

## FEATURES

# How placenames evoke memories of the past

LIZ PRICE recently asked for clarification on the use of the apostrophe in the case of Hawke's Bay. The name has always been confusing because the geographic bay itself was named "Hawke Bay" (named by Cook to honour Sir Edward Hawke, First Lord of the Admiralty) while the region is known as "Hawke's Bay" and takes a possessive apostrophe.

Toponymy is the name given to the study of placenames and, broadly speaking, a placename is a toponym. A more specific lexical and linguistic use of the term toponym is an object, an event or, in early history, a person, named after a place. There is certainly no shortage of toponymic terms in New Zealand English.

One of the earliest well-known examples is Corriedale, the sheep bred at North Otago's Corriedale



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## WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

Station in the 1860s. Tukidale, on the other hand, is a blend of the breeding place Tukituki, a Hawke's Bay locality, and a Drysdale sheep.

These two terms are without doubt considered more pleasant to the eye, the ear, and the imagination than non-toponymic names given to recent sheep breeds such as Carpetmaster and Cormo.

Toponyms evoke the image of a place and a past. Hokonui is a placename that has been given to illegally stilled alcohol (whisky, in particular) and to a feral breed of merino that roam the Hokonui hills of Southland.

Both have a socio-historical significance. Examples of toponymic flora and fauna include the endangered Castlepoint daisy, Mangere sub (a subterranean clover), Onehunga weed, Strathmore weed, Tararua dishmop (Raoulia tenuicaulis, a creeping scabweed) and Avondale spider.

Many animal diseases have been named after places in which they were first found or became prevalent. Hope disease, Morton Mains disease, Tauranga disease and Waiata doze (an ill-thrift disease in sheep) are among these.

The early washing of sheep or

wool is evident in the place-names Dipton, Woolwash, Washdyke, Washpen, and Washpool, while Tapanui is the small Otago town known for the occurrence of Tapanui flu. The far north's Hokianga is the name adopted for a thick, slab-like sandwich, whereas Tararua lends its name to Tararua biscuit, a tramp's lifesaving sustenance.

This year we have been treated to a new term — the "Ponsonby handshake". It is a term that was first used in rugby circles, and involves a fist in the face (*Herald*, March 11).

But the names that have historical mystique — names such as Bedstead Gully, Deadman's Creek, Starvation Creek, Siberia, Roaring Meg, and Gentle Annie, not to mention Mount Awful, Mount Difficulty, and Mount Misery — stir the imagination. Some localities, es-

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pecially those "down Central", are associated with gold, with sublime names such as Aurum and Ophir, whereas early West Coast mining towns showed a less aesthetic approach with such examples as Hatters' Terrace and Try-Again.

In recent years the tendency for

clipping or shortening names and adding alternative additional endings has flourished. Known as hypocorism, this has affected some placenames more than others. Hamilton has become the hypocoristics capital of New Zealand, if we have to have one. We have citations for Hammers, Hammytown, Hammertown, Hamiltown, (the city has been branded as Hamiltown: the city of the future) and recently "the Tron" has appeared: "A cabin attendant strolling with a pilot: 'Yeah, I'm off to Vegas, then the Tron.'" (*Sunday Star-Times*, March 2) (Rotorua has been Rotovegas for some years, but it is now, apparently, plain Vegas.)

A further citation shows that "the Tron" is not just a trendy Sunday usage: "Take our special train to the V8 Supercars in Hamilton. Hop on board, chill out, have

some brekkie and you'll be in the Tron by 9.50am." (*Herald*, April 9) In *The Dominion Post*, April 12, Duncan Graham said "Wellington in the 80s was blokeville. Now it's the Women's Republic."

Wellington, the Cardy Capital, has certainly been known as Clarkville, Wellywood, and Wellies, but some of us might have been surprised at the term blokeville.

The origins of placenames is a fascinating area of research and can challenge the assumptions we make about where we live, in the same way that the more recent adaptive names can.

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