

A CLASH OF TOPONYMIES, OR TOPONYMIC CONFLICT ON PHILLIP ISLAND, NORFOLK ISLAND ARCHIPELAGO

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Abstract: The Norfolk Island Archipelago offers researchers propitious instances relevant to toponymy and cartography. This position piece details the role and placement of toponyms as mappable cultural capital using the example of Phillip Island, a small island six kilometres south of Norfolk. Maps are presented and a toponymic hierarchy is defined and explicated. The hierarchy reveals Norfolk names – toponyms in the Norfolk Island language – exist as more ‘authentic’, i.e. Norfolk names are more highly valued by the community than English names.

The following is a position piece concerning the role and placement of toponyms as mappable cultural capital. I use the example of Phillip Island, Norfolk Island Archipelago to present localised and distinct processes of mapping in an isolated and insular cultural and linguistic milieu. I outline the case of conflict between names from the two pre-1856 settlements and the post-1856 period of the resettlement of the Pitcairners on Norfolk Island. This has produced two distinct layers of placenames – Norfolk toponyms and English toponyms – and has created tensions among contemporary residents as to whether pre- or post-1856 placenames are more ‘authentic’, and therefore more highly valued by the community. The problems in negotiating these issues within a community are also identified.

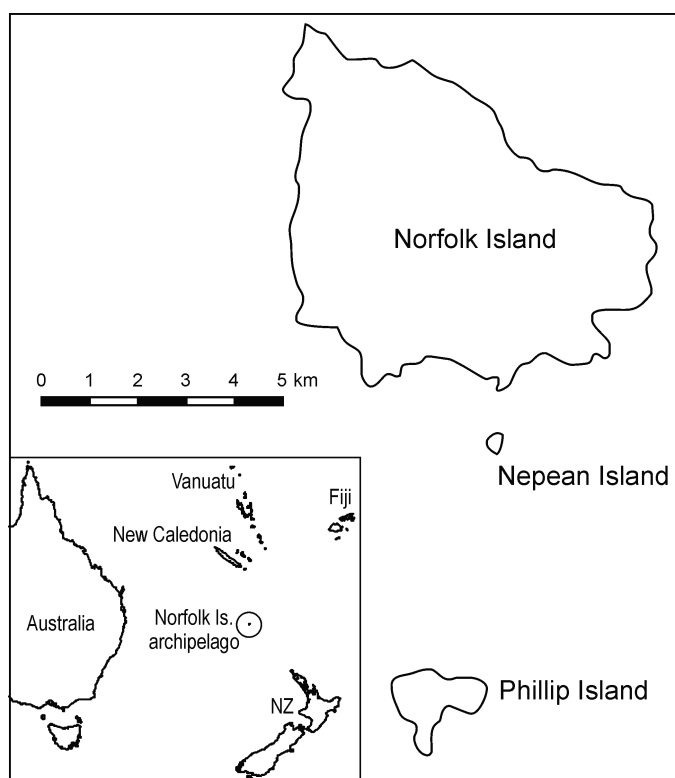


Figure 1. Norfolk Island Archipelago

The *toponymic hierarchy* which developed in this small island microtoponymic study exposes how language as toponyms and toponyms as language can be managed. I define a toponymic hierarchy as an implicit or explicit mode of hierarchically prioritising sets of toponyms based on their linguistic origin. Priorities, values, and even different groups of people favour sometimes incompatible sets of names. The placenaming, cartography, and community consultation which took place during the rabbit eradication programme and the proclamation of Phillip Island as a part of the Norfolk Island National Park during the late 1980s starkly depicts how several toponymic ideas have been at odds with each other and how their coming together, conflict, or clash have resulted in different placename maps.

Approximately 3 nautical miles (6 km) south of Norfolk, Phillip Island, with an area of just under 2 km², is a significant element in the

Norfolk cultural and linguistic landscape (**Fig. 1**). Insider toponyms are linked to the Norfolk Islanders and their language – Norfolk – and do not commonly appear on official maps. However, in

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the community these names exist at the top of the toponymic hierarchy – *Coynes Cove* holds less weight than *Dar Tomato*; *Red Road Valley* was named by a non-Norfolk Islander and thus holds less toponymic weight than *First West End Valley*. Phillip Island placenames designate, delineate, and demarcate clear boundaries in the history of the language on the rest of the Norfolk Archipelago: Norfolk only exists in names endowed after the Pitcairners arrived in 1856; English names occur both before and after 1856.

