THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PLACENAMES SURVEY

Principles and Practice

ANPS TECHNICAL PAPER
No. 4

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 1970 the Council of the Australian Academy of the Humanities resolved to set up a national committee to establish guidelines for research in Australian placenames and to help coordinate work in this field. The President of the Academy, eminent historian Sir Keith Hancock, believed that a placenames project on historical principles would be a national endeavour of scholarly worth, comparable to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and the *Australian National Dictionary*, both of which came into being as a result of his strong support and under the initial auspices of the Academy or its predecessor, the Australian Humanities Research Council.

Although preliminary work began as early as 1971, the project was rested in September 1974 as a result of difficulties in resolving issues to do with the varying State and Commonwealth responsibilities and with the competing demands of the universities concerned. After another abortive attempt to revive the project in 1991, further meetings were held in the years 1994 to 1996, which led to a successful funding application to the Australian Research Council via the Academy. Work began on the project at the University of New England, Armidale, in 1998 with ARC funding, and was continued at Macquarie University from 2002 to 2006, under the title of the *Australian National Placenames Survey*. It is now community-supported under the auspices of Placenames Australia (Inc).

The aim of the Survey (ANPS) is to prepare a national database of geographical names, formed on established principles within the disciplines of history, geography, linguistics, cultural studies, surveying and mapping. It will record all known Australian names[1], documenting their spelling and pronunciation, generic class, origin, meaning, history, and location. To put it briefly, the task of ANPS is to investigate the history, meaning, and motivation for use of each name ever current for a geographic feature or habitation feature in Australia, and to make public the results of these investigations. It is intended that the database will be made accessible for public enquiry via the Web to enable the production of placename dictionaries, both local and national.

The methodology of ANPS is based on a progression through the three key elements of each placename (or toponym): *identification, documentation, interpretation*.

2 IDENTIFICATION

To properly and unambiguously identify the reference of a placename, ANPS requires three factors to be established: the linguistic form, the feature type, and the location. The registers of the various States, Territories and other government authorities provide the primary source of this information, either directly or through their submissions to the *Composite Gazetteer of Australia*.[2]

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[1] The current aim of the Survey is to record toponyms within the 'Introduced' placenaming system; that is, the set of placenames which sit within the standard language of Australia, *Australian English*. The 'Indigenous' toponymic networks that were in pre-colonial use (and which in some cases are still extant) are not excluded from the Survey's scope but are beyond its current resources.

[2] https://placenames.fsdf.org.au/

Each toponym is identified by that unique set of parameters, as in the example following:

linguistic form	[Kingswood]
feature type	[suburb]
location (latitude and longitude)	[-33° 45' 54" / 150° 43' 44"]

TOPONYM		
feature	linguistic form	location

This information is entered as the central module of the database, the Register, and is sufficient to define the placename.

A toponym, therefore, is not regarded as 'a name for places'; it is 'a name for a place', or 'a place and its name'. The one linguistic form will generate more than one toponym if, for instance, the location differs (*Perth* the city in Scotland, *Perth* the city in Western Australia) or if the feature type is different (*Rose Bay* as a suburb on Sydney Harbour, *Rose Bay* as a bay in Sydney Harbour).

Other information, where available, is included within the Register entry: State identification number, Local Government Area name, parish, and other descriptive material.

2.1   The Linguistic Form

As with all dictionaries the written form, rather than the spoken, is taken as primary, for purely practical reasons. Most of the evidence on which toponymic research proceeds is documentary in nature; in other words, the historical record on which the process relies is in written form. Contemporary evidence can indeed be spoken or recorded, but generally speaking the fieldwork necessary for effective collection of pronunciation data is difficult and expensive.

Because the orthographic form is part of the 'definition' of a toponym, any variation in that form gives a different toponym. Although James Cook's references to *Botany Bay* and *Bottany Bay* in his journal belong to the same geographic feature, they are two separate toponyms in the ANPS database because of the orthographic variation. Differences in spacing (*Newcastle Bay* v *New Castle Bay*), punctuation (*Hervey's Bay* v *Herveys Bay*) and numeral style (*Cape 3 Points* v *Cape Three Points*) are all regarded as significant. Absence of capitalisation for a generic element, however (*Red point* for *Red Point*), is not.

