

Antecedent Generics: How Capes, Lakes, Mounts, and Points Are Named in the Antipodes

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Toponymic literature often mentions that the names of geographic features generally have the structure: specific + generic. While this is often the case, there are a set of geographic features that regularly do not follow this sequence. These are capes, lakes, mountains, and points. Their order of elements is often the reverse: generic + specific. By using toponyms from the *Gazetteer of Australia* and the *New Zealand Gazetteer*, this article shows there is indeed a distinct and suggestive pattern to the names that these features bear, explores this phenomenon and attempts to discover reasons for this trend.

KEYWORDS placename generics, placename specifics, Australia, New Zealand, cape, lake, mount, point.

In the toponymic literature it is often mentioned that placenames in their archetypal form consist of two elements: a specific followed by a generic. The generic element is often a geographic feature term, designating what type of geographic (or civic) feature it is (e.g. *Dora Creek*, *Murrumbidgee River*, *Middle Harbour*, *Towong Hill*, *Murray Valley*, *Torres Strait*, *Tasman Sea*, *Great Barrier Reef*, and *Kangaroo Island*). While this order of elements is usually specific + generic, there are a set of natural features that often do not follow this particular sequence. These, in English at least, include capes, lakes, mounts, and points.¹ Their order of elements is often the reverse (e.g. *Cape Catastrophe*, *Lake Eucumbene*, *Mount Kosciuszko*, and *Point Piper*).² Such features will be referred to as “Generic” X structures, and as having “antecedent generics;” feature names in which the generic follows the specific will be referred to as having the structure X “Generic.” The question arises as to whether there is something inherently distinctive about these features that permits this reversal of the so-called archetypal structure. Are they grammatically or semantically distinct in some way from other generics? Or is it just one of those quirks of language use whose origin is lost in the mists of time and is difficult or impossible to explain? This article attempts to shed some light on the issue.

Methodology

The starting point was the *Gazetteer of Australia* and the *New Zealand Gazetteer*. All the feature designations that would reveal relevant toponyms bearing the generics *cape*, *lake*, *mount*, and *point* were extracted from the Gazetteers and tallied.³ These feature designations include:

- *cape*, *prom* (“promontory”), and *PT* (“point”)
- *lake*, *intl* (“intermittent lake”), and *dam*⁴
- *MT* (“mountain”), *hill*, and *peak*.
- *PT* (‘Point), *cape*, and *prom*.

The above uncovered toponyms with the four generics under discussion.

The *Glossary of Generic Terms* (CGNA, 1996) provides the following feature definitions:⁵

Cape a piece of land projecting into a body of water.

Lake a body of fresh or salt water, natural or artificial, enclosed or nearly enclosed by land. It may or may not have in and outflowing water. (Including: *Loch* “a lake or arm of the sea” and *Lough* “an Irish term for lake or arm of the sea”).

Mount a natural elevation of the earth’s surface rising more or less abruptly from the surrounding level, and attaining an altitude which, relative to adjacent elevations, is impressive or notable. In general, the elevation of a mountain is more than 300 m from foot to summit, but this distinction is arbitrary.

Point the extreme end of a cape; or the outer end of any land protruding into the water, usually less prominent than a cape.

Toponyms which contained the above generics (including *Ben*), either occurring before or after the specific, were counted. Many features had the feature designations listed above, but did not have the generics of interest in their names (e.g. tarns, lagoons, waterholes, swamps, dams etc.); these were excluded.⁶

Toponyms were classified as either being “descriptive” or “non-descriptive.” “Descriptive” toponyms incorporates those whose specifics were: (a) descriptive (indicating an inherent characteristic of the feature), e.g. *Cape Manifold*, *Cape Capricorn*, and *Cape Three Points*; (b) associative (indicating something which is always or often associated with the feature or its physical context), e.g. *Mount Dingo*,⁷ *Telegraph Point*, and *Fishermans Point*; (c) occurrent (recording an event, incident, occasion, date, or action associated with the feature), e.g. *Cape Tribulation* and *Jubilee Point*; or (d) evaluative (reflecting the emotional reaction of the name-giver, or a strong connotation associated with the feature), e.g. *Mount Awkward* and *Lake Pleasant View*. “Non-descriptive” toponyms incorporates those whose specifics were: (a) eponymous (commemorating or honoring a person or other named entity by using a proper name, title, or eponym substitute as a toponym), e.g. *Lake Eyre* and *Cape Naturaliste*; or (b) a name shift (use of a toponym, in whole or part, from another location or feature), e.g. *Cape Frederick Hendrick* from surrounding *Frederick Hendrick Bay* and *Mount Ararat* (see Tent and Blair, 2011: 83–86).

