay may have originally been a volcanic

crater. The highest point is Korolevu (‘Big Mountain’) at approximately 440 metres, and there are ten villages, divided into two vanua (political units)—Sawau (where the firewalkers are from), and Raviravi. The population in 1881 was 807, and in 1921 fell to 606, but rose to 1,356 in the most recent census of 2017. It is now famous as a tourist attraction, with its pristine coral reefs and diving with sharks.

It is generally the case in Fiji that European exploration proceeded from east to west, so the more westerly the island the later its ‘discovery’ by outsiders. So it is that many islands of Lau, Vanualevu and Lomaiviti made their way onto maps in the early nineteenth century; but the first reference to more westerly Beqa was not until 1827, when the French explorer Dumont d’Urville recorded it as ‘Benga’, noting that its Tongan pronunciation was ‘Péka’, and estimating its population at 1,000. However he confused the issue somewhat by recording it again under the name *Oumbenga* (misanalysing the article ‘o’

as part of the name) and giving the population as 2,000.

A look at Dumont d’Urville’s map confirms that he was indeed confused about Beqa, since he gave the name to the island of Ono, of similar shape and size but some 60 km to the south-east, and he omitted the island of Beqa. The population of 2,000 then

more likely referred to the

island of Ono, which he mistook for Beqa. Why did he make these mistakes when his recording of toponyms and the location of their referents was otherwise exemplary? Very simply, he had other things on his mind at the time—namely, desperately trying to save his ship from destruction on the reef surrounding Kadavu and extending north from Ono. He was successful, and named the offending reef after his ship, *L’Astrolabe*, the name it bears to this day as *Great Astrolabe Reef*.

In 1840, the American Commodore Charles Wilkes, in charge of the United States Exploring Expedition, gave



*The island of Beqa*

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## ...Placenames of Fiji 22

the name as *Mbenga* or *Benga*, noting its former status as one of the highest ranking islands in Fiji, and its then current status as subject to Rewa.



*Firewalking, anyone?*

There are at least two other places in Fiji named *Beqa*. There's a deserted village near the junction of the Wainitonuve and Wainikoroiluva rivers in the Serua highlands, due north of the island of Beqa; and there's a bay near Wainigadru in north-east Vanualevu. There is also an island named *Beqalevu* ('large Beqa') near Vusasivo on the Vanualevu coast of Natewa, opposite Wainigadru.

Now to etymology. There is no believable source of the name in any Standard Fijian dictionary. However, if we expand our search to include non-standard languages, we do arrive at a plausible etymology. In parts of central

and eastern Vanualevu, 'beqa' means a piece of arable flat land beside a river, particularly suitable for grazing and growing root crops such as taro (*Colocasia esculentum*). This, then, I propose as the most likely origin of the name of the island of Beqa, which indeed is famed for produce such as taro, and also of the other places with the name *Beqa* or *Beqalevu*. Since these places were named, the noun 'beqa' has been lost, or replaced by other terms such as 'buca', in most of eastern Fiji, but retained in parts of Vanualevu.

Finally, you may be surprised to know that newspapers in Fiji regularly carry supermarket advertisements for quality dairy products from Beqa. Fertile though the island is, it does *not* have a dairy industry. What has happened is that copywriters have misread *Bega*, that well-known valley in southern New South Wales, for the island in Fiji they are familiar with—compounded no doubt by the fact that the 'g' in the company logo has no curve in the tail, so does indeed look more like a 'q'. Who knows, one day the 'island of firewalkers' may be known locally as the 'island of cheesemakers'.



Next time – the island of Naviti in the Yasawa Group, probably the first island in Fiji to be named!

**Paul Geraghty**  
*University of the South Pacific*

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# Placenames Puzzle Number 89

## Arboreal placenames

In this puzzle the clues refer to places named after tree species. For example: (NSW) A bay near Bobbin Head on Cowan Creek, Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, named for the genus *Malus*. Answer: *Apple Tree Bay*

1. (NSW) A small town named for the *Brachychiton populneus*, 75 km NW of Sydney in the Hawkesbury LGA
2. (NSW) A Sydney suburb 41 km north of the CBD
3. (NSW) A marine protected area on the north side of Sydney's North Head, named for the *Cordyline australis*
4. (NSW) A town in the Tweed Shire, named for the 'native pine'
5. (VIC) A swamp SE of Horsham in the Jallumba Wildlife Reserve, named for the eucalyptus with widest national distribution of any in the species
6. (WA) A suburb of Perth named for the genus *Acacia*
7. (NSW) A town in the Wollondilly Shire, 13 km W of Camden, named for the genus *Quercus*
8. (VIC) A suburb of Melbourne, 27 km E of the CBD, named for the *Cyathea australis*
9. (NSW) An inner suburb of Wollongong, named for the 'Australian banyan'
10. (QLD) A mountain SW of Proserpine, named for the *Santalum acuminatum*
11. (NSW) A small village in the Liverpool Plains, 14 km S of Quirindi, named for the genus *Salix*
12. (TAS) A mountain near Mount Inglis in Cradle Mountain National Park, named for the *Athrotaxis cupressoides*
13. (NSW) A village 4 km SSW of Soldiers Point in Port Stephens, named for the tree that bears a yellowish acidic fruit
14. (NT) A town on the Stuart Highway 193 km N of Alice Springs, that shares one of the common names of the *Cordyline australis*
15. (WA) A suburb N of the Perth CBD, named for the tree named after Cook's botanist
16. (NSW) A small village 76 km N of Nyngan, named for the swagman's camp
17. (QLD) A mountain NW of Bundaberg in the Warro National Park named for the shrub that produces 'spider flowers'
18. (NSW) A small town (with an unusual name) NNW of Taree, named for the national tree of Lebanon.
19. (TAS) A remote locality (former settlement) NNE of South West Cape, named for the 'paperbark'
20. (VIC) A Melbourne suburb, 6 km E of the CBD, named for the genus *Crataegus*

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

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