BC Geographical Names Office

Heritage Branch, Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture, and Sport
Genevieve Weber, Manager of Programs and Services
Geographical Names Day: November 13, 2023
Introductions

British Columbia
Geographical Names Office (BCGNO)
Heritage Branch
Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport

Trent Thomas,
Provincial Toponymist

Avalon Suriano, Project Coordinator, Toponomy

Toponymy – the study of toponyms (place names)
Introduction

“A place name is a reminder of history, indelibly stamped on the land. To enquire about a name is to reawaken memories of the history that produced it, and to write about it is to retell some of that history.”

-Wilson Duff, RBCM Curator 1950-1965

BC Archives I-15350
Log Bridge, Naikoon Provincial Park
Queen Charlotte Islands
Provincial naming authority:

- Natural features (rivers, lakes, mountains, etc.) and unincorporated communities
- Administrative boundaries through legislation, and structures (roads, highways, dams, etc) by owner or municipality

The Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport (TACS) is responsible for naming geographical features in BC, under the Land Act. The Minister delegates this responsibility to the BC Geographical Names Office (BCGNO) within the Heritage Branch.

In accordance with the Geographical Naming Policy and Procedures

BCGNIS holds all official names – just over 41K

BC Archives I-21985
Waterfall in Cameron Park
Place Names and Society

- Fundamental for everyday life
- Used as reference for navigation
- Over 40,000 official names in British Columbia
- Majority of names have an origin story with varying degree of significance to the land and its people, usually depending on the naming process

BC Archives I-05015
The importance of place names

Everyday life and identity

Navigation and emergency response

Reflects heritage values and tells a story
Historically, many names were applied to features with minimal consultation or consideration for the interests, values, or history of British Columbians.

- Very little respect for Indigenous perspective or traditions
- Many features took their name from nearby, prominent features
- British Columbia has a long history of Indigenous and commemorative names
“Place names ...embody a sense of belonging to a place, coexistence with the natural world, and the longstanding relationship between a people and their place – they anchor the past to the present.”

- Bob Joseph, Gwawa’enuxw Nation, President & Founder of Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.

BC Archives J-04194
Alert Bay (Yalis)
Early Indigenous Naming

- Translation and/or origin often not recorded or inaccurate
- Arbitrary words from Indigenous dictionaries (created by early colonizers) applied to features as surveyors seemed fit – didn't have much significance to local Indigenous communities
- Anglicized Indigenous names - often were interpreted poorly and applied to a feature which the name was never intended for
Early Indigenous Naming

Tsinga Point, located on Lyell Island,
Haida Gwaii

Adopted: August 1, 1957

Origin: Named by the Hydrographic Service in 1957 for its tooth-like shape on the chart. Tsinga is an adaptation of the Haida word for tooth, taken from the vocabulary list in George Mercer Dawson's 1880 monograph "On the Haida Indians of the QCI."
Kelowna

Adopted: May 4, 1905

Origin: Augustus Gillard, one of the first European settlers in the area, who was described as “a husky, hairy Frenchman” that lived in a “primitive hut,” was nicknamed Kimach touche (kemxtús, nsyilxcen for brown bear) by the local Indigenous peoples - later the name was applied to the area. When the area was being incorporated as a city, it was decided that “Kimache Touche” sounded was too harsh, and they decided to change the name to “Kelowna” based on kiláwnaʔ, nsyilxcen for grizzly bear instead of brown bear.
Early Commemorative Names

- Names used to recognize/celebrate an individual, place, or thing
- Many features were named for people or things that were very important to a decision maker - people they admired (Mount Garibaldi), family members (Moresby Island), ships (Queen Charlotte Islands), places from their home country (Newcastle Island)
- After World War II, it was a very common practice to commemorate war casualties

BC Archives I-15889
Black Tusk, Whistler-Garibaldi
Now, commemorative names are only considered if:

- they have widespread community support
- they are for individuals who have significant contributions to B.C.
- acceptable to the public beyond a single or special interest group