Features that have common nouns as their specifics were usually deemed to be “descriptive,” while those with proper nouns or proper names as specifics were generally judged to be “non-descriptive.”⁸ Of course there are toponyms that have common nouns as

their specifics, but are in fact proper nouns/names (e.g. *Archer Point*, *Mount White*, *Brown Lake* etc.). On occasions it was difficult to decide whether these were descriptive or non-descriptive. When in doubt, I erred on the side of non-descriptive.

Another issue concerned toponyms that had either Indigenous Australian or Māori specifics. Very many of these are descriptive in the original language; however, their meanings are not generally recognized by most monolingual English speakers. Such toponyms were therefore deemed non-descriptive, except when the indigenous term had become fully nativized into Australian or New Zealand English (e.g. *Wombat Point*, *Moa Point*, *Mount Kakapo* etc. —⁹ in which case they were regarded as descriptive).

Results

Cape

There are 394 headlands in Australia that have *cape* as their generic, 93 % of which have the structure *Cape X*, leaving 7 % with the structure *X Cape*, all of which have a descriptive specific (e.g. *Table Cape*, *Rocky Cape*, *Fluted Cape*, *Danger Cape*, *False Cape* etc.). Thirteen of the *X Cape* toponyms have a specific giving a compass bearing (e.g. *North West Cape*, *South Cape*, *West Cape* etc.). This is quite a common trend. As Table 1 shows, the vast majority of *Cape X* toponyms have a non-descriptive specific (e.g. *Cape Baudin*, *Cape St George*, *Cape York* etc.). The small number of remaining capes have a specific that is descriptive (e.g. *Cape Adieu*, *Cape Bowling Green*, *Cape Catastrophe*, *Cape Keerweer*, *Cape Upstart* etc.).

Although the *New Zealand Gazetteer* has far fewer toponyms with *cape* (only 59), the distribution of the elements is similar to that of Australia. Once again, compass bearings are common for specifics in descriptive *X Cape* forms, the one exception being *Table Cape*. Details of the distributions of toponyms with the generic *cape* in Australia (AUST) and New Zealand (NZ) are summarized in Table 1. The majority of *Cape X* forms are non-descriptive, while the small number of *X Cape* names are all descriptive.

Lake (loch/lough)

There are 3,206 water bodies that bear the generic *lake* in Australia. Included in this number are a small number of water bodies designated as *lake* that bear the Scots and Irish Gaelic generics *loch* and *lough*, which are equivalent to *lake*, and were found to behave exactly like the generic *lake*. New Zealand has 829 lakes. As Table 2 indicates, the distribution of descriptive versus non-descriptive *lake* forms is almost identical in both countries. Non-descriptive lake toponyms outnumber descriptive ones for both toponym forms; however, descriptive names increase between seven and ten times with the *X Lake* structure.

Mount

This generic is somewhat different to the others, in that the lexical form of the generic often changes with the reversal of the order of the toponym elements. For example, one encounters many *Mount X* toponyms (e.g. *Mount David* and *Mount Blair*), but not many

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION SUMMARY OF CAPE GENERIC

Country	Toponym type			
	Cape X		X Cape	
	Descriptive	Non-descriptive	Descriptive	Non-descriptive
AUST	24 (7%)	342 (93%)	28	—
NZ	10 (22%)	35 (78%)	14	—
	Total 34 (8%)	Total 377 (92%)	Total 42	—
	Cape X total 411 (91%)		X Cape total 42 (9%)	
	Grand total 453			

Note: The 7% and 93% indicated in the row for AUST refer to the descriptive versus non-descriptive 366 *Cape X* toponyms, not to the proportion of the total 394 headlands.

X Mounts (e.g. *Tenchs Prospect Mount* and *Bamboo Mount*). Instead, *X Mountain* is far more common, especially in Australia with 1,486 examples: 831 (56%) descriptive and 655 (44%) non-descriptive. New Zealand has 42: 37 (88%) descriptive and five (12%) non-descriptive. There are only four *Mountain X* forms in Australia, all descriptive: *Mountain Black*, *Mountain Creek Yard*, *Mountain Lickhole* and *Mountain Red*.¹⁰ New Zealand has none of these forms.

The generic form *mountain* did not form part of the dataset in this study. Although *mountain* and *mount* are cognates, they entered English as distinct lexemes (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016):¹¹

Moreover, it is clear from the data that the two terms are used quite differently.

Table 3 shows that Australia has 6,599 and New Zealand 1,626 prominent elevations with the generic *mount*. The distributions for *Mount X* type features are quite similar in both countries; however, New Zealand virtually has no *X Mount* toponyms. *Mount X* forms are clearly dominated by non-descriptive specifics.

Point

Australia has 4,605 headlands that bear the generic *point*, while New Zealand has 1,780. Whereas with the previous three generics the “Generic” *X* form was more abundant, the *Point X* form overall is 14 times less numerous than the *X Point* form. Table 4 shows that the distributions of descriptive versus non-descriptive specifics for the *Point X* form are again similar (despite the small number), while those for the *X Point* form vary considerably between the two countries. In Australia the distribution of descriptive versus non-descriptive *X Point* forms is almost equal, while in New Zealand the distribution is skewed towards non-descriptive specifics, which (excepting capes) tends to follow the general pattern of the other generics.

Discussion

Table 5 summarizes the results for the four toponym types that permit antecedent generics in Australia and New Zealand. It shows that, for toponyms with antecedent generics, the generic is most often non-descriptive. That is, the specifics are largely eponymous or name shifts. Both countries follow this toponymic tenet, almost identically. With the

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION SUMMARY OF LAKE GENERIC

Country	Toponym type			
	Lake X		X Lake	
	Descriptive	Non-descriptive	Descriptive	Non-descriptive
AUST	73 (4 %)	1,658 (96 %)	609 (41 %)	866 (59 %)
NZ	41 (6 %)	608 (94 %)	77 (43 %)	103 (57 %)
	Total 114 (5 %)	Total 2,266 (95 %)	Total 686 (41 %)	Total 969 (59 %)
	Lake X total 2,380 (59 %)		X Lake total 1,655 (41 %)	
	Grand total 4,035			

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION SUMMARY OF MOUNT GENERIC

Country	Toponym type			
	Mount X		X Mount	
	Descriptive	Non-descriptive	Descriptive	Non-descriptive
AUST	854 (13 %)	5,592 (87 %)	64 (42 %)	89 (58 %)
NZ	177 (11 %)	1,442 (89 %)	7	—
	Total 1,031 (13 %)	Total 7,034 (87 %)	Total 71 (44 %)	Total 89 (56 %)
	Mount X total 8,065 (98 %)		X Mount total 160 (2 %)	
	Grand total 8,225			

TABLE 5
DISTRIBUTION SUMMARY OF "GENERIC" X AND X "GENERIC"

Country	Toponym type			
	"Generic" X		X "Generic"	
	Descriptive	Non-descriptive	Descriptive	Non-descriptive
AUST	974 (11 %)	7,966 (89 %)	2,671 (46 %)	3,193 (54 %)
NZ	228 (10 %)	2,113 (90 %)	577 (30 %)	1,376 (70 %)
	Total 1,202 (11 %)	Total 10,079 (89 %)	Total 3,228 (41 %)	Total 4,569 (59 %)
	"Generic" X total 11,281 (59 %)		X "Generic" total 7,797 (41 %)	
	Grand total 19,078			

exception of *X Lake* toponyms, *X "Generic"* toponyms show considerable variation in this regard. Nevertheless, the number of descriptive specifics amounts to considerably more in this form. Even though we see this principle generally adhered to when it comes to name bestowal in Australia and New Zealand, there exist no policies for the naming of geographic features by CGNA, at least not in terms of whether the generic should precede the specific or vice versa¹² One reason for this is perhaps because it would be superfluous, given most features discussed were named long ago. Apart from the occasional new artificial lake, generally there would not be many, if any, new such features likely to be named.