Pronunciation variants are entered at the most appropriate written form, and do not generate new toponym entries. (It is assumed that spoken forms are almost always supported by an orthographic record of some kind—in the absence of such a written record, an archetypal form is supplied and noted as hypothetical.) The transcription for pronunciations is based on the International Phonetic Alphabet, but uses a respelling of the IPA that is restricted to the 26 English alphabetic characters. Sydney, for example, is represented as /'sid-nee/ and Canberra as /'kan-bruh, 'kan-buh-ruh/.[3]

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[3] The transcription matches that used by the *Macquarie Junior Dictionary*, which is based in turn on the phonological conventions and IPA characters of the *Macquarie Dictionary*.

2.2   The Feature Type

In a previous technical paper[4] we established a standardised set of designations for Australian geographic features. The catalogue of features outlined there, consisting of 525 feature terms (grouped into 114 feature sets), displayed the same level of generality and the same feature coverage as the set of existing codes used by the *Gazetteer of Australia*. A later paper[5] took account of the fact that the scope of the Australian National Placenames Survey is narrower than that of the naming authorities which contribute to the national Gazetteer. The original catalogue was therefore reduced to include only the geofeatures and habitation features investigated by the Survey.

Although the scope of ANPS is defined as including geofeatures and civic features, some types of features within that area are rarely subject to naming. For instance, within the sub-category of historical features, *aircraft wreck sites*, *ruins* and *cairns* are usually unnamed. Various such features are not therefore toponymically relevant, and they are omitted from the catalogue.

2.2.1   Feature Term

The currently-used catalogue of feature terms for the Survey recognises 225 terms used in Australia to indicate geographical or civic features. Some of those features (such as railway stations, post offices and rural homesteads) are included for their historical toponymic value. Many feature terms function as the generic element within a toponym (Red **Hill**, **Mount** White). Others, while not generally used as parts of a placename, are nevertheless recognised descriptors for a feature (**grassland**).

Some generic descriptors, on the other hand, are extremely specialised or regionally restricted. Because they are rarely used, the feature catalogue does not award them a main entry but instead treats them as synonyms of a feature term and lists them as cross-references.

In summary, the process of establishing this feature term catalogue is one of identifying terms which are used in Australia, either as the generic element in a toponym or as a recognised descriptor for features, and defining each term in an entry which also includes any synonymous terms. A typical entry from the feature term catalogue shows the feature term, the definition, and synonyms:

> **bend**   A curve in the course of a stream. *Also:* **elbow, river bend**. *Theme:*
> INLAND WATER *Feature set:* <BEND>

Each of the listed feature terms is allocated to a superordinate set referred to as a 'feature set'.

2.2.2   Feature Set

For the purposes of research and analysis, a level of generalisation above that of feature terms is useful. For this reason, the 225 feature terms in the ANPS catalogue are tagged with codes which represent 76 feature sets. The sets operate at a higher level of abstraction than the terms themselves and each is labelled with an alpha code of 2-5 characters. A

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[4] Blair, David (2008, 2014). *A standard geographic feature catalogue for toponymic research,* ANPS Technical Paper No. 1

[5] Blair, David & Jan Tent (2015). *Feature terms for Australian toponymy*, ANPS Technical Paper No. 3

typical entry from the list of feature sets shows the feature code, its definition and its included feature terms (and any synonyms of those terms, in parentheses):

Feature Code	Feature Set Definition	Theme
BEND	A section of a stream which incorporates a significant change in the stream's general direction *Included terms:* bend (elbow, river bend), meander	INLAND WATER

The 76 feature sets are distributed into six broad *themes* that permit further statistical analysis of toponymic feature terms, if required.
1. Marine features
2. Inland water features
3. Relief (hypsographic) features
4. Vegetation and Desert features
5. Constructed features
6. Civic features

These categories, with their justification and application, are described fully in the ANPS Technical Papers referenced above.

2.3 The Location

The coordinates of each feature are given as latitude and longitude, where available, and preferably expressed in minutes/seconds rather than in decimal format. Less precise substitutes are used where necessary.

Since the Survey records information on 'imaginary' places (such as the Black Stump) and on features known to have existed but of uncertain location, the *Location* parameter is permitted to be vague or even omitted in some entries.

