

Placenames Australia

Newsletter of the Australian National Placenames Survey

an initiative of the Australian Academy of Humanities



Yeo Yeo Creek: does NSW have its own 'Yes-Yes' Creek?

In a previous article in *Placenames Australia* ('The low down on *Yo Yo Creek*', September 2018) I discussed the origin and meaning of *Yo Yo Creek* near Augathella (QLD). The name was bestowed by Edmund Kennedy during his 1848 expedition exploring the course of the Victoria River. He explains in his journal that the name derives from the constant response he received from a small group of local Aboriginal people when he asked them questions. He correctly presumed *yo-yo* meant 'yes'.

In the meantime, I have discovered that NSW has a creek with a very similar name, *Yeo Yeo Creek*, in an area near West Wyalong some 500 km west of Sydney. Although the name is historical and is no longer in use for the stream, a nearby rural place and parish are officially assigned as *Yeo Yeo*. (Yeo Yeo locality is about 7 km east of the town of Stockinbingal.) The creek has also been known in the past as *Manna Creek*, but it now bears

the less-than-interesting name of *Bland Creek* (Figure 1). Although 'Creek' has always been the generic in the name, its designated feature type is actually a RIVER. It is a partly-perennial stream rising about 6 km north-west of Frampton, and generally flows in a nor-nor-westerly direction for about 110 km into Lake Cowal where it occasionally overflows into the Lachlan River.



Figure 1: The Newall Highway crosses Bland Creek, aka Yeo Yeo Creek

As yet, I have not been able to discover who named the creek or under what circumstances it was named. The surveyor James Larmer (who helped explore and lay out towns in much of southern and western New South Wales as well as parts of Sydney) travelled down Yeo Yeo Creek to Lake Cowal in 1848, but '[l]ittle seems to be known about it at

that period' (Jervis, 1952, p. 4).

In 1861, the Department of Lands gave notice that plans for a site had been fixed for a town to be called *Yeo Yeo*

continued page 3

In this issue: Yeo Yeo Creek – 1 • Willsons Downfall – 4 • Sassafra – 5 • Pettit – 8

• Language in placenames – 9 • Qamea (2): Fiji #26 – 10 • Puzzle 94: Things, not places – 12

From the Editor



A couple of promises have been fulfilled in this issue. I said we'd set the record straight on two placenames that someone here (me? surely not...) had been a bit sceptical about. David McDonald and John Schauble have done the honours for *Willsons*

Downfall and *Sassafras* respectively.

Paul Geraghty's second instalment of Qamea's origin

story is here too; but (spoiler alert) the answer is still a secret, until our next issue.

One other thing to remind you: it's EOFY time again, as the major retailers are telling us. So those of you who are faithful supporters with your annual donation, thank you in anticipation. We live frugally here at PA, but are grateful for every encouraging dollar! (For the 'how-to', see the back page.)

David Blair

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Gazetteer of Historical Australian Places

TLC Map

The Time-Layered Cultural Map (TLC Map) is a platform within a service known as the Gazetteer of Historical Australian Places (GHAP) that helps researchers in the humanities and social sciences map Australian history and culture. We are partners with the GHAP research team, and the ANPS Database can be accessed from a tab on the TLC Map website: <https://tlcmap.org>

Tapitallee

Our reader Garry Daly asked if our ANPS records held any information about the name of **Tapitallee**, a locality in the NSW coastal area of Shoalhaven. We had to say that, at that stage, our Database had no documentation about the name's origin, but the odds were that it was related to a word in Gundungurra or Dharawal, from the early days of settlement in the area.

Garry, having researched the National Library's invaluable TROVE archive, then sent us this extract from one of our favourite newspaper sources, the *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate*. In a 1933 edition of that august journal, its 'Australianities' column contained a report (from a Will Carter of Hurstville) which began:

About eighty years ago, a fine young aborigine of the Tappatilla tribe named Sam Condylwright, worked for a farmer named Livingstone at Broughton Creek (Berry), where old King Tappatilla flaunted his cherished copper crescent of royalty.

We reckon that seems to be a pretty good clue. We've also discovered that the NSW Government Gazette in 1852 advertised three lots for sale 'near Tappitallee Creek'; and the name appears on parish maps from the 1880s, also in the form *Tappitallee*. We, and Garry, would be pleased to hear from any of our readers who have any information that might fill out the story—the chain of documentation still has a long way to go!

Puzzle answers - (from page 12)

- | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Coober Pedy | 6. Outback | 11. Millicent | 16. Victoria |
| 2. GAF/EE Canberra | 7. Avalon | 12. Kimberley | 17. New Holland |
| 3. Kingswood | 8. Belmont | 13. Oberon | 18. Armidale |
| 4. Tarago | 9. CAC CA-11 Woomera | 14. Monaro | 19. Ballaarat [sic] |
| 5. Noorduyn Norseman | 10. Darwin stubby | 15. Carlton Draught | 20. Snowy River |

This newsletter is published quarterly by
Placenames Australia (Inc.)
ISSN: 1836-7976

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PO Box 5160
SOUTH TURRAMURRA NSW 2074

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(Figure 2). Nothing ever came of these plans, though, and in January 1890, the plans were officially shelved.