Although many, if not most, of the toponyms in the two datasets that contain indigeneous specifics are actually descriptive (as the examples given illustrate), they have, as mentioned above, been counted as non-descriptive. The indigenous toponyms or descriptors were adopted by the colonizers in labeling the new landscape they encountered, usually

TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTION SUMMARY OF POINT GENERIC

Country	Toponym type			
	Point X		X Point	
	Descriptive	Non-descriptive	Descriptive	Non-descriptive
AUST	23 (6 %)	374 (94 %)	1,970 (51 %)	2,238 (49 %)
NZ	—	28	479 (27 %)	1,273 (73 %)
	Total 23 (5 %)	Total 402 (95 %)	Total 2,449 (41 %)	Total 3,511 (59 %)
	Point X total 425 (7 %)		X Point total 5,960 (93 %)	
	Grand total 6,385			

not being cognizant of the literal meanings of these names or terms. The indigenous specifics thus became part of the introduced system of placenames and were used as non-descriptive specifics.

The question now must be posed: Is there any explanation for the phenomenon of antecedent generics and the associated distribution of descriptive versus non-descriptive specifics? The toponymic and linguistic literature rarely discusses this issue and, when it does, it is not very helpful and usually quite cursory. Algeo (1973); Anderson (2003: 358–359, 2007: 185–186); Brown (1964: 182–183); Campbell (1991: 334); Long (1969: 122); McDavid (1958: 70); McMillan (1949: 247 fn.); Quirk et al. (1985: 293 n.); and Zinkin (1969) all make reference to the phenomenon, but add little, if anything, to an understanding of it. Most authors correctly observe that X “*Generic*” toponyms outnumber “*Generic*” X toponyms, and those discussing toponyms in North America sometimes suggest that the latter form is a result of former French or Spanish sovereignty. Algeo (1973: 25–26) draws the interesting analogy between “*Generic*” X toponyms and name combinations such as “*pianist Liberace*” and “*comedian Jack Benny*” which “in turn blend into combinations of titles and names: *Senator Smith*, *Mayor Daley* [...]” (in essence seeing these names as close appositional structures).¹³ however, he does not elaborate further.

McMillan (1949: 247 fn.) seems to be the only author to have noted under what conditions a specific is antecedent: “It is frequently true that when a lake is named descriptively or is named after a near-by city the specific precedes, and specifics which are old genitive case surnames always precede.” The data above show that the first and third part of his claim is correct, at least for Australian and New Zealand terms. He is incorrect, however, concerning the naming of a lake after a nearby city and, overwhelmingly, in these cases the form is “*Generic*” X. Although he specifically refers to the naming of lakes, the first and third part of his claim also may be taken to apply to the other generics under discussion.

A French origin?

A French origin of the “*Generic*” X form has been hinted at by some of the authors mentioned. Indeed, the naming of bays, capes, forests, lakes, ponds, mountains, points, and ports in France very often follows the pattern *generic* + *specific* (e.g. *Baie Caroline*, *Cap Vauquelin*, *Bois-Colombes*, *Lac Daumesnil*, *Mont St Bernard*, *Pointe Liancourt*, *Port Saint-Marine* etc.). This pattern adheres to the French syntactic convention of placing the adjective after the noun, e.g. (*le*) *chat noir*, literally “(the) cat black.” If we consider

the generic as the noun and the specific functioning as an adjective identifying the noun, then this type of naming pattern makes sense. River names in French do not follow this pattern, however, their names tending to simply consist of the *definite article* + *specific* (as is the general convention in much of the rest of Western Europe) (e.g. *La Loire, La Seine, die Mosel, de Maas* etc.).