3 DOCUMENTATION

The *identification* of a toponym is recorded in the Register module of the ANPS Database. Other information relating to the history of the placename and its use is not normally to be found in the sources which provide the technical data. The major research effort of the Survey, then, is directed at finding the historical and cultural information which will establish the 'story' of the placename. The *documentation* module of the Database records that evidence.

Various types of documentation are searched and recorded in the Database:
- Books
- Sections or Chapters of Edited Collections
- Journals
- Newspapers/Magazines
- Manuscripts [typescript and word-processed material of limited distribution, including diaries and correspondence; e-versions of such material]
- Websites
- Maps
- Artefacts [includes plaques, signs, monuments, craft objects]
- Oral [includes recordings made in the course of oral history projects and information gathered from interviews]

Multiple citations are collected for each toponym, where possible, to allow a proper assessment of their value and validity. As with any historical dictionary, good citations are required to provide the evidence which will enable an appropriate entry to be written. Most obviously, citations will show the existence of the toponym; but questions of identification, chronology and motivation also require citational evidence.

4   INTERPRETATION

From the recorded documentation for each toponym, the Survey attempts to write a 'biography' of that name, answering the WH- questions associated with its origin. There are various formulations of those questions, but the following five questions[6] (based on the feature itself rather than the name) are convenient:

> *What* is it
> *Where* is it
> *Who* named it
> *When* was it named
> *Why* was it given that name

The documentary evidence does not normally provide an answer to all, or even most, of those WH- questions. A given interpretation may, therefore, be partial. Furthermore, documents may indicate conflicting stories about the origin of a placename. Multiple interpretations may, therefore, be hypothesised.

Answers to the '*what*' and '*where*' questions are lodged in the Register. Information to provide answers to the remaining questions is recorded in the Documentation module.

If the date of naming is indicated by available evidence, that date is explicitly and separately marked in the Interpretation entry by fields which capture the year of naming as well as any additional necessary comments on the date.

The '*who*' question, where the evidence permits, is captured within the Interpretation entry by the field 'Named By'. The underlying PERSON table lists biographical references for each individual recorded by that field.

The '*why*' question poses particular problems for the construction of a toponym story. The motivation for naming in a particular case is not often clear from the available evidence, and the mechanism of the naming process tends to be omitted from the historical records. Nevertheless, such information is an important element in a placename's history, and the Survey uses a model of toponym typology to reflect it. The typology is based on the *modus operandi* of the naming, and takes into account the methods, strategies and motivation of the namer, as well as the original reference or referents of the name. (One possible motivation, it should be noted, is that a toponym is named in honour of a person; as with the '*who*' question, this information is entered in a 'Named After' field, again supported by the underlying PERSON table.)

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[6] Blair, David & Jan Tent (2021) 'A revised typology of place-naming.' *Names* 69 (4), 30-47.

The taxonomy lists nine major categories of motivation/mechanism:
1. Descriptive
2. Associative
3. Occurrent
4. Evaluative
5. Copied
6. Eponymous
7. Innovative

Each of these major categories has two or more subcategories. For example, category 6 is expanded as follows:

> **6** **Eponymous** – using the name of a person or other named entity by using a proper name, title, or eponym substitute as a toponym
>
> **6.1** **human** – using the name of a person or of a group of people.
> **6.1.1** **namer** – using the namer's own name as the toponym
> **6.1.2** **notable person** – using the name of an eminent person, patron, official, noble, politician etc., or the name of a group of such people
> **6.1.3** **colleague** – using the name of a member of an expedition or survey involved in the discovery or naming of the feature, or the name of the group so involved
> **6.1.4** **family member or friend** – using the name of a family member or friend of the namer
> **6.1.5** **associated person** – using the name of a person or a group connected to the feature as, for example, a founder, builder, owner or local inhabitant
> **6.2** **other animate entity** – using the proper name of a non-human animate entity
> **6.3** **non-animate entity** – using the proper name of a non-animate entity
> **6.3.1** **notable abstract entity** – using the name of a notable occasion, entity or concept, such as a battle, a political association or other abstract category
> **6.3.2** **named concrete entity** – using the name of an entity such as (a class of) a ship, train or plane
> **6.3.3** **expedition vessel** – using the name of a vessel involved in the 'discovery' or naming of the feature
> **6.4** **literary and mythical entities** – using the name of a figure or place from literature or mythology

Each Interpretation entry is tagged with the appropriate typology code.