- Much less common than in the past
Commemorative Names

- Alma Russell islands
  - NW side of Imperial Eagle Channel, Barkley Sound, Barclay Land District are for individuals who have significant contributions to B.C.
Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.
Indigenous Place Names

➢ Original names
➢ In original languages of the land
➢ Reflect deep history of the land
➢ Specific to the place/being/route
  ➢ Can hold detailed information
Indigenous Naming and Indigenous Languages

- BC is home to 34 distinct languages and 90+ dialects
Proposing Name Changes

➢ The BCGNO does not initiate name changes
➢ The BCGNO initiates an engagement period to request comments from Indigenous and local governments whose territories and boundaries a feature is within, and from organizations impacted by a proposed name change (e.g., search and rescue groups).
➢ Governments and organizations are requested to respond on behalf of their communities and members.
Rescinding derogatory names

- Directed to rescind names by the Geographical Names Board of Canada Secretariat
- Engagement process same as with proposed name changes
- Names are not being replaced but will no longer appear as official names
- A record of the history of the name is maintained in the BCGNIS

K’iyán Mountain, BCGNIS
BC Geographical Names Information System (BCGNIS)

- Official Names database
- Multi-component system
- Publicly accessible
- Over 3 million users per year
- Thanks to GeoBC
# K'iyán Mountain

**Feature Type:** Mount - Variation of Mountain: Mass of land prominently elevated above the surrounding terrain, bounded by steep slopes and rising to a summit and/or peaks. ["Mount" preceding the name usually indicates that the feature is named after a person.]

**Status:** Official

**Name Authority:** BC Geographical Names Office

**Pronounced:** KEY-yawn

**Relative Location:** W side of Atlin Lake, W of Mount Hitchcock and Black Mountain, NW of Atlin (community), Cassiar Land District

**Latitude-Longitude:** 59°56'26"N, 133°54'02"W at the approximate centre of this feature.

**Datum:** WGS84

**NTS Map:** 104N/13
Origin Notes and History:

"Mount Minto" adopted 31 March 1924 in the 18th Report of the Geographic Board of Canada, as labelled on Geological Survey sheet 742, Atlin Mining District, 1902. Re-approved 6 May 1947 on 104NW, and 4 October 1951 on 104N. Official name changed to K’iyán Mountain 22 March 2023 on 104N/13 as requested by Taku River Tlingit First Nation. K’iyán is the traditional and ancestral Tlingit name.

**Source:** BC place name cards & correspondence, and/or research by BC Chief Geographer & Geographical Names Office staff.

K’iyán Mountain is the Tlingit name for this mountain, which translates to “Hemlock grows around the bottom”, which describes an unusual natural feature of the mountain as hemlocks do not normally grow in this area. Hemlocks are a culturally significant resource, and were traditionally used to make clan houses of the Tlingit people, particularly the Yanyeidí (wolf) clan (advice from Taku River Tlingit First Nation, 2016).

**Source:** BC place name cards & correspondence, and/or research by BC Chief Geographer & Geographical Names Office staff.

For more information, please visit the Taku River Place Names website: http://trt.geolive.ca/map.html.

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Using Geo Names in Archives

- Confirmation of official place names
- Includes history of people and places
- Adds to our understanding of a place, including Indigenous history and knowledge
- Opportunities to include Indigenous languages and traditional knowledge to archival research
- Naming policy aligns with archival naming projects ongoing around the province and country
Useful Links

- BCGNO website - https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/celebrating-british-columbia/historic-places/geographical-names
- BCGNIS Web App - https://apps.gov.bc.ca/pub/bcgnws/web/
- First Peoples language map - https://maps.fpcc.ca/
- First Voices - https://www.firstvoices.com/home
- The Relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Place Names: https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/the-relationship-between-indigenous-peoples-and-place-names
- Interactive webmaps published by Nations
  - Taku River Tlingit map - https://trt.geolive.ca/
Thank you

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