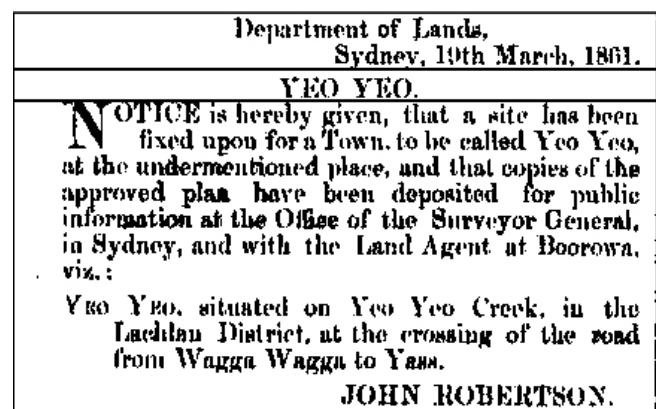


Figure 2

Hamacher (2013, p. 4) believes the name originates from an Indigenous name for a 32.2 kg octahedrite (meteorite) found near Stockinbingal in 1855. He cites Gale (1924, p. 4) who reports on the history of the discovery of the meteorite in his newspaper column ‘Then and Now – Young and Its Surrounding Country’. Gale says:

Some time back [...] this aerolite, according to Aboriginal lore, descended on earth and half buried itself there at the head of Bland Creek, which has its principle source in the vicinity of Stockinbingal. It is a huge block of stone [...]. The blacks were terribly afraid of it, believing it to be possessed of supernatural powers. So they called the strange visitor ‘Yeo Yeo’, a synonym for their pidgin English ‘Debbil-Debbil’ [Devil-Devil]. And Yeo Yeo Creek it remains today.

There are two problems with this, one geological and the other linguistic. Firstly, Gale’s account intimates that the fall of the meteorite was witnessed. This would mean it fell to earth within the last 50,000 years. However, Hamacher admits that doubt exists as to the validity of the supposedly observed fall. He cites Chang and Wänke (1969, p. 401) who estimate the meteorite has been exposed to the earth’s atmosphere between 100,000 to 240,000 years. Secondly, *Yeo Yeo* is not a convincing candidate for a derivation of ‘debbil-debbil’. Gale’s account asserted that it was a synonym; unfortunately there is no other evidence that this was, or is, the case. The Grant & Rudder dictionary (2010) of Wiradjuri gives only *wanda-wandaang* for ‘devil-devil’.

A *Sydney Morning Herald* article in 1864 (Friday 29 July,

page 8, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article13107836>), ran a report by a Lawrence Struiby about a young Indigenous boy named Bobindi, who was described as belonging to ‘the Yeo Yeo tribe’. It is not clear what Struiby precisely meant by this—was this the accepted ethnonym for Bobindi’s people, or was Struiby merely describing the region from where Bobindi came? If the former, then this ethnonym may be another example of what I reported on in my previous article on *Yo Yo Creek*. There I noted the custom that Australia’s Indigenous people have in naming each other’s languages and clans according to their terms for ‘yes’ or ‘no’, many of which are cognates and have forms such as: *ea*, *e-ee*, *eeyo*, *ye*, *yea*, *yi*, *yu*, *yo*, *yoi*, *ya*, and *yoe*, etc. An assortment of words collected by James Larmer appears in the journal *Science of Man* (Vol. 2 No. 8, 21 September 1899, pp. 146-148) under the heading: ‘Aborigines’ Words and Meanings’. Under the column labelled ‘Lachlan and Murrumbidgee R’s.’ we find *ye-a* ‘yes’. Unfortunately, a similar entry under the adjoining column labelled ‘Yeo Yeo and Narraburra’ cannot be found. Nevertheless, the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Rivers are in the region of Yeo Yeo Creek. Also, Curr’s



Figure 3: The railway station at Stockinbingal

The Australian race (1886) lists *Eiye* or *ye-ye* ‘yes’ for the Yitha-Yitha language (between the Lachlan, Murray and Darling Rivers). Yitha-Yitha country adjoins that of the Wiradjuri, the country of Yeo Yeo Creek.

It is my contention that Yeo Yeo Creek derives its name from the local word for ‘yes’, and not from the purported pidgin English ‘Debbil-Debbil’.

continued next page

Willsons Downfall

So Willsons Downfall, that locality near Tenterfield (NSW), is so-named because a man called Willson had an accident there in his buggy... Really? Surely it's one of those stories that's too good to be true—a folk etymology. David McDonald drew this to our sceptical attention a while ago, and here's what his research has since discovered.

Mr George Willson was, in the 1860s, a leading citizen of Tenterfield. The owner of the general store in town, he was apparently known as 'the King of Tenterfield'. A letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in August 1927 from a Mr John Willis recalled that Willson had been driving his buggy through 'this dangerous depression in the road and his buggy was capsized, and he himself was thrown out.'¹ The writer continued, 'it was natural to name a place where so prominent a man in the northern area had temporarily "come to grief," as his "downfall"...