A full description of this taxonomy, along with a a semantic justification for the present categories, appears in Blair & Tent (2020).[7] A comprehensive review of previously-attempted taxonomies appeared in a previous ANPS Technical Paper.[8]

An extract (Figure 1, below) from the relationships table of the ANPS Database gives an indication of the three modules (Register, Documentation, Interpretation) and their internal structure.

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[7] Blair, David & Jan Tent (2020). *Toponym types: a revised typology of placenaming*. ANPS Technical Paper No. 5.
[8] Tent, Jan & David Blair (2009) *Motivations for naming: a toponymic typology*. ANPS Technical Paper No 2.
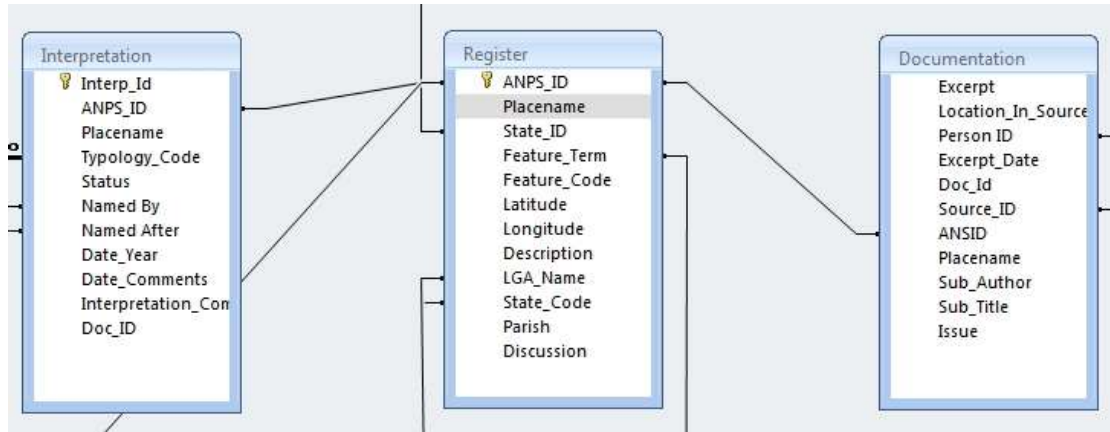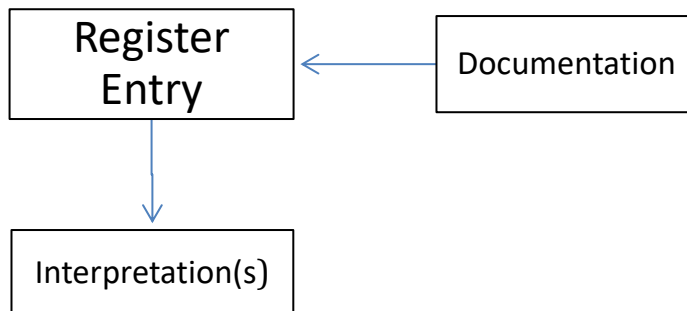
Figure 1: ANPS Database relationships table (detail)

5 THE PROCESS

The three elements identified above—*identification*, *documentation*, and *interpretation*—provide both the theoretical core of the Survey and the sequential process through which toponym 'stories' are researched and written.

5.1 The Sequence of Steps

The Register entry (that is, the *identification* of the toponym) is the theoretical starting-point for the process. Most entries (certainly all formally assigned placenames) are imported into the Register from sources such as the approved lists supplied by Australian government authorities. In general, these sources provide such technical information as geographical coordinates, feature type and approved spelling for each toponym.

There is some ambiguity, however, in the diagrammatic representation at this point, because in some cases it is the *documentation* itself which reveals the existence of a placename: not all toponyms are imported into the Register from other database sources. In these cases, when a toponym not previously entered into the Register is found, there is a sense in which the documentation is generating the process, since it is the stimulus for the creation of a new Register entry. In practice, however, the Register entry is still primary, since it has to be constructed and completed before any documentation relating to that toponym can be entered.

