

International Science Council

ISSN 1755-9030

# SCAR **report**

No 41  
October 2021

## International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names



Published by the

**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON ANTARCTIC RESEARCH**

at the

**Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, United Kingdom**

# International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names

Recommended international principles and procedures for the use of  
existing place names and the standardization of new names for features  
in Antarctica (south of 60°S)

Prepared by

SCAR<sup>1</sup> Standing Committee on Antarctic Geographic Information (SCAGI)<sup>2,3</sup>

Version: June 2021

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<sup>2</sup> Based on work prepared by the SCAR Working Group on Geodesy and Geographic Information, led by Jörn Sievers (Germany), 31 August 1994

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## 1. Introduction

Antarctic place names are important for identification, orientation, positioning and navigation, providing an essential reference system for logistical operations (including search and rescue measures), management, environmental investigation and protection, scientific research, culture, tourism, and preservation of heritage. They facilitate the exchange of information in the field, in scientific publications and in administrative measures of the Antarctic Treaty System. Place names also reflect the history of exploration of the continent.

There are more than 50 signatory countries to the Antarctic Treaty, and place names appear in numerous languages and scripts. Principles and procedures for using existing names and for proposing new names and changes have not been previously established internationally. Traditionally, each country has established its own principles and policies, which has resulted, in many cases, in the multiple naming of features, the translation or mistranslation of place names, and ambiguity and confusion in the current use of names in Antarctica.

In 1992, the SCAR Working Group on Geodesy and Geographic Information, during the XXII SCAR meeting in Bariloche, recognised the need for a composite gazetteer of Antarctica to bring some order to the complex toponymy of Antarctica. The goal of the work programme, which evolved from that discussion, provided the scientific community with two products:

- a compilation and central storage of all existing place names of Antarctica, first published as a printed gazetteer, followed soon after as a database; and
- a set of guidelines to be followed both when selecting an existing name for a feature and when proposing new names or changes to existing names. A draft version was distributed in 1994.

As part of the early development, a place identifier known as Place\_ID, was added. This changed the focus of the gazetteer from names to features. This identifier connected names from different gazetteers to the same feature for the first time.

Many countries have an acknowledged national body which approves the names of geographic features within their own country and which also has the authority to enforce their use. However, for Antarctica there is no such single naming authority. Individual countries are responsible for their national policy on, and authorisation and use of, Antarctic names.

Antarctica is managed by a unique set of agreements known as the Antarctic Treaty System. This document provides those signatories to the Antarctic Treaty with clear principles and procedures for the use of existing names for features in Antarctica (south of 60°S) and for the application of new names for previously unnamed features on maps, in scientific publications, and in databases.

SCAR, through its recommendations, hopes that the present effort will contribute to the adoption of 'one name per feature' by all Antarctic place-naming authorities to minimize ambiguity and avoid confusion. The most recent recommendations

concerning Antarctic Place Names (which are still valid) are the SCAR Rec. XXVII-1<sup>4</sup>, the previous ones being Rec.XXIV-5<sup>5</sup>, Rec.XXV-7<sup>6</sup>, Rec.XXVI-2<sup>7</sup>.

The SCAR Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica (CGA) is now a well-developed web application allowing users to search the database and retrieve/re-use Antarctic names. The CGA reflects the gazetteers of SCAR member countries.

These principles and procedures have been established in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Antarctic Treaty and in agreement, where possible, with the resolutions adopted by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). These principles and procedures support standard, consistent and accurate place-naming practices.

This document is subject to review, as necessary. How countries have implemented these principles and procedures should be included in their SCAGI reports. SCAGI members are encouraged to provide feedback to the chair at any time.

## 2. General

The principles and procedures for naming features and places in Antarctica:

- are applied to all land features, ice shelves and subglacial features south of 60°S;
- include undersea features entirely or mainly (more than 50%) within the limits of the territorial sea, not exceeding the 12 nautical mile limit. For undersea features beyond 12 nautical miles, the B-6 guidelines<sup>8</sup> of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) should be followed;
- are consistent, where possible, with relevant resolutions of the UNGEGN;
- should be applied to geographic features and places on maps, charts, publications, databases, etc.;
- address the written form (orthography)<sup>9</sup> of place names only, not the pronunciation;
- relate to the use of the Roman script only, including relevant diacritical marks or special letters<sup>10</sup>;
- emphasise the limitation of new names to those needed for science, logistics and management;
- provide recommendations for the Romanization of non-Roman scripts, as adopted by UNGEGN or according to the system approved by the country that