Herald the following week by a writer calling himself 'ex-Tenterfieldite'. He recalled that Mr Willson and his business partner owned 'one might say, half the town properties of Tenterfield, but unfortunately ended in a "financial" downfall.' It was, however, 'the "physical" upset that still keeps his name alive in the nomenclature of the district.'

The story was confirmed by another letter² to the

Endnotes

¹ Willis, J. (1927, August 31, p. 10). Willson's Downfall. *Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/28053854>

² Ex-Tenterfieldite. (1927, September 2, p. 6). Willson's Downfall. *Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/16400928>

...from previous page

Postscript

The noun **yeo** appears in the OED with the following sense and etymology. It seems the term had only a local usage (in the south-west of England, specifically Cornwall, Devon and Somerset).

yeo [< Old English *eá, *iá for eá 'stream, river']

local (south-west)

'A stream or drain (in mining)'

Now this is nicely coincidental, because there was gold mining in and around Yeo Yeo Creek... and the creek may well have been used as a drain during the mining operations. However, I am not at all suggesting that the toponym derives from this English dialect word. Firstly, because the Australian toponym has a reduplicated form. And secondly, because gold mining around Yeo Yeo Creek only commenced in the late-1860s/early-1870s, well after it was named thus. As we've noted before, such unrelated coincidences are often the origin of folk etymologies; and, attractive as they may be, we must remain sceptical of such suggested derivations. In fact, my previous article on Yo Yo Creek noted (and rejected)

...Yeo Yeo Creek

exactly one of those suggestions: that the rapid rise and fall of that creek's water level recalled the up-and-down action of a yo-yo.

Jan Tent

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The naming of Sassafras

*In our March 2025 issue, John Schauble alerted us to a centenary celebration for the Victorian village of Kallista, and in so doing made mention of the nearby **Sassafras**. This raised some eyebrows at Placenames Australia—why did it sound so American? Could the placename be an American import? Was our Oz Sassafras named after Sassafras County in Kentucky? John offered to set us straight...*

Sassafras (or *Sassafras Gully*, as it was originally called) might, it has been suggested, have been named after a place in Kentucky, USA; or named for the deciduous North American sassafras tree (a genus of three species of the *Lauraceae* or laurel family).

Indeed, if you Google ‘sassafras’, an AI-generated response will tell you: ‘Sassafras can refer to a tree, a hallucinogenic drug, or a destination in Victoria’.

Well, leaving aside a slang name for marijuana, it seems that there are sassafras trees and then there are **sassafras** trees. *Sassafras albidum*, the so-called ‘true’ sassafras tree of eastern North America, is perhaps the best known and has been used in tea, making root beer, and cooking.

But the accepted wisdom in these parts and more widely has always been that **Sassafras**, Victoria, and its nearby creek were more obviously named for a local plant.

The most prolific indigenous plant of this name is *Atherosperma moschatum*, variously known as southern sassafras or the blackhearted sassafras (a reference to the colour of its heartwood) or just plain ‘sassafras’. It is endemic to the Dandenongs and widespread in

Tasmania, where another town named Sassafras (about 20 km south east of Devonport) is also named for it.

The tree is found patchily on the mainland as far north as Barrington Tops in NSW. (There’s also another tiny community of Sassafras in NSW between Nowra and Braidwood). As a final confusion, there’s a Sassafras Gap and another Sassafras Creek, site of an old gold mining settlement, to be found in the Victorian high country to the north of Benambra in the state’s far east.

Atherosperma moschatum was first formally described in 1806 by French naturalist Jacques Labillardière (1755–1834) in his *Novae Hollandiae Plantarum Specimen*. Labillardière visited Tasmania in 1791 as a member of the D’Entrecasteaux expedition. It was also described by the English-colonial botanist Alan Cunningham (1791–1839). Growing to 15–30 m in height, it is a mid-storey species found in damp forest. Southern sassafras has small fragrant white flowers and was used in saddlery and the manufacture of clothes pegs, but more recently its wood has become much prized for furniture making. The plant is related to another Australian plant, the yellow sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*), a tropical rainforest species.



Sassafras in the early 20th century, Rose Series postcard, SLV collection

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The Sassafras Gully Post Office and store was established by Arthur Goode in 1894. The town has been known as *Sassafras* since around the time of World War 1, although to this day the post office (and the postmark) remains 'Sassafras Gully'. VICNAMES, the official register of placenames, notes that Sassafras was named 'in recognition of the plentiful growth of Southern Sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*)'. It cites Les Blake's *Place names of Victoria* (1977) as authority. The earlier *Place names in Victoria and Tasmania* (1944) by A.E. Martin suggests as its origin the 'name of tree which was plentiful there. Tea has been brewed from its bark and its oil used in asthma and other complaints'. The *Cambridge dictionary of Australian places* (1992) provides the clearest exposition: 'It was so named in 1894 because of trees growing there, which were probably not true sassafras trees but southern sassafras, *Atherosperma moschatum*.'