5.2   Competing Interpretations

Because it is common for the available documentation to support more than one possible interpretation, the Database provides for a probability rank to be recorded for each interpretation. The probability status may be tagged as

- Confirmed
- High
- Probable
- Possible
- Unlikely

Decisions on probability status depend on several factors. These include the number of supporting documents, the date of those documents, and the toponymist's judgment of the reliability of the source.

5.3   Establishing the Placename Story

In some instances the evidence for a placename's origin is not complicated: there is only one account of the history. The toponymist's task is simply to outline as clearly and concisely as possible the story, answering the WH- questions if the documentation provides the answers.

In the case of the many toponyms whose available documentation points to more than one possible story of origin, the task is more complex. It first requires an assessment of the competing claims; but following that, editorial decisions come into play. Depending on the quality of the evidence, the toponymist may choose one as 'the story'; or, on the other hand, a decision may be made to outline the competing interpretations, with or without a summarising judgement.

6   THE PRESENTATION

The presentation of the toponymist's report on the placename origin is, firstly, entered in the Discussion field within the Register table. This provides ANPS with assurance that all the relevant material is captured by the Database. Secondly, when the relevant *Placenames Report* is published, the 'story' is followed in the structure of the entry by a selection of the key documentary evidence.

The two sample entries on the following pages illustrate the sequence. The toponyms concerned appear in *Lord Howe Island* (ANPS Placenames Report 3); each is a simple entry with a single interpretation in the data. Both placenames have variant forms; as well as being noted within the main entry, each variant has its own separate entry that acts as a cross-reference to the main.

In both examples, the motivation code *7.1.2* indicates that the toponym honours a person who is not a member of the expedition or exploratory group that bestowed the name.

David Blair
May 2022
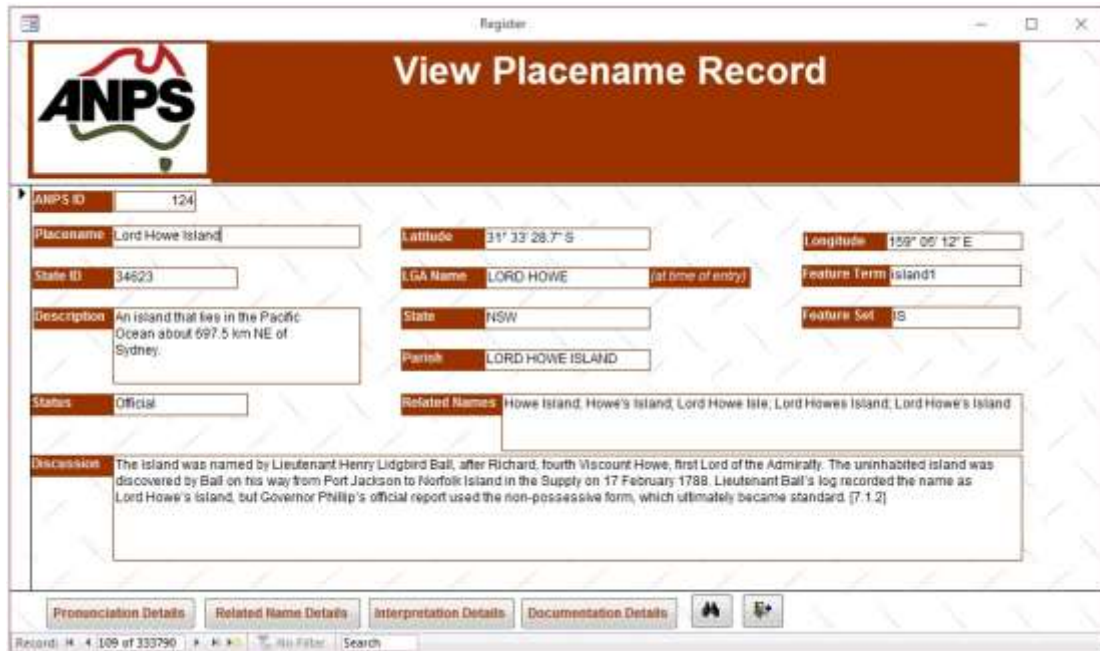
Lord Howe Island OFFICIAL (ANPS 124, NSW 34623); 31° 33' 28.7" S, 159° 05' 12" E

ISLAND[1] An island that lies in the Pacific Ocean about 697.5 km NE of Sydney.

> RELATED NAMES: **Howe Island; Howe's Island; Lord Howe Isle; Lord Howes Island; Lord Howe's Island**

The island was named by Lieutenant Henry Lidgbird Ball, after Richard, fourth Viscount Howe, first Lord of the Admiralty. The uninhabited island was discovered by Ball on his way from Port Jackson to Norfolk Island in the Supply on 17 February 1788. Lieutenant Ball's log recorded the name as *Lord Howe's Island*, but Governor Phillip's official report used the non-possessive form, which ultimately became standard. [7.1.2]

> 1789: Phillip, *The voyage of Governor Phillip,* pp. 94, 180
>> 19 March 1788…
>> A small island, but entirely uninhabited, was discovered by Lieutenant Ball in his passage to Norfolk Island. In his return he examined it, and found that the shore abounded with turtle, but there was no good anchorage. He named it Lord Howe Island…
>> *Nautical directions, and other detached remarks, by Lieutenant Ball…* Lord Howe Island was discovered by Lieutenant Henry Lidgbird Ball, Commander of his Majesty's tender Supply, on the 17th February, 1788, and was so named by him, in honour of the Right Honourable Lord Howe.
>
> 1789: Collins, *Account,* pp. 18, 539
>> 1788 April. Lieutenant Ball … fell in with an uninhabited island in lat. 31° 56' S and in long. 159° 4' East, which he named Lord Howe Island.
>> Footnote 10: Lord Howe Island was named after Richard, fourth Viscount Howe (1726 – 99) who was first Lord of the Admiralty in 1787.
>
> 1882: Wilson, *Report,* p. 1
>> The "Supply" left Sydney on 14th February, 1778, and on the 17th fell in with a beautiful island, which Lieutenant Ball called Lord Howe Island. The "Supply" visited Howe Island again on her return…
>
> 1940: Rabone, *Lord Howe Island,* p. 11
>> … on the 14th of February we saild from Port Jackson… On the morning of the 17th we Discovered an Island at a Great Distance & the Next Day passd within four Miles of it. As we were undoubtedly the first who had Ever seen it Lieutenant Ball Namd it Lord Howe Island. [David Blackburn, master of *Supply*, July 12, 1788; quoted from RAHSJ, 20, pp. 26-8]

Mount Eliza OFFICIAL (ANPS 139, NSW 17393); 31° 30' 48.2" S, 159° 02' 24.9" E
HILL A hill about 1000 m north of North Head and about 1000 m west of Kims Lookout.
    RELATED NAME: **Finger Peak**
    The feature, formerly known as *Finger Peak*, was renamed by Captain Middleton (a settler on Lord Howe Island, 1841-1855) after his wife Eliza. [7.1.2]
        1889: Australian Museum, *Lord Howe Island*, p. 102
            The North Ridge is broken up into a series of semi-detached peaks, presenting a bold face to seaward, rising from soundings of ten and eleven fathoms in precipitous vertical cliffs, of from 600 to 700 feet, without the intervention of any beach. The north-east end of this ridge terminates in the North Peak, or "Pools-Lookout," a well rounded hill of 714 feet. Following the cliffs along to the westward, over successive minor rises, a peculiar semi-isolated hill is approached, standing in majestic solitude, and known as Mount Eliza.
        1893: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September, p. 5
            …on the northern face seven summits rise sheer from the sea, to heights varying from 800ft to 1000ft. The northern promontory is Poole's Lookout, named after Captain Poole, the original purchaser of land from the first settlers on the island, and the north-western extremity is called by the islanders Mount Eliza.
        1940: Rabone, *Lord Howe Island*, p. 29
            Tradition dates to the 'forties the arrival of Captain Middleton. He settled at the foot of Mount Eliza, which he named after his wife. They were the first settlers west of Dawson Ridge, and in 1855, Captain Middleton sold out to Captain Stevens…
        2006: Nichols, *Lord Howe Island rising*, p. 34
            Captain Middleton and his wife, Eliza, arrived as independent settlers in 1841, making their home at Callam Bay. Their hut was situated on an area now known as The Cut Grass Patch where they farmed, raised pigs and were noted for digging the Island's first well. They left the Island in 1855. It is unknown if Finger Peak was named by Lieutenant Ball or by whalers, but Captain Middleton renamed it Mount Eliza after his wife. Callam Bay is known today as North Bay.