<sup>4</sup> Recommendation SCAR XXVII-1: Concerning Antarctic place-names, Bulletin 149, p10  
<https://www.scar.org/scar-library/reports-and-bulletins/scar-bulletins/2609-scar-bulletin-149/>

<sup>5</sup> Recommendation SCAR XXIV-5: Concerning Place Names, Bulletin 125, p10  
<https://www.scar.org/scar-library/reports-and-bulletins/scar-bulletins/4395-scar-bulletin-125/>

<sup>6</sup> Recommendation SCAR XXV-7: Concerning Antarctic Place-names, Bulletin 133, p12  
<https://www.scar.org/scar-library/reports-and-bulletins/scar-bulletins/4403-scar-bulletin-133/>

<sup>7</sup> Recommendation SCAR XXVI-2: Concerning Antarctic Place-names, Bulletin 141, p10  
<https://www.scar.org/scar-library/reports-and-bulletins/scar-bulletins/4305-scar-bulletin-141/>

<sup>8</sup> See reference B-6, available for downloading at [https://www.iho.int/iho\\_pubs/IHO\\_Download.htm](https://www.iho.int/iho_pubs/IHO_Download.htm)

<sup>9</sup> UNGEGN Glossary of Terms:  
[https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/pubs/documents/Glossary\\_of\\_terms\\_rev.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/pubs/documents/Glossary_of_terms_rev.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> A diacritic is a sign, usually small, placed above, below or across a letter or group of letters in order to change the phonemic value of the original letter(s), or to denote stress or tone, or to distinguish between two words, for example German ä, ö, ü; Russian š, č; French ç, é, è; or special letters Nordic ø. Source: UNGEGN Glossary of Terms

gave the name. It is expected that the country of origin will undertake the Romanization and provide these to the CGA.

### 3. Languages

Antarctic place names have been published in scientific papers, maps and databases in the following languages (non-exhaustive list), which are used by the countries active in Antarctica:

Bulgarian	English	German	Japanese	Norwegian	Russian
Chinese	Finnish	Hindi	Korean	Polish	Spanish
Dutch	French	Italian	Māori	Portuguese	Swedish

## 4. Principles and procedures for the use of existing Antarctic place names

### 4.1 Introductory remarks

Without agreed Antarctic naming principles, past practice has led to existing names being translated into another language or features being given similar or completely different names by other countries. These additional names were then submitted to SCAR CGA and recorded as another name for the same feature or place. This has resulted in multiple names for one feature or place, which has caused ambiguity and confusion, and has adversely impacted operational, search and rescue, and location identification activities. In the future, this practice will be strongly discouraged by SCAR.

In the past, where multiple names have been applied to a single feature or place, and in an effort to support 'one feature - one name', countries should adopt the specific element of the name already in the SCAR CGA. Where there is more than one name assigned to a feature or place, the oldest name approved by a naming authority should be adopted. Note: names in the SCAR CGA may not necessarily indicate priority of naming and further research may be required. Users of the SCAR CGA should use the Place\_ID to check if a feature has multiple names.

However, names that have been well-established and are in widespread and long-standing use may be acceptable even though they do not conform to current principles.

### 4.2 Recommendations for the use of existing place names

If known, preference should be given to the originally approved name of a feature or place originally approved by a national naming authority. All names found on other products should be submitted to the SCAR CGA where a Place\_ID will be allocated. A Place\_ID links names from gazetteers from different countries to the same feature. In some places it might become relatively complex and this would require coordination between the relevant national naming authorities.

The specific element of a name should be written in the language in which it was originally given, although a name in non-Roman script must be changed to Roman

script, according to a systematic and approved Romanization process, so it can be understood and adopted by other countries. All diacritical marks should be included.

Generic terms may be translated to the language of the published product.

## 5. Principles and procedures for the standardization of new names for features in Antarctica

### 5.1 General principles

A place name primarily serves to distinguish a specific feature or place from all others; in so far as possible, the combination of the generic and specific elements should be unique in Antarctica.

The principal purpose of giving a place name is to supply an effective and appropriate means of identifying the feature beyond doubt; commemoration of expeditions or persons is a secondary consideration.

Names should be given with a view to provide the toponymy needed for the science, logistics and management of activities, avoiding the undesirable introduction of provisional, duplicated or unofficial names.

### 5.2 Classification of geographic features

A place name normally consists of a *generic element* defining the topographic feature type (Mount, Valley, etc.), and a *specific element* and provides the unique identification from other names that use the same generic element.

The generic element of a place name associates the name with the geographic feature, and is therefore fundamental in the Antarctic context. Generic elements aren't mandatory, but their inclusion is encouraged. For example, *The Buttons* is a name without a generic element. Map readers may have no idea what the name applies to, which in this case, is two small islands. The feature could have been named Buttons Islands, giving the map reader important practical information.

Names should include generic elements from the language of the country which gave them. Other naming authorities are encouraged to recognise these new names, including their generic element, in their original form. However, they may choose to translate the generic elements of these names for practical purposes on their products. This translation process may require modifications to the order of specific and generic elements comprising the name.

Example Place ID 79

- Monte Ader (Argentina)
- Mount Ader (United States of America)
- Mount Ader (United Kingdom)

Names given to the same type of feature (e.g. Marble Point, Rocky Point) should consistently use the same generic element. Generic elements should be selected from the SCAR Feature Type Catalogue available online at [data.aad.gov.au/aadc/ftc/](http://data.aad.gov.au/aadc/ftc/). This includes definitions to reflect the physiographic descriptions of the features.

To better understand these principles and procedures, see the example name with id=1724. In this example it is assumed that Bôzu Yama was the first name applied to the geographic feature.

Place ID 1724

- Bôzu Yama (Japan) Bôzu= bare skull? and Yama = mountain
- Bozu Peak (United States of America)
- Bôzu san (Russia) san also means mountain in Japan, but this form uses an alternative Japanese reading for the character 山
- Fleinskallen (Norway) Translates to bare skull with no generic element, but a similar meaning for the specific element

If these countries had adopted the same generic elements, these names could have been:

- Bôzu Yama (Japan)
- Bôzu Peak (United States of America)
- Bôzu Gora (Russia)
- *Bôzufjellet* (Norway)

This practice should make it easier for one country to use a name given by another country. It supports “one feature - one name” by allowing a country to adopt the specific element from the original name but, where necessary, to translate the generic element for use on products generated for its own use in its own language. Only the generic part of the name is translated. For example, assuming the Belgium named a feature first with the name Monts Reine Fabiola, this name would become Reine Fabiolafjella for Norwegian maps (Norway currently shows as Dronning Fabiolafjella) or Reine Fabiola Mountains for English maps (USA currently shows as Queen Fabiola Mountains). It is understood that there will be instances of existing names that will contradict these new principles.

### 5.3 Specific elements of place names

Before giving a new name to a previously unnamed feature, each country must check the SCAR CGA to determine whether the feature is already named. If the feature is confirmed to be unnamed, a new name can be considered. There is a presumption that where a feature has an existing name (or names), no additional name should be given. This aligns with the international principle of univocity (one name for one feature).

All new place names must reflect a connection to Antarctica. Whenever possible, descriptive names should be applied to Antarctic features. However, because Antarctica has been ‘discovered’ through the efforts of explorers, scientists, and other individuals, it may be appropriate to apply the names of such persons to Antarctic features or places.

Living persons should only be commemorated if they have made exceptionally significant contributions to Antarctic research or have given other notable service in Antarctica.

Examples of non-personal place names where they have a connection to Antarctica are:

- names that commemorate events (e.g. Proclamation Island, Place\_ID 11645);
- names descriptive of earth sciences, shape, colour, etc. (e.g. Hurricane Ridge, Place\_ID 16855), provided that they are not too general and the combination of the specific and generic parts of the name make it unique to Antarctica;
- names relating to science and scientific work (e.g. Publication Ice Shelf, Place\_ID 11690);

- names relating to culture (e.g. Te Puna Roimata Peak, Place\_ID 17142);
- names of ships, aircraft or vehicles operating in Antarctica. (e.g. Mount Belgica, Place\_ID 1118).

#### **5.4 Other acceptable place naming criteria**

- names which contribute to an existing theme or create a new theme in a particular area, e.g., astronomy, geology, field equipment, flora, fauna, explorers, scientists from a particular discipline, etc., are encouraged as appropriate and applicable to Antarctica and especially where they uphold collaborative science. A themed approach with an Antarctic connection can be used for groupings of connected geographic features. Future naming is encouraged to follow an existing theme in an area or to create a new theme. Note that there may be situations where existing names may not contribute to existing or new themes. All names which contribute to a theme, should reference the theme in the CGA 'Named For' field. A list of themes is maintained on the CGA web site;
- names should follow the standardized orthography, including spelling, from the language of the country of origin;
- names in common or long-term use should take precedence.

#### **5.5 Inappropriate place names**

Naming in the following categories is inappropriate:

- names of obscure or private origin, including names suggesting a relationship or friendship with the intended honoree;
- names of pets;
- names of organisations;
- names of commercial products (e.g. Mobiloil Inlet), or contributors of funds, equipment, and supplies;
- names combining both the first name and family name, or a first name only;
- pleonastic or tautological forms of names;
- names in poor taste, frivolous, or offensive;
- names containing an abbreviation or acronym (e.g. SCAR Hills, GANOVEX-Kette);
- names of people, events, activities, science, objects, ships, etc. without a connection to Antarctica, the science or to the feature;
- duplicate names. A group of related/connected/associated features may be given the same specific element, such as Harrison Bluff and Harrison Stream, because the generic element provides unique identity;
- naming more than one feature for a person;
- the use of the possessive form. However, where the possessive form is used, the apostrophe should be dropped;
- insignificant features, except in very special circumstances and at the discretion of the national naming authority;
- names that are overly long;
- names from a country's homeland unless there is a connection to Antarctica;

- names should not be applied to every feature or for reasons not relating to Antarctic connection;
- remote naming that does not contribute to scientific activity, mapping/charting or operational requirement.

### 5.6 Antarctic place-naming procedure

Proposals to name unnamed features in Antarctica should adhere to these principles.

Proposers should consult with a national naming authority. It is then the responsibility of this naming authority to consult with other naming authorities of countries operating in the region, according to the requirements of these principles and procedures.

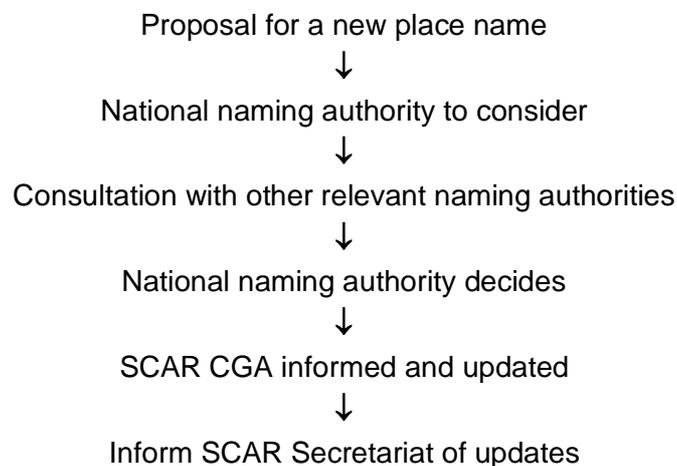
Proposals should include full information about the name, the reasons for its choice, the reason the feature needs a name and a clear description of the feature; the description should include a precise position in terms of geographic coordinates as well as a map, chart or image at a sufficiently large scale to show the feature. Geographic extent may also be appropriate. An example of an Antarctic Place Name Proposal Form is attached as Annex A. Alternatively, a proposal can include details about a proposed name and allow a national naming authority to identify an appropriate feature to assign the place name to.

When proposing a new name, the following should be considered:

- priority of discovery;
- early recording of a newly-emerged feature;
- publication of any previous name for the feature;
- significance of the feature;
- position: absolute (e.g. latitude and longitude) and relative to other features (e.g. 20km north west from Lake Name), including the source and accuracy of data;
- suitability of the generic term.

The specific element of a place name approved by a national naming authority should not be translated to another language. However, names in an alternative writing system from that used by the national naming authority will naturally need to be transcribed or transliterated by the authority considering the names.

The process for national naming authorities is summarised as:



### 5.7 Consultation

Consultation with all interested parties in preparing and processing new proposals offers significant benefit, particularly to ensure all relevant information is available for informed decision making. National naming authorities are encouraged to consult with each other on any new names in regions of mutual interest before decisions are made. Where no response to requests are received within an agreed timeframe, it may be assumed there are no concerns and the new proposals may proceed.

### 5.8 Approval and compliance

Following approval of a new name, the naming authority will add it to its gazetteer and submit it to SCAR for inclusion in the CGA.

A proposed place name should not be used in any product unless it has been approved by the respective national naming authority.

After this process, once a name is approved, the Antarctic community is strongly encouraged to use it.

Each country's national naming authority is encouraged to record the SCAR CGA place identifier, known as the Place\_ID, in their database, to allow for efficient cross-reference, search and retrieval.

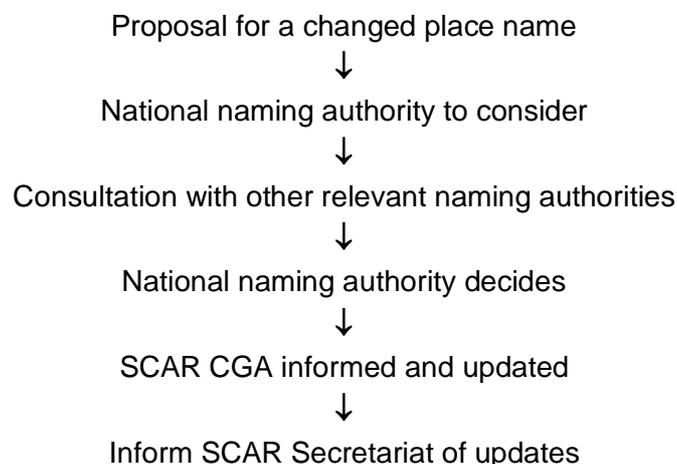
Each country is encouraged to share any name and geographic coordinate updates with other countries.

## 6. Procedure for changing existing place names, spellings, or geographic coordinates

Approved names should only be changed if there is a compelling reason. Examples include:

- to avoid confusion, ambiguity or inappropriateness;
- when the location of the feature is unclear and to improve its positional accuracy;
- to standardize orthography.

Name changes should be processed by the national naming authority that has given the original name, and in the same way as new name proposals. The process is summarised:



## 7. The SCAR Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica

SCAR has no jurisdiction to name features in Antarctica. It is the responsibility of each national naming authority. Compilation of the CGA began in 1992. It has a web application available at [placenames.aq](http://placenames.aq) allowing users to search the database and retrieve Antarctic names. It brings together each nation's approved Antarctic names into a composite gazetteer.

During the compilation of the CGA, it was found that many features had been named more than once, and many features had been recorded with inaccurate locations. The CGA allocates every name a unique name identifier known as the Name\_ID. In addition, each geographic feature is allocated a Place\_ID, which connects names from different gazetteers to the same feature.

Stinear Peninsula (AUS)	69° 24' 14.6" S	76° 18' 26.2" E	Name ID: 2115	Place ID: 14048
Sanjiao Bandao (China)	69° 24' 10.2" S	76° 18' 10.9" E	Name ID: 106663	Place ID: 14048

*Figure: An example entry in the CGA*

The CGA includes a feature type for each entry. Feature types are defined in the SCAR Feature Type Catalogue available online at [placenames.aq](http://placenames.aq).

New names or updates should be sent to the CGA content manager ([scar.cga@unisi.it](mailto:scar.cga@unisi.it)). Instructions can be found at [placenames.aq](http://placenames.aq).

CGA data can be downloaded at [placenames.aq](http://placenames.aq).

## Annex A: Antarctic Place Name Proposal Form

### 1. New or changed name proposed

If this is a changed name proposal, what was the original name and Place ID in the SCAR Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica, if known:

### 2. Descriptive data

#### 2.1 Coordinates

- of midpoint or summit:

Latitude:                    S, Longitude:                    E/W, Elevation:                    m

- of extremities (If extended or area feature):

Minimum Latitude:                    S, Longitude:                    E/W, Elevation:                    m

Maximum Latitude:                    S, Longitude:                    E/W, Elevation:                    m

- source of coordinates (satellite-based navigation system

(e.g. GPS, GLONASS etc.)/ground survey/satellite imagery/map etc.):

#### 2.2 Associated named and unnamed features

(located ... kilometres in ... direction from ..):

#### 2.3 Feature type (mount, valley, glacier, etc.):

#### 2.4 Feature characteristics (shape, dimensions, total relief, steepness, etc.):

#### 2.5 Photo reference (vertical, oblique, satellite image, no. and year of acquisition, etc.):

#### 2.6 Map reference (map title, scale, year of publication, etc.):

### 3. Supporting data

#### 3.1 Reason for choice or change of place name:

#### 3.2 Date discovered, recorded, mapped, etc.:

#### 3.3 By whom:

Expedition or field party:

#### 3.4 Particulars of specific element of the name (if an honoree, state how associated with the feature to be named):

#### 3.5 Comment on how the proposed place name meets relevant and appropriate naming criteria:

### 4. Submitted by

Name, address, institution, email address, phone, date

(Attach copies of items 2.5 and 2.6):

### 5. Submit form to:

(Address of national committee approving Antarctic place names)

### 6. Exchange information

Given under items 1 to 3 with other interested place names committees

**Annex B: List of Acronyms**

CGA	Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica <a href="https://placenames.aq">https://placenames.aq</a>
IHO	International Hydrographic Organization <a href="https://iho.int/">https://iho.int/</a>
SCAGI	Standing Committee on Antarctic Geographic Information <a href="https://www.scar.org/resources/scagi/overview/">https://www.scar.org/resources/scagi/overview/</a>
SCAR	Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research <a href="https://www.scar.org/">https://www.scar.org/</a>
UNGEGN	United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names <a href="https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/">https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/</a>