The Phillip Island data was collected on several fieldtrips to Norfolk in 2008 and 2009. Most of the data was acquired from an archive documenting the 1989 community consultation and involved public comment held at the Norfolk Island National Park headquarters on Mission Road, Norfolk Island. The files record a large part of the consultation process which took place between the Norfolk Island Government, the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (ANPWS), and the Norfolk community. The data shows overwhelmingly that the community believe the ‘original’ Norfolk names given by Norfolk Islanders are the ‘authentic’ names, although there are several extant names on Phillip Island which pre-date 1856. I believe the English names – either the pre-1856 names or those of the ANPWS – are just as reliable and accurate toponymic descriptors and locators as any Norfolk names. This tension illustrates that in the presence of any other toponyms, Norfolk names are deemed to be the only set of authentic names which can be taken seriously; other non-Norfolk names must always exist lower on the toponymic hierarchy than Norfolk names.

Although the current placenames (**Fig. 2.**), those mainly used by the Norfolk Islanders, have been previously published (ANPWS 1989, 8), the former names on Coyne’s Map¹ (**Fig. 3.**), commented on by the Norfolk community and eventually changed, served a practical and functional purpose during the rabbit eradication program. They provided utilitarian pointers for workers to locate themselves and find their way around the island. I believe the names on Coyne’s Map were created because no one on Norfolk Island – whether of Pitcairn descent or not – told the ANPWS staff what the names were in the places they were working. What is significant is how and why these names have come to be changed and what this represents for the Norfolk community’s opinion on toponymy, notions of uniqueness, and also the process of name changing in a situation that could be labelled ‘quasi-indigenous’. Simultaneously there is another level of what seemingly exists as less authoritative geographical nomenclature in the form of English names. This makes explicit the toponymic hierarchy with Norfolk names being prioritised over English names.

It is important to remember that the Pitcairners were not the first arrivals on Norfolk. There was an agricultural settlement followed by a penal settlement prior to the Pitcairners’ arrival, which presented the new arrivals with a significant albeit colonial and even foreign place-naming legacy. The spelling of the name of the island is itself a peculiarity. The two spelling variations of ‘Phillip Island’ and ‘Philip Island’ demonstrate the tenuous nature of language discussions on Norfolk. During the community consultation process during the referral of the *Phillip Island Draft Management Plan* (ANPWS 1989), the following submissions regarding the spelling of the Phillip Island were received:

The traditional spelling of Philip Island should be retained. Although it was recognised that historically the spelling is incorrect it was felt that over one hundred years of spelling Philip with one “l” should be grounds enough to retain this spelling. (Graham Jurd’s submission (#9), NINP [Norfolk Island National Park file]/029)

We would prefer the spelling of “Philip” to remain unchanged, i.e. with one ‘l’, for the following reasons: [...] the Pitcairn descendants have used Denham’s spelling since their arrival over 130 years ago.² Denham’s spelling is firmly entrenched in official maps and documents, scientific literature, and history books, and a change now would create doubt and confusion. (Derek and Andrea Greenwood’s submission (#6), NINP/029)



Figure 2. Combined toponymic map of Phillip Island (ANPWS 1989, 8; Nash 2011)



Figure 3. Coyne's Map of Phillip Island (ANPWS 1989, 8 fig. 2.1)

These points of view are countered by another submission (Allan Tavener (#11) NINP/029):

I think it would be the most appropriate time to re-instate the spelling of the Island's name to "PHILLIP" rather than "PHILIP" which it has been spelt in recent times. The Island was named by Gidley King "...in honour of His Excellency Governor Phillip." (quote from King's Journal. 28 Feb. 1788).

These views are overridden by a local archaeologist and former museum curator with the clearest and most cogent argument for not changing the spelling of Phillip's name:

I am not alone in the objection of changing the spelling of Philip Island to include another "l". The old spelling is a legal spelling and a spelling in common usage throughout the Third Settlement [after the arrival of the Pitcairners]. I can not [sic] see the necessity for changing the name back to the historical spelling after more than 130 years of accepted usage. Spelling reform or a change of name is usually required where there is risk of confusion or some practical reason for doing so. In fact the change will blur the distinction that exists between the more famous Phillip Island [Victoria]. It is felt by some that the change of spelling emanates from an ego desire to make a mark on history (no offence). To me it represents another attempt to change yet another aspect of the Third Settlement [after the arrival of the Pitcairners] for no purpose. (Robert Varman's submission (#12) NINP/029)

I favour the Australian Government's spelling 'Phillip Island' (double l). I do not believe there is much at issue – even after I have been involved in a longitudinal study of Norfolk toponymy for more than seven years as a non-resident of Norfolk. Below is a more general point of view on the process of placename changes: Varman continues:

There seems to be some discrepancies between some of the names given on page 8 – figure 2.1 [Fig. 3. in this paper] and the local names and even amongst the local names. I would suggest that considerable thought be given to this small matter. If interest is taken to changing some of the names to locally known one then this would satisfy a lot of people; if no interest is shown then the draft [sic] plan could well alienate the "locals" who would consider the plan as a "fait-accompli" and show no further interest. The most important reason for adopting established names is that if there should be an emergency of any kind on the island then everybody would be familiar with the general area.

