

# Toponymy, Mapping and the Geologist: 144 Years in Canada

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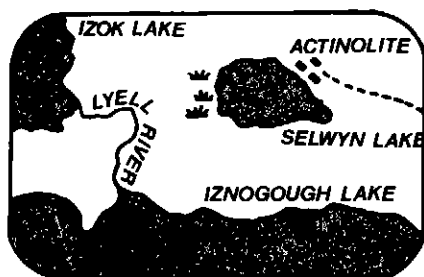
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## Toponymy, Mapping and the Geologist: 144 Years in Canada

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### Introduction

The relationship between the compilation of information for the production of topographic maps and the work of the geologist in Canada can be traced to the earliest beginnings of the Geological Survey of Canada in the early 1840s. This relationship, in a somewhat modified form, still exists today, especially when one considers the names and naming of geographical features in Canada's north. This paper not only examines the historic role played by the geologist in providing geographical data, and in particular the names of geographical features, but explains the nature of the science of toponymy and the present day role of the Toponymy Program of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT).

### The Science of Toponymy

Marcel Aurousseau a noted British toponymist, defined toponymy as "the historical and documentary investigation of the names used in the language of a particular country for the inhabited and formerly inhabited places, uninhabited places and geographical features of that country" (Aurousseau, 1957, p. 3). As a formal discipline, the science of toponymy can be traced to its beginnings in Britain in the 1860s. At this point, it was considered to be a sub-discipline of the science of etymology, which is primarily concerned with the study of the origins of words. The study of geographical names became a philological discipline based on an analysis of the early spelling of names for which rules were developed by the scholar Isaac Taylor. With Taylor's rules European scholars began systematically and scientifically to analyze the names of geographical features. The study of geographical names "passed at once out of the phase of speculative guesswork and became an exact science" (Mawer, 1922, p. 9). The basic principles developed by Taylor and others during the late 1800s

remain as guides for modern European toponymists who look upon geographical names as "ancient words or fragments of ancient words — each of them, in short, constituting the earliest chapter in the local history of the places to which they ... refer" (Mawer, 1922, p. 390).

At the same time that the Europeans were striving toward a more scientific approach to the study of their geographical names, scholars in North America were developing a somewhat different focus for this type of study. North American methodology developed during the mapping of large areas of the continental interior prior to the economic use and settlement of those areas. For fifty years prior to the turn of the century maps were produced by a variety of government agencies at different scales. These maps often had different names or spellings for the same geographical features. It soon became apparent that some form of standardization had to be implemented. Canada and the United States both established, in the late 1800s, geographic boards responsible for the nomenclature on new maps. One of the primary responsibilities of the Geographic Board of Canada, established in 1897, was to standardize the geographical names that were to appear on all federally produced maps. This process included the examination of names appearing on early maps and where discrepancies were found to make a decision, based on communication with local residents, on which name was most appropriate. This board also decided upon the suitability of names proposed for geographical features for which no local name was known.

The examination of geographical names by the early Geographic Boards of Canada and the United States was not primarily for the purpose of determining the origins of these names but to establish their correct spelling, location and extent. Their concern was strictly for gathering data, not for the analysis of that data. This latter aspect of the study of geographical names, though well developed in Europe by the 1900s, remains largely undeveloped in North America to the present. In North American toponymy the emphasis remains, as developed in the 1800s, on determining the names of geographical features through local field research. Secondary or follow-up research is conducted through the examination of old maps and other written materials generally available in libraries and archives. Field work for a European toponymist means testing, only as a final step, the etymological interpretation of the name. In North American toponymy, the emphasis placed on the gathering of information in the field as a first step reflects not only the relative youth of North American toponyms but also the conviction that the function of maps, and the names shown on those maps, is to reflect reality. Names are given to features in order that they may be referred to in an

unambiguous manner; if maps do not show the correct toponyms then the purpose of those maps has been defeated.

### The Historic Role of the Geologist in Geographical Naming

The early work of the Geological Survey of Canada, and prior to Confederation this was the Geological Survey of the Province of Canada, was seriously hampered by a lack of topographic maps for the areas being examined. Topographic work, and subsequent map production, usually preceded geological surveying but this was not the case in many areas of Canada. The early survey geologist, by necessity, became involved in the production of maps. Many of the earliest detailed maps of Canada were produced by geologists and therefore they were the first to record many of the geographical names that we now see on our modern maps. The obvious question to ask at this point is where did these names come from? It can be demonstrated that there were only two sources for these names, one being the local residents of the areas being surveyed and the other being the geologists themselves. The early work of Joseph B. Tyrrell will be used to illustrate this point.

Joseph Tyrrell, an employee of the Geological Survey of Canada, along with his brother James Tyrrell, led, in 1893, a party of eight men on an exploratory trip down the Dubawnt and Thelon Rivers to Chesterfield Inlet on Hudson Bay. Little was known about this portion of the Northwest Territories prior to the work of the Tyrrell brothers. Joseph Tyrrell produced a map of the region upon which are shown a number of names which fall into the two previously mentioned categories. Tyrrell recorded the Chipewyan name Dubawnt Lake. Dubawnt apparently means "water-shore lake" (Geographic Board of Canada, 1910, p. 358) which may refer to the fact that well into summer the middle of the lake is covered by ice.