The editors of the two Oxford placenames dictionaries, Ekwall (1951) and Mills (2003), declare the major influence French had on English placenames was, first, the bestowal of names on castles, manors, estates, and monasteries, and second, in the spelling of some established English names. Apart from that, the French influence was minor “in spite of the far reaching effects of the Norman Conquest on English social and political life and on the English language in general” (Mills, 2003: xvii). One of these effects may have been the francophone style of naming capes, lakes, mounts, and points. However, much more detailed research needs to be conducted to confirm or deny this hypothesis. In the meantime, a cursory examination of the etymologies of the generics under discussion will be a small start. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2016) shows that they are all derived from, or their use was reinforced by, Anglo-Norman < Old French, and have first attested uses between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries: *cape*, c. 1405; *lake*, c. 1275; *mount* (< Latin, subsequently reinforced by Anglo-Norman), c. 1200–1275; and *point*, c. 1474. I venture to hypothesize that the “*Generic*” X pattern in some toponyms is probably not the result of any endo-linguistic force or any specific class of generic, but rather, purely a matter of naming fashion and style. Having said that, however, the question now arises as to why the English generics, such as: *isle* (< French, c. 1290), *bay* (< French *baie*, c. 1385), *valley* (< French *valee*, reinforced by Anglo-Norman, c. 1297), and *gulf* (< French *golfe*, c. 1400), do not permit the “*Generic*” X form (apart from when they are used in an *of*-prepositional phrase construction, e.g. *Bay of Islands, Valley of the Giants* and *Gulf of Carpentaria*). So, why do these generics not behave in the same way?

Linguistics is the science of discovering and describing patterns in human language. Language is, after all, purely patterned behavior, and it is precisely the existence of these patterns (or inherent rules), at all linguistic levels, that facilitates the learning of language as well as the generation and comprehension of utterances and texts. Placenames are simply another form of language behavior, and hence my overriding aim in studying placenames is to find patterns in their formation and their labeling of the landscape. But, as is often the case, humans do not always behave in an orderly or predictable fashion, and this also applies to linguistic behavior. Occasionally, there simply is not a pattern, or we cannot discern one. However, there is quite a strong pattern revealed in Australian and New Zealand toponyms with antecedent generics for capes, lakes, mounts, and points. This pattern was outlined above. It is likely that similar patterns exist in other English-speaking countries. The question of why certain toponyms allow antecedent generics while others do not remains to be answered. Is it that grammatical and/or semantic constraints are operating? Are these patterns vestiges of the etymologies of their generics? Or, are they just a result of linguistic fashion? Answers to such questions ultimately will lead to revealing facets of cultural history, and of human nature in naming the world — a very human need and behavior. The focus here has been on antecedent generics in Australia and New Zealand partly because these are relatively young countries, as far as European and English name bestowal is concerned. In investigating these two countries it can be seen that recent Anglo-centric naming practices reveal a mindset that could unlock the

enigma of antecedent generics. It is now left up to other researchers to investigate this phenomenon in places such as Britain, Canada, the USA, and South Africa.

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Notes

¹ There are other geographic features that also adhere to this naming principle, e.g. forts, ports, and gulfs etc.; however, too few of these exist in Australia and New Zealand, so it was deemed their small numbers would not be sufficient from which to draw any viable conclusions.

² Except where indicated, all toponyms exemplified are from the *Gazetteer of Australia* or the *New Zealand Gazetteer*, and hence the spelling of some generics may not adhere to US spelling conventions (see: Geoscience Australia, n.d.; Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM), n.d.a; Land Information New Zealand, n.d.).

³ These gazetteers also include toponyms in the Antarctic territories of Australia and New Zealand, as well as their off-shore islands and territories.

⁴ The Scots and Irish Gaelic generics “loch” and “lough” were also included in the “lake” dataset because they are used in the same way as “lake.” The same applies to the Scots Gaelic “Ben,” although interestingly, the *Glossary of Generic Terms* (Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia (CGNA), 1996) does not recognize this as a feature designation.