Even looking at the name of the island it is apparent how ways of spelling names clash – different spellings tell different stories; people want their own names deposited in the landscape; placenames matter. Three names derived from the archive narrate how Norfolk names on Phillip, including one name which also uses Norfolk article grammar (*dar* for 'the'), exist at the top of the Norfolk toponymic hierarchy (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Selected local placenames on Phillip Island
(Norfolk Island NP file NINP/029, 1989; quoted in ANPWS 1990, 124-128)

Name	History
Dar Tomato	The bay, the beach and steep slopes on the western side of Phillip. Wild tomatoes grow half-way up on the steep slope/cliff. Chopie Evans climbed up the cliff to the tomatoes and left his hat there to prove he'd made the climb. Was referred to as <i>Coyne's Cove</i> during the rabbit eradication program after Peter Coyne who worked for ANPWS on the program.
Valley on Top Niggers Hoof	Was referred to as <i>Tobacco (Baeccer) Valley</i> during the rabbit eradication program.
Second West End Valley	Was referred to as <i>Whitewood Valley</i> (after the few relict Whitewood trees) during the rabbit eradication program.

One of the most knowledgeable persons I interviewed on Norfolk, a person who had done a lot of fishing on and around Phillip, used the name *Baeccer Valley* instead of what most islanders would consider to be the authentic or 'original' name, *Valley on Top Niggers Hoof* (see #2 above). Even the label 'original' is problematic when describing indigeneity on Norfolk because the Pitcairners were not the first people to inhabit the island. Having Pitcairn blood heritage – *come from* – does not imply

any essential ability to understand the workings of Norfolk Island better than any other individual. As regards toponymy, I believe knowledge comes through experience and contact with place, language, names, and people, not through a preconceived idea that linguistic or cultural affiliation predetermines an individual's aptitude to accessing and using toponymic knowledge.

Table 2 lists other more esoteric and generally undocumented placenames on Phillip Island:

Table 2. Esoteric and undocumented placenames for Phillip Island obtained through interviews (source: the author 2013)

Name	History
South Peninsula	The name given in the convict days to what is now known as Garnet Point on the extreme southern tip of Phillip (<i>garnet</i> is the Norfolk name for gannet birds).
South Rock	The most southerly point on the Norfolk Archipelago.
Foul Water	A name dating from convict times (pre-1856) just off Garnet Point.
Collins Bay	Given in the convict days to what is now known as <i>Dar Moo-oo</i> (<i>moo-oo</i> is the Norfolk word for the native flax used in plaiting and weaving).
The Brothers/Twin Brothers	The convict name of two rocks which some claim has been erroneously named <i>Sail Rock</i> .

Phillip Island toponyms clash within the differing ideas of what is highlighted in language and place relationships on Norfolk Island. I dispute the veto given to Norfolk names and even how they necessarily represent the only authentic perspective of place-naming on the Norfolk Archipelago. Older convict names are not as valued or considered as accurate as younger Norfolk names by the Norfolk community when there is a question of authority. This has led me to suggest the role of social allegiances as applied to names and language is more important than truths and facts about the history of names. When there is a choice, Norfolk placenames are somehow considered more important and significant in Norfolk society than non-Norfolk names. Because English and Norfolk toponyms are included as nationally gazetted names (e.g. AUSLIG 1992), their inadvertent recognition by the Australian Government is significant. Perhaps this 'clash of toponymies' or toponymic conflict on Phillip Island is also representative of a much larger clash between language, officialness of names, and the need for legislation and more comprehensive documentation of Australia's other lesser-known minority languages.

Acknowledgements

I thank David Blair for comments on an earlier version of this paper published in *Placenames Australia* (December 2013). I also thank an anonymous reviewer for *The Globe*.

NOTES

¹ This map is called 'Coyne's Map' because it is attributed to the work carried out by Peter Coyne, the head officer the ANPWS on Norfolk Island at that time. Coyne was responsible for much of the documentation work on Phillip Island, which led to Phillip Island being proclaimed as part of the Norfolk Island National Park in 1996.

² This submission is referring to Denham's map from 1856 on which the former spelling of 'Phillip Island' became 'Philip Island'.

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