Tyrrell also placed names on a number of geographical features for which no local names could be found. He named Boyd Lake for the Hon. John Boyd, Lt.-Gov. of New Brunswick; Barlow Lake for Scott Barlow, Geographer and Chief Draughtsman of the Geological Survey of Canada; Selwyn Lake for Dr. Selwyn, Director of the Geological Survey of Canada; and Carey Lake for his father-in-law, Rev. Dr. Carey of New Brunswick.

There are also many modern examples in the north of geologists naming geographical features. One such example was recently brought to my attention by Dr. Gibbins, the Arctic Islands District Geologist for Indian and Northern Affairs. In 1973, during reconnaissance mapping of an area approximately 350 kilometers north of Yellowknife, a geologist with Texas-Gulf informally named two small lakes "Iz-no-gough" and "Iz-o-kay". These names apparently refer to the state of

mineral deposits in the area. The latter of the two names, because it was spelled i-z-o-k began to be pronounced "Izok". The name of a new mineral found at "Izok Lake" has recently been approved by the Commission on New Minerals and Mineral Names as "izoklakeite". The name "Izok Lake" was examined and subsequently rejected in 1976 by the member of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names representing the Northwest Territories. As the name has not slipped into obscurity during the intervening ten years it will obviously have to be reconsidered for approval. This brings us to the question of how geographical names are approved in the Northwest Territories.

#### The Toponymy Program of the GNWT

The research and subsequent officialization of names for geographical features in the Northwest Territories was, until 1984, the responsibility of the Federal Governments Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. During the past 40 to 50 years naming responsibility has been transferred from the Federal Government to each of the Provinces. Toponymy programs were then established, usually in association with departments responsible for mapping. In January of 1984, the Federal Government offered to transfer its naming responsibility in the NWT to the Territorial Government. In November of 1985, I accepted an offer from the GNWT to establish a Toponymy Program with the Department of Culture and Communications. The four major responsibilities of this new program are:

(1) to receive and process requests to name or change the name of physical features and populated places in the NWT;

(2) to conduct systematic toponymic field studies of selected areas of the NWT;

(3) to review and process toponymic data gathered through independent research projects; and

(4) to disseminate toponymic data through answering specific questions posed by the public and through the production of written material made readily available to the public.

The officialization process for geographical names has yet to be fully established although urgent requests, as was the case with the change of name for Frobisher Bay to Iqaluit, can be placed before the Executive Council of the Government of the Northwest Territories. The approval procedure followed by the majority of provinces is that of review by a public board. The Northwest Territories will have a public board that will deal with a wide range of heritage issues, including geographical names. Name submissions received by the Toponymy Program will be presented, along with supplementary research, to this Board for approval or rejection. The board, as with all southern boards, will follow the principles and procedures for geographical naming established by the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. These principles and procedures, which were developed over 90 years of name officialization in Canada, emphasize the recognition of locally established geographical names. Thirteen additional guiding principles are outlined in the publication of the Canadian Permanent Committee titled *Principle and Procedures for Geographical Naming in Canada*. This publication is available from the Geographical Names Secretariat, Energy, Mines and Resources, 615 Booth Street, Ottawa,

Ontario K1A 0E9. The principles and procedures of the Committee are currently undergoing revision and updating by members of this Committee.

In order that name submissions may be handled expeditiously by the Toponymy Program the initiator must provide certain information. If a name is being proposed for a locally unnamed feature then we must know the location of the feature, preferably by latitude and longitude; a map outlining the extent of the feature; the reason for proposing the name; and, the origin of the name. If recognition of a locally used name is being requested then the submission should also include, if known, the extent to which the name is used locally; the length of time in local use; and, any stories or legends associated with the name or the feature.

The Toponymy Program also provides services to the public, to other government departments and to companies working in the north. These services include providing information on the proper spelling, pronunciation, and origin of the approximate 15,000 official geographical names in the NWT and the correct location and extent of the features to which these names apply.

#### References

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Accepted, as revised, 12 June 1987.

#### Announcement

## FIRST WORLD CONGRESS OF HERPETOLOGY

11-19 September 1989 at the Canterbury, United Kingdom

This international congress will be the first of a series occurring at regular intervals at venues around the world. Such a meeting will enable persons interested in herpetology to meet and exchange information, to promote the advance of knowledge and the conservation of the world's amphibians and reptiles. The congress will consist of topical symposia, poster sessions, plenary speakers, workshops, displays, excursions, and meetings of ancillary groups. Subjects and moderators of symposia will be announced well in advance so that potential participants can volunteer.

**First Circular:** The complete program and full details of excursions, including prices, are given in the First Circular, available from the Secretariat. This includes a Provisional Registration Form. Registration begins January 1988; £90 fee covers abstract book and program, refreshments, and costs of hiring meeting rooms and equipment. *Advance registration is strongly encouraged* for planning purposes and to insure that you receive all other announcements promptly.

**Secretariat:** Address all inquiries to: First World Congress of Herpetology, Ecology Research Group, Rutherford College, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NY, United Kingdom.