⁵ New Zealand is a member of the CGNA, and hence its feature definitions are on a par with those of Australia, and its naming policies are very similar. The CGNA is a standing committee of the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM). The former’s role is to coordinate place-naming activities across Australia and New Zealand, and to communicate the consistent use of placenames to ensure they meet the requirements of the whole community, including government bodies and emergency services, and indigenous people. The current CGNA is to be renamed the Permanent Committee on Place Names (PCPN).

⁶ Toponyms that commenced with the definite article (e.g. *The Lake*, *The Blue Lake*, *The Mount*, *The Point* etc.) were also excluded, as were ones that contained an *of*-prepositional phrase (e.g. *Mount of Olives*, *Point of Chillon*, *Chain of Lakes* etc.). The toponyms form a special class for which there is little consensus

in any of the toponymic or grammatical literature on how to classify them. The *of*-prepositional phrase toponyms, I feel, either belong to a sub-category of the antecedent generic toponym type, and/or behave more like a noun phrase consisting of a common noun as its headword + a qualifying *of*-prepositional phrase. It is only by means of this construction that such generics can be antecedents to their specifics. Also excluded were toponyms that had a plural generic (e.g. *Zig Zag Lakes*, *Snowy Mountains*, and *White Pup Points*). These either did not exist for the generic *cape*, or were very few in number (e.g. only one for *points*). In addition, a plural generic either never or very rarely occurred as the first element of a toponym — *Lakes Wooroonooke* being the only example. It occurred only once with *mountains*, but had an *of*-prepositional phrase as a specific (*Mountains of Jupiter*) and referred to a mountain range.

⁷ The “dingo” (*Canis lupus dingo*) is Australia’s wild endemic dog.

⁸ The distinction between proper noun and proper name is still quite contentious. See for example the works by: Algeo (1973); Anderson (2007); Coates (2006, 2009); Frege (1960 [1892]); Gardiner (1954); Huddleston (1984); Kaplan (1979); Katz (2001); Kripke (1980); Mill (1843); Pulgram (1954); Russell (1905); Searle (1958); van Langendonck (2007); and Wittgenstein (1953); to name but a few. For simplicity’s sake, Huddleston’s (1984: 230) definition of proper noun and proper name will be employed: a “proper name is a full [noun phrase], not just a part of one — proper names are most often used to refer to the person, place, institution, etc. that bears the name,” and further, proper names “need not have proper nouns as heads,” e.g. *Mount Kosciuszko* and *Lake George*, and they are “institutionalised [...] by some kind of registration.” Moreover, “[p]roper names are generally not listed in ordinary dictionaries because they do not have any meaning definable for the language as such.”

⁹ The ‘wombat’ (family *Vombatidae*) is an Australian marsupial, the ‘moa’ (order *Dinornithiformes*)

is an extinct species of very large flightless bird, and the ‘kakapo’ (*Strigops habroptilus*) a large, flightless, nocturnal, ground-dwelling parrot, both endemic to New Zealand.

- ¹⁰ *Mountain Creek Yard* is designated a *mountain*, not as its name would suggest a *yard* (i.e. an enclosure forming a pen for livestock etc.; a stockyard), with the specific *Mountain Creek*. Its specific is *Creek Yard*.
- ¹¹ Oxford English Dictionary: *Mountain* < Anglo-Norman *mountain*, *montaine*, *mountaine*, *mountaine*, *mountaigne*, etc., and Old French *montaigne*, *montangne*, etc. *Mountain* < Latin *mont-*, *mōns* MOUNT

+ *-ānus* -ANE suffix. *Mount* (in early use) < classical Latin *mont-*, *mōns* mountain, hill, towering heap or mass; subsequently reinforced by Anglo-Norman *mnt*, *mund*, *mont*, *mount* and Old French, Middle French, French *mont* mountain, hill (late 10th cent.) < classical Latin *mont-*, *mōns*.

- ¹² See *Guidelines for the Consistent Use of Place Names*, available at: <http://www.icsm.gov.au/cgna/consistent_place_names_guidelines.pdf>.
- ¹³ This is indeed how Zinkin (1969: 187) views ‘Generic’ X type toponyms.

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Notes on contributor

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