Helen Coulson's version of events in *Story of the Dandenongs* (1959) is as follows:

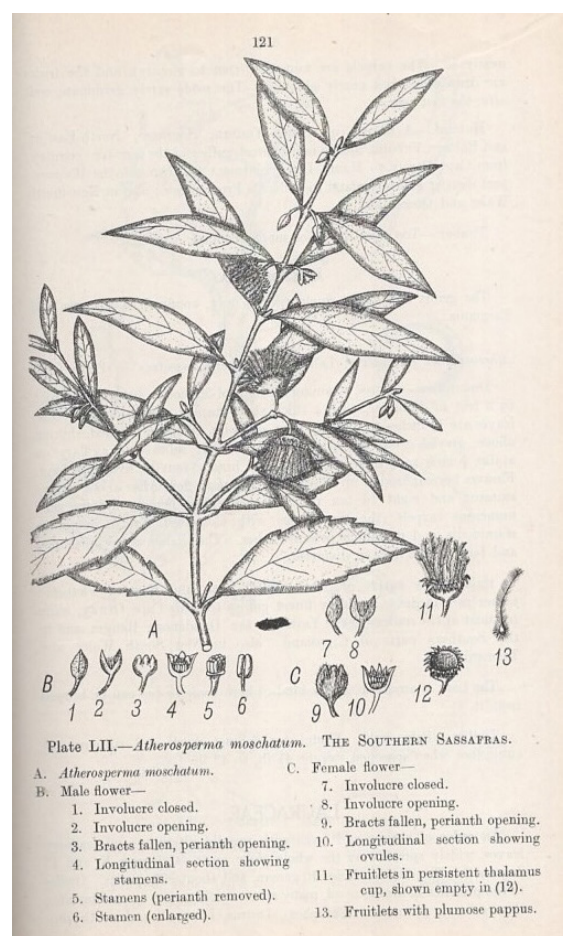
The discovery of sassafras trees in this part of the Dandenongs is attributed to Ambrose Eyles, a former chemist who immigrated from England and became lessee of *Monbolk* cattle run, at existing Lysterfield, about 1850. During his explorations of the district Eyles was amazed to discover what he believed were sassafras trees, and the young Englishman gathered specimens which he later took to the curator of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, who assured him that the trees were, in fact, sassafras. Eyles promised to take some plants to the curator on his next trip to Melbourne but on the homeward journey he was caught in a downpour and developed pleurisy from which he died shortly afterwards.

Ambrose Eyles (1823-50) had only arrived in Victoria in 1849 and died at the young age of 27, leaving a wife and child (born on the ship outward bound).

As early as 1853, the *Argus* was waxing lyrical over the 'magnificent sassafras tree (*Atherosperma moschatum*), which later for some time kindly vegetates with the fern-trees, but in the course of time overwhelms or destroys it.' (An accurate description of the colonising behaviour of the plant.) A decade later, the medicinal properties of the plant were being discussed in the *Victorian Farmers' Journal and Gardeners' Chronicle*.



And what of the American sassafras? Well, aside from the suggestion that the Australian varieties are named because the leaves and bark share a strong scent of nutmeg with that tree, especially when crushed, nothing further is heard. It is rarely grown in Australia, although sometimes available from specialist nurseries. The two trees are not related, but as contemporary Tasmanian writer Bert Spinks has noted: 'The northern hemisphere exiles, invaders and migrants of the late 1700s and 1800s were so desperate to make sense of this antipodean foreignness that the first English names they received were those of trees from elsewhere, of which they were very roughly an equivalent'.



Atherosperma moschatum, illustration from Alfred J. Ewart, *Handbook of Forest Trees for Victorian Foresters*, Melbourne: Government Printer, 1925

This was borne out as early as 1801 on an expedition to Western Port led by Lieutenant James Grant (1772-1833), who had earlier mapped Bass Strait in the *Lady Nelson*. Returning from an inland exploration of 'a forest of stately timber trees', he noted: 'I brought Governor

...Sassafras

King specimens of light woods and a species of sassafras discovered by my second mate.’ (Hateley, 2020, p. 8). Later, the explorer William Hovell (1786-1875) described forest around Mount Disappointment, 60 km north of Melbourne, as containing ‘the fern tree and Sarsafress’ (Hateley, 2020, p. 23).

John Schauble

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In the Sassafras Gully. (photo: John Schauble)

Toponymist on the loose...



Toponym misses and placename misnomers

Marion Shopping Centre in suburban Adelaide isn't in Marion SA 5043. It's in Oaklands Park SA 5046. *Croydon Avenue* lies in West Croydon, not Croydon. *Holland* is but one part of the Netherlands, so not all Dutch people are from Holland. How and why do we get some apparently simple things so toponymically incorrect, imprecise or even misleading?

Saying to an Adelaide person ‘I live in Maylands’ may leave them stumped, because most people have never heard the name: ‘It's near Norwood.’ Everyone's heard of Northwood. Same for the prestigious suburb of Thorngate: ‘It's close to Prospect.’ Thorngate is so small and exclusive that it comprises a mere three streets. At least those new names, unrelated to their better-known neighbours, don't seem designed to actually mislead anybody. But where would you expect to find *Pirie East*? Turns out it's not a suburb of Port Pirie but is way south of there—unlike *Port Pirie West* which is actually to the west of Port Pirie.

Further afield, Sydney's *Great North Road* is no longer great, because it stretches a mere 3.5 km from the suburb of Five Dock to its neighbour Abbotsford. And we know that Sydney's *Circular Quay* is no more circular than *Australia Square* is square; and *Green Square* and *Taylor Square* are not remotely squarish, either.

This is not just an Oz inadequacy—our foreign friends are just as bad. East London in South Africa is actually a l-o-n-g way south of London; makes you wonder how much of their mail ends up in the UK. Head to New York and you'll notice, if you didn't already know, that *Madison Square Garden* is quite round and not a garden at all. Further west, *Kansas City* is not even in the state of Kansas: it's in Missouri. And while we're in the USA, why are our trans-Pacific cousins so paranoid about false identification that they always need to tell you it's ‘London, England’, ‘Paris, France’, or ‘Venice, Italy’?

In their defence, I suppose we have to be similarly specific when we mention ‘Denmark, Western Australia’...

Joshua Nash
Some Islands

The petite village of Pettit



Turnoff to Pettit on the Hume Highway (photo: Jan Tent)

The fittingly named **Pettit** is a tiny NSW village located just off the Hume Highway, about halfway between Coolac and Gundagai. It is in the LGA of Gundagai, and the traditional owners of the region are the Wiradjuri people. The nearby trig station shares the *Pettit* name.

The village lies on the now disused Cootamundra-Tumut railway line, a branch of the Main South Line. The towns and villages the line served included Brawlin, Muttama, Coolac, Pettit, Mingay, Gundagai, Tumblong, Gilmore and Tumut. The line opened as far as Gundagai in 1885, and was extended to Tumut in 1903; a branch to Batlow was opened in 1922, which was then extended to Kunama shortly after.

Pettit is clearly an eponymous toponym, the name-form being quite a common family name dating back to the Norman Conquest of Britain in 1066, and derives from the Anglo-Norman-French word *petit* 'small'. The Geographical Names Board of NSW notes that the village was named after 'Albert Hugh Petit' [sic]. He and



Pettitts Railway Station platform (photo: Nathan Johnston, 08/02/2003. <<https://www.nswrail.net/locations/show.php?name=NSW:Pettitts>>)

his wife settled in the area about 1890. In an obituary for Mr Pettit in *The Gundagai Independent and Pastoral, Agricultural and Mining Advocate* of 4 April 1932 (page 2), it mentions that he joined the railway service in 1885, and in 1888 was promoted to the head ganger at Coolac. He served for 44 years on the railways, retiring in 1929. He apparently refused promotion several times 'preferring his home life and family to rambling about the country'. His obituary continues:

His experience was wide and varied in regard to railway matters, the responsibility of wash aways and derailments having fallen to his lot a good many times, but he always rose to the occasion. He was highly commended more than once by the Department for his prompt action, taken in dealing with an emergency which otherwise would have proved of a more serious nature. In civil life he was highly respected and loved, always ready to lend a helping hand to those in distress...

The naming of the railway station and subsequent village seem a fitting tribute.

The railway station at Pettit was initially named *Pettitts Platform* when it opened in 1946; the erroneous spelling was provided to the Railways Department at the time by a distant relative, says the GNB record. *Pettitts Platform* was renamed *Pettitts Railway Station* in 1970. In 1980, the name *Pettitts Railway Station* was discontinued, and the village name *Pettitts* was changed to *Pettit* (NSW Government Gazette #91, #99). During the Hume Highway upgrade in 2009, the old *Pettitts Railway Station* platform was relocated to Coolac (RMS, 2018, p. 78).

Jan Tent

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This is the second in our new series of VIGNETTES - short pieces on Australia's places and their names, submitted by our readers.

What your language does to its placenames

When we speak in natural conversational style, neighbouring sounds influence each other in many ways. This process is termed ‘assimilation’ because neighbouring sounds assimilate to become more like each other. This happens in all languages, and should not be seen as laziness or sloppiness on behalf of the speaker. It is nothing more than a way to make the production of speech more efficient, thus aiding the movement from one sound to the next. These assimilatory changes are all part of the forces that lead to language change (or as I like to call it, ‘language development’ or ‘language advancement’), all of which make the language do a better job of serving its speakers. The only reason that a language doesn’t develop is because it has no speakers and users; we call it a ‘dead language’. Sometimes, the changes in normal everyday speech, due to these natural language processes, will alter the actual standard pronunciation of a word. For example, *cupboard* is now always pronounced [ˈkʌbəd], never [ˈkʌpˌbɔd], even in slow, highly articulated speech.

Sometimes neighbouring sounds are radically different in their place and manner of articulation. This means they may differ quite markedly in the place in the mouth where they are formed (place of articulation) or in the manner in which they are formed (i.e. whether the sound is produced with the vocal folds vibrating or not vibrating—voiced vs voiceless, e.g. [b] vs [p] or [s] vs [z] respectively; whether the sound is produced by an occlusion of the airflow followed by a sudden release of that occlusion, e.g. [b] and [p]; whether the sound is oral or nasal, e.g. [d] vs [n] respectively; or whether the sound is produced with a narrowing of the airflow such as with [f, v, s, z, h] etc.). So, when a voiceless sound has a voiced sound on either side of it, it will usually become voiced itself, e.g. house [haus] vs houses [hauzəz].

Sometimes, over time, the spelling of a word may also change due to such linguistic forces, e.g. the simplification of initial consonant clusters in Old English words that resulted in the loss of *h*, *k*, and *w* in words such as *klence* > *link*, *hnutu* > *nut*, *bring* > *ring* and *wlisp* > *lisp*.

Word stress (or ‘lexical stress’) also has an influence on how words, and toponyms, are pronounced. Compare for example *Wangaratta* [wæŋgəˈrætə] vs *Tallangatta*

[təlæŋgətə]. Not every syllable in English is stressed. There are different degrees of word stress ranging from heavily stressed (primary stress), secondary and tertiary stress, through to unstressed. It is with the latter that the most noticeable changes are to be perceived. Stress falls on syllables, and the nucleus of the syllable is the vowel. So, changes in stress will see changes in the way vowels are articulated.

Since toponyms are names, and names are part of written and spoken language, they too will be subject to the normal, natural rules of articulation. An example of the loss of a syllable in a toponym, probably due to the neutralising of stress of a syllable, resulted in the change of spelling of *Cadebirie* (Derbyshire, UK) to *Cadbury*.

A nice homegrown example showing a similar process is in the name of the Tasmanian township **Geeveston** (on the Huon River, some 60 km south-west of Hobart). [By the way, this is the township where the popular ABC program *Rosehaven* was filmed]. It derives its name from William Geeves, an English settler who was given a land grant in the area. A settlement grew up there and was named *Geeves Town* in 1861 (Whitworth 1877, pp. 82-83). Eventually, the name became *Geeveston* because the generic *Town* [taʊn] became unstressed in normal conversational speech, thus making it [tən] or [tən]. This pronunciation then became the norm and was expressed in the spelling, after the model of other toponyms ending with *-ton*.

Jan Tent

Reference

Whitworth, R.P. (1877). *Bailliere's Tasmanian gazetteer and road guide, containing the most recent and accurate information as to every place in the colony*. Hobart Town: F.F. Bailliere.



More surprises from Qamea...

In our traverse of Fiji's islands and their names, we previously (March 2025) introduced our overview of the island of **Qamea** (34.5 km²), to the north-east of Taveuni and west of the much smaller Laucala.

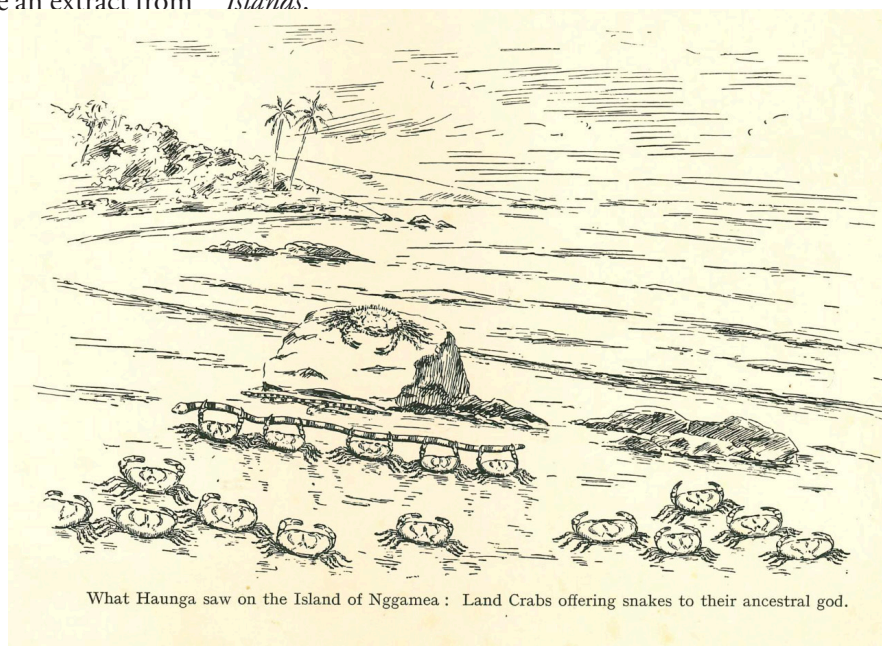
Qamea was seen by at least two explorers even before its name was known: Abel Tasman in February 1643 and James Wilson in 1797. As we noted previously, historian G. C. Henderson has identified the islands Tasman sighted, roughly in chronological order, as Nukubasaga, Nukupareti, Nukusimanu, Laucala, Taveuni, Yanuca, Rabe, Kioa, Vanualevu and Cikobia. (See an extract from his map, next page.) It was not until 1827 that the French explorer Dumont d'Urville saw the island and actually recorded its name, as 'Ongomea' (misanalysing the article 'o' as part of the name).

We have noted that Qamea is remarkable for its flora and fauna, including the nutritious tree *Gnetum gnemon*, known as *sikau*, pronounced /sɪʔau/, the jungle fowl (*Gallus gallus*, locally *toa ni cōcō*), and two introductions: the Australian magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*, *mekepai*) and the American iguana (*Iguana iguana*).

Summer is a time of great plenty in Qamea, and the sea-worm *balolo* (*Eunice viridis*, the same as Samoan *palolo*) is looked forward to every year. The worms rise every November in their millions from the base of the reef to the surface of the sea opposite the village of Dreketi on the east coast of Qamea, and at coastal locations on the nearby islands of Matagi and Laucala. They are scooped up and either eaten raw or taken home to be cooked in various ways, with some taken to friends and relations who live in places where the delicacy does not rise.

Around the same time another treat is anticipated in the form of land crabs (*lairo*, *Cardisoma* spp), which migrate in their millions to the sea to release their eggs every November to December, an event comparable to the annual mass migration of red crabs on Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean. The month is known in Taveuni

and Qamea as the *vulaiyāyā*. While these land crab migrations are common throughout Fiji and the tropical Pacific, Qamea is unusual in that the crabs (it is said) carry a snake in their claws and offer it to their 'king', like a presentation of barkcloth. This remarkable event was recorded by Huanga, a Tongan resident of Vanuabalavu in the nineteenth century who mentioned it to Charles Richard Swayne, a high-ranking colonial official, who passed it on to another colonial official, Adolph B Brewster, who published it in his 1937 book, *King of the cannibal isles: a tale of early life and adventure in the Fiji Islands*.



What Haunga saw on the Island of Nggamea : Land Crabs offering snakes to their ancestral god.

Here I paraphrase Haunga's report (illustrated above).

I went on a light sailing canoe, with Takaiwai, a high chief of Taveuni, to see the annual presentation of the *lairo* (land crabs) at the island of Qamea. It was about 1870. We were at Qeleni [Taveuni] when Takaiwai told his people to make ready to go to the carrying of the hundred-fathom bales [of barkcloth, *katudrau*]. We crossed the strait in three *camakau* (light outrigger canoes) and landed in the afternoon. Takaiwai told the men to plait baskets.

It was a sandy beach stretching for several hundred fathoms. Takaiwai and I sat on a rock about ten feet high and about a fathom from high-water mark. On our right at a short distance, perhaps twenty fathoms, was a sandy point running out about ten fathoms seaward. At the point of it was a small rock about three feet high.

The tide was coming in: about half tide. Just at sunset Takaiwai pointed to the grass on the edge of the sand. He spoke very low. I noticed some land crabs coming out on the beach on both sides of us. I could also see several snakes, perhaps twenty, common brown land snakes. The snakes lay on the sand in

...Placenames of Fiji 26

front of the land crabs. The crabs were all making for the point of the sand; and each snake was seized by six or eight of them and carried slowly to the foot of the small rock.

I saw a very large crab crawl from the rock and climb to its top. Takaiwai said, 'That is their Chief.' Then I noticed that he made froth on the water, after which he crawled down and went under the rock again.

Takaiwai then told me that the ceremony was over and that the crabs had made their offering of their hundred-fathom bales. He called to his people to catch crabs and put them in their baskets and they filled about thirty. He told them not to harm the snakes. They were all alive and had not resisted being carried by the crabs. Before leaving I went to the rock and saw that there was a big hole under it and much froth such as crabs make.

To my knowledge, this event has not been reported anywhere else, nor has any investigator gone there to verify if it still occurs.

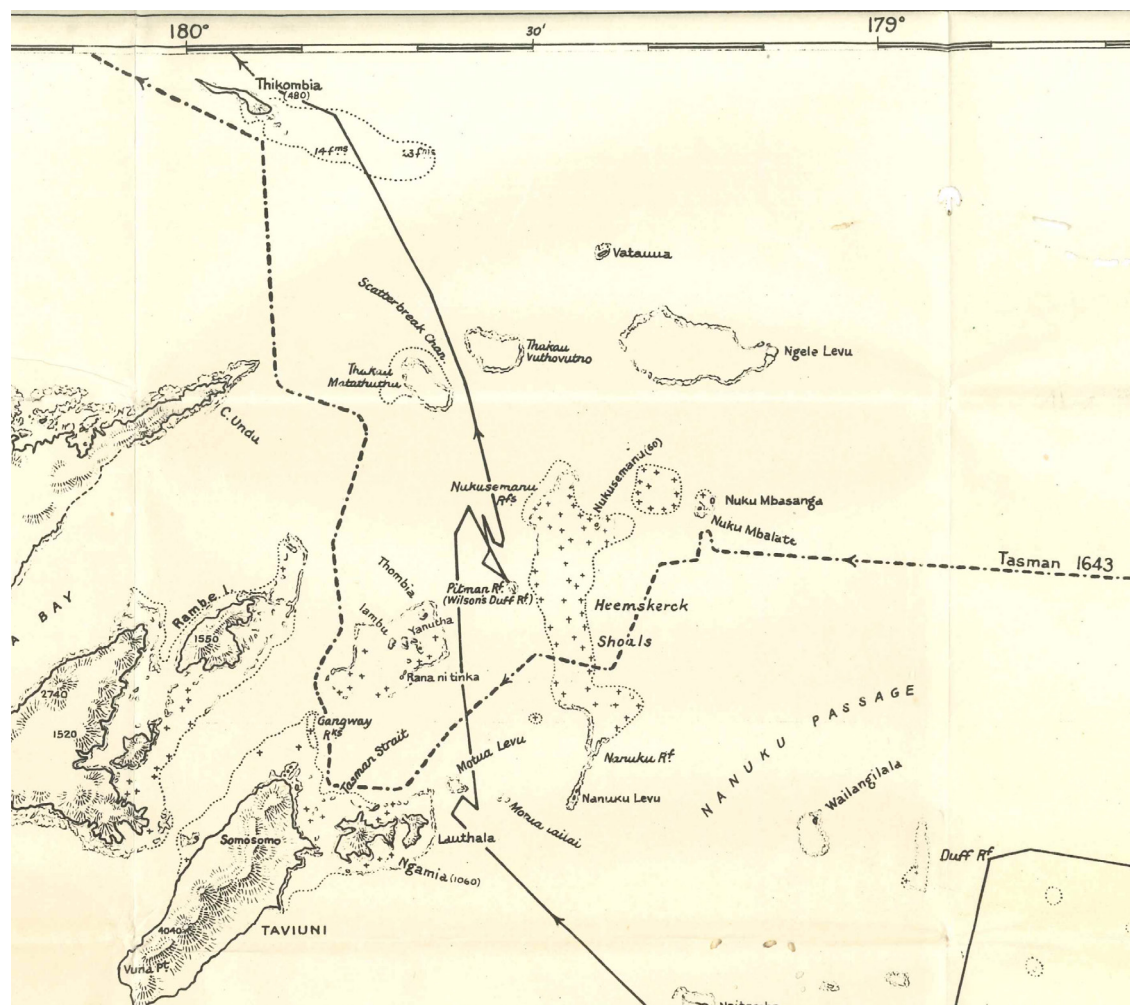
Qamea is also notable for a food called *paileve*, so much so that a native of Qamea is referred to affectionately by some neighbours as *batipaileve* 'paileve eater'. This follows a custom of parts of insular east Fiji whereby

people are referred to by typical foods, with the prefix *bati-* (literally 'tooth'). So, for example, people of Gau are called *batilumi*, meaning eaters of *lumi*, a kind of seaweed (*Hypnea pannosa*) that flourishes there.

Paileve is better known by its Standard Fijian name, *bila*. Nowadays it is made of cassava (*tavioka*, *manioke*, *Manihot esculenta*) pounded, flavoured with sugar or grated coconut, wrapped in leaves and boiled. Cassava is an introduction of the mid-nineteenth century, and it appears that it was earlier made of Tahitian chestnuts (*ivi*, *Inocarpus fagifer*).

Strange to say, while residents of Qamea are used to being addressed as *batipaileve*, very few of them know what it is! There is a reason for this, which is connected to the history of pre-colonial land sales in northeast Fiji, but since we appear to have run out of space for this issue, I will beg the editor's indulgence and discuss this in the next issue, along with, at long last, the possible meaning of the name of the island of **Qamea**!

Paul Geraghty



Tasman's route
(marked by
dotted line) from
Henderson - extract

Placenames Puzzle Number 94

Things that sound like places. *In this quiz we ask you to identify manufactured goods bearing the name of an Australian toponym (though not necessarily named after it). For example: A small sailing boat named after a northern Sydney beach suburb Answer: Manly Junior*

1. An Akubra hat style with the name of a SA mining town where many live underground
2. A twin-engine 1950s jet bomber
3. A car (Holden) with the name of a western Sydney suburb
4. A car (Toyota) with the name of a township 40 km S of Goulburn
5. A single-engine aircraft with the name of a WA town in the Goldfields-Esperance region
6. A car (Subaru) with the general name for the remote, vast, sparsely populated Australian region
7. A car (Toyota) with the name of a Sydney northern beach suburb
8. A car (Holden) with the name of a Lake Macquarie, Brisbane, or Perth suburb
9. A WWII Australian torpedo bomber with the name of an RAAF base and rocket range, N of Adelaide
10. A 2.25 litre beer bottle with the name of a capital city
11. An RM Williams boot style with the name of a SA town 50 km NW of Mount Gambier
12. A car (Austin) with the name of WA's northern-most region
13. A class of submarine with the name of a NSW Central Tablelands town near Bathurst
14. A car (Holden) with the name of the NSW region between Adaminaby and Cooma
15. A brand of draught beer with the name of a Melbourne suburb
16. A car (Austin) with the name of a southern Australian state
17. A brand of tractor with the historic European name for our continent
18. A class of patrol boat with the name of a northern NSW university city halfway between Brisbane and Sydney
19. A steam engine (built by James Hunt in 1871) with the name of city NW of Melbourne famous for an uprising
20. An Akubra hat style with the name of an iconic river whose source is on the slopes of Mount Kosciuszko

[Compiled by **Jan Tent**
Answers on page 2]

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Supporting photographs or other illustrations are greatly appreciated.

Closing dates for submissions are:

March Issue: 15 January

June Issue: 15 April

September Issue: 15 July

December Issue: 15 October