

DUDLEY PENINSULA

Linguistic Pilgrimage and Toponymic Ethnography on an Almost Island

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ABSTRACT: Toponymy as an active and resourceful medium is used to explore fieldwork experiences and insularity on Dudley Peninsula, Kangaroo Island. Placenames are employed as memes and means to understand emotional connections to place and to reconcile the 'almost-island' sentiment on Dudley with the larger island(er)-ness of greater Kangaroo Island.

KEYWORDS: Insularity, linguistic pilgrimage, Kangaroo Island, toponymic ethnography, toponyms, Dudley Peninsula

The eastern end of Kangaroo Island ... is almost an island in its own right.... In 1874 this almost-island was officially proclaimed the Hundred of Dudley.
(Taylor, 2008: 101)

Late summer 2009. A gentle balmy breeze. Seas breaking to the south of the isthmus near Pennington Bay. To the north, the still waters of Pelican Lagoon, a figurative almost internal inland sea. An Irish gentleman named this brackish body of water Big Duck, describing all the 'big ducks', that is, pelicans he once beheld overhead.¹ I am stationed on island to document the local history and land use existing and represented in the many little known, localised, and esoteric toponyms. Not of the whole island, but of an almost-island. Dudley Peninsula is contained, held in, and moderated by and from the rest of Kangaroo Island (Figure 1). There is more than geographical disjuncture between the two island elements. There are different patterns of settlement history, distinct names, contrasting transformations in perceptions of landscape. This area is particular, singular, separate from the larger part. The merit of the Dudley is its enclosed nature, its insularity, its contradictions. I am not overly concerned with the toponymy of the remainder of the island, just Dudley names. Notwithstanding my role as a linguist, I feel a pull toward much more than regional language in landscape and placenames as elements in the provincial geographical sociolect. I sense an extensive complex of name, place, and people, connections built up over time privy only to those allowed access. I have a hunch about the existence of a deeper imaginary, an intricate nexus of language and self relations. My work does not necessarily require me to access this system. Still, ambition drives me further.

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Figure 1 - Dudley Peninsula, Kangaroo Island, South Australia

From Prospect Hill, known locally as Mount Thisby, I look west toward greater Kangaroo Island and east toward Dudley Peninsula (Figure 2). The one kilometre stretch separates the two distinct elements of Kangaroo Island: Dudley Peninsula, an almost-island, a *presqu'île*, and the rest, the island proper. When one reaches the southern part of Pelican Lagoon travelling eastward along the top of the terrestrial divide, Dudley Peninsula begins. From here, an entrance into a world of names. YMCA Corner is on the right, Felt Hat Corner on the left, Tiger's Cairn up a dusty road towards the heart of this domain. Stink Corner, where Percival Clark would dump wallaby carcasses after skinning them,² is on the Willson River Road. There is also a fishing ground named after him—Perce's Patch—just offshore to the north of Penneshaw. The Tits describes the undulation along the Penneshaw-Kingscote Road resembling a woman's bodily landscape. Humorous names, local appellations, pertinent environmental descriptors, weighty cultural capital, embedded language in place.

I have struggled to ascertain whether island environments themselves provide possibilities for measuring differences in linguistic behaviour compared to non-island environments. Are the linguistics of islands and island toponymy worthy considerations for nissology, the study of islands on their own terms? Perhaps the almost-island, the peninsula, the Danish of which is *halvø*—'half island'—offers similar but nonetheless distinct opportunities. Isolated yet connected, cut-off but allied, secluded albeit related. I confront the 'boring' names of Dudley. The Meat Tree, Jack's Paddock, Four Square, The Triangle. Apart from a few obvious French ones – Baudin Beach, Anse des Sources, they are all English, many of them plain, descriptive, explanatory. Although I have striven to show these names as

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quintessential elements in the landscape terms of the area, they are pretty ordinary and obvious. They do not really show any grammatical difference or aberrancy to normal English words or names. There are still large amounts of wisdom contained within these common placenames. It is this content more than the form of the names that are in need of my attention.



Figure 2 - Looking east toward Dudley Peninsula from Mount Thisby (author's photo, 2009)

Dudley Peninsula, and even less greater Kangaroo Island, has never been my home. I am a linguist, an ethnographer, a toponymist, an outsider. Whereas I am also a pilgrim, my pilgrimage is toponymically directed. I am on a search for the basis of what constitutes a *toponymic ethnography*. Although the theoretical basis of what may comprise a toponymic ethnography is not new, my appellation is. Many scholars on both islands and mainlands have written about peoples through the lens of toponymy, topogeny and topography. They have produced analyses that illustrate how toponymy can be a valuable tool anthropologically for eliciting cultural understandings and concepts of place and place attachment. I try to take these ideas further, synthesise something novel, create a union of hitherto disparate elements.

Jean Nunn (1989) wrote about the soldier settlers' scheme after World War II, and how these settlements led to what she believes comprises a quintessential Kangaroo Island identity. Rebe Taylor (2008) argued for why and how the Aboriginal women brought from Tasmania to Kangaroo Island in the 1800s by renegade sealers were maltreated and deserve a better place in island history. Francis Bauer provided some of the best maps I ever came across in his regional geographical and geological work on the island published in 1959. I am in good intellectual company on this (half) island. Still, I am differently situated. My search is similar to Father Patrick Kelly who walked the Kangaroo Island coastline in the late 1970s and wrote about it as a recollection of his role as an island pastor (1979). His (sacred and nature-focussed) pilgrimage recollects many of the remote and rarely visited coastal features and the placenames; he reflects on the ways he came to know and reconnect with the island that came to be his home. Like me, he was a non-islander.

My pilgrimage is altogether physical and intellectual. It personally implicates the 'almost-ness' of the almost-island - the peninsula - with the definiteness and definitiveness of a

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mainland. This almost-ness, this lack of definition, this obscuring of dichotomies, continua and edges, is what and where my toponymic work exists and breathes. It is as much art as science, leisure as work, personal as public, insular as cosmopolitan. I consider the names I have documented as much mine as theirs, here in the present as there in a distant past, alive and at hand as removed and vague. Although I am not an islander, I nonetheless occupy and prevail in the names and maps I have created. I captured the memories of people now dead. With their passing, my probing represents a lasting cartographic honouring of their recollections. As a mapmaker and writer of culture and history engaging in linguistic cartography and toponymy, I (almost) survive in a similar way to how the names I bring to life on this almost-island endure. The names comprised on the map are geographies of emotion at the same time as being emotional geographies.

In my years of doing toponymy and documenting toponymies I have had many realisations. Writing and describing an insular, an island-like toponymy through toponymic ethnography is never complete. Where Dudley is an 'almost-island', its toponymy is not 'almost-insular'. Most of the colloquial names are not listed, gazetted, or mapped. I have travelled several times with a local gentleman, Graham Trethewey, on the Cape Willoughby mail run. Down dusty roads, he would point out places, names, and stories while I photographed, asked questions, and continually prodded for more information. Dudley people are happy to talk about their past and their heritage and interviewing and travelling with them across their properties and the country they know so well, brings forth unique information and insight into local culture and history. One can sense past events and the role of individuals in their stories and yarns.

Although close to a mainland, people on Dudley consider themselves islanders. Their perspective on the world is insular, their names hidden. This almost-island's place-naming - a toponymy of isolation - is represented as an *insular toponymy*. Whereas some names are available to outsiders, the majority are difficult to access. Most landscape monikers are held within the minds and experience of people of advanced age. Because land use has changed so dramatically, the need to have knowledge of local and culturally embedded toponyms for one's physical and social livelihood has lessened. The importance of fishing and sheep and grain farming which forged the older Dudley population's connection to the land has over time lessened. It is now not as essential for people, especially the young, as it was generations ago to know names such as Devil's Kitchen, Yarloop Hill and Staggerjuice Corner. Places to fish like The Seal Ground, The Waterworks, The Pig Sty Patch, Off Congony's and No Reason were once part of the fishermen's mental maps of the offshore seascape where they plied. Most now use GPS. Still, those who do not possess this knowledge often claim these names are a key cultural apparatus, names they no longer have access to. This knowledge is considered folklore by the younger generation.

When documenting such topographical names, it is obvious that physical interaction in a particular people's speech environment with the people who actually know the toponyms is paramount to obtaining accurate and reliable data. Most of these names have never been recorded. Relating in a socially intimate manner is important to observing how these names function in the minds of the members of these two communities and how they perceive place in terms of these names. The fieldworker must *vibe* with people, situations, and places creating what I have labeled the *Vibe Component* of the fieldwork situation. Toponyms are not arbitrary ephemera that exist in a vacuum; they are culturally embedded and alive, living, existing, making sense only in the minds and the

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environments of the people who know their meanings. On the Willson River Pty Ltd. property, oats were grown on the House Paddock and lucerne on the Grain Shed Paddock. Toponyms not only create realities; these actualities are realised by the names themselves.

This vibing through fieldwork is an absorbed linguistic and personal pilgrimage, a passage of language and mind to place and people. Through pilgrimage I garner knowledge of the place. Through knowing the names I gain insight into happenings, into islandness. I deal mainly with the older population using maps, interviewing them, asking whether they remember the places and who lived there, who named these places, and what activities were carried out in these places. Many remember the names of places, their location and what they did there but in many cases they do not know who named them, and why they were named such. Minds at the interface, pen in hand, memories interacting. At times I probe to understand how people acquire this knowledge such as fishing ground locations. Informants told me they would simply go out fishing with the old boys when they were young and the old fisherman would tell the younger men where the old places were. The men knew whom Swanny's and Linnett's were named after; they worked with them, had a beer with them at the local and their children played together. Because of the insular nature of Dudley, an insular toponymy, unconnected to the rest of Kangaroo Island developed. This toponymy serves not only a linguistic and practical social function involving communication; it also becomes a vital economic tool and provided a means of adapting ecologically to the place where these names existed and still exist. Fieldwork in these places is a reliable method to access this insider knowledge and such insular toponymies. These names make no sense to those not on or from the peninsula. Greater Kangaroo Island seems just as removed as the Australian mainland. The view from Penneshaw to the north island is grand. Holly, my partner, and I spent several summers here.

Places are understood, remembered and managed through names. How people think about, talk about, move around in and manage an ecology of toponyms is central to how aspects of the ethnography of a people can be written in terms of their toponymy. Toponyms are therefore vibrant cultural entities and artefacts that cannot prevail apart from the cultural and ecological niches where they are situated. On Dudley Peninsula, people questioned why I would be interested in documenting names they considered common, even boring. Such names show that although several forms are consistent with official English placename syntax and show little grammatical aberrance, their history and meaning are linked to and strongly embedded within the places they exist. Although The House Paddock, The Straight Stretch, The Deviation, The Mad Mile and The Chimney appear trivial, there is a lot of wisdom in these simple yet effective historical and spatial descriptors. Although transparent due to their known histories, and because these names developed as a pragmatic measure to transform space into place through toponymy, The Chimney and many other Dudley toponyms are strongly lodged and situated in the minds of the people who know them.

Far from official due to their ability to remain locked within family dialects of landscape and their physical isolation behind locked gates, fences, and cattle grids, these markers of language on landscape can be summarised in the statement: 'wisdom sits in places unconsciously'. Where toponymists and anthropologists have ascribed toponymic wisdom to wise people and that this wisdom arises out of and through knowing a place intimately (which naturally happens over time and through interaction with ecologies), a degree of

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wisdom evolves which becomes a part of our identity. This is a type of toponymic identity or the action of realising our self interacting with the land we inhabit and interact with. Within this location and creation of self through toponymy, which can be accessed and described in a toponymic ethnography, there is a humble, unconscious yet 'wise' self that is accessed both by the fieldworker and by the self-aware informant or toponymic knower. Toponyms are one method of accessing this nucleus of history articulated in this wisdom. The knowledge local residents have in the names they know and continue to use lives effectively in connection to their ancestral properties.

My informants do not seem to be conscious of the obscurity and sophistication of the wisdom they possess. Their knowledge implicates a large amount of hidden knowledge linked to creating an expansive, encompassing, and imaginative world out of a few names located in confined, yet congenial circumstances and environments. Small tracts of land, ploughed by their fathers, both limited and vast geographical areas rendered concise and understandable through their fluency and legibility of the cognitive and spatial descriptors of topography.

The family names of and on Dudley Peninsula bear the cultural weight associated with a powerful claim of long established family heritages. Bates, Buick, Lashmar, Neaves, Willson and Trethewey. There are roads that endure this anthroponymic weight, a colonial legacy that is maintained through the confluence of local power and the influence these families still hold. They own large farm allotments, find themselves in positions of authority in the local council, and are respected as 'true blue', born and bred islanders. The family names and happenings outside of the peninsula elude me. I never really met these other people, at no time did I experience their hospitality. This implies little. It merely shows how I too was bounded by and within the insular peninsular.

Autumn came. 2013. I was on Dudley Peninsula again. I spent four weeks with Holly. Pregnant. From our flat behind the Willsons' house near Frenchman's Rock and Backstairs Passage you look across part of Penneshaw known as Snob Hill. It is a pejorative name commemorating where many of the well-off people live. Contemplation Seat is just above Frenchman's Rock. It reminds us of the stolen Tasmanian women brought to Kangaroo Island. Time renders memories obsolete. Names furnish them into language, into our thought systems. We walked on the beach at Hog Bay every evening, witnessing the sunset beyond over Kangaroo Head. People on Dudley Peninsula are rumoured by the other Kangaroo Islanders to have six toes, a jovial allusion to their being a small and closed community, which makes them different, separate. We saw some six-toe footprints in the sand (Figure 3). The Dudley, the names, the insiderness, the insularity, an almost-island.

The view across the Kangaroo Head marina looks out over Shag Rocks and into Eastern Cove, the area fishermen like Nils Swanson used to ply. Shorty Northcott introduced me to Nils. They are both gone now. They knew all the fishing grounds offshore. The Front Door, The Pig Sty Patch, The Left Chimney Patch, Sandra's Hole, Gray's. Autumn came slowly. Holly grew. We left the almost-island. The season turned to winter. This winter, on 28 July 2013, our daughter - Olive Autumn - came. She had already seen the peninsula, felt a part and apart, perceived the almostness, heard us speaking the names.

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Figure 3 – Six toe footprints on Penneshaw Beach (author's photo, 2013)

END NOTES

¹ Kevin 'Shorty' Nortcott, personal communication, Penneshaw, 2009.

² Hartey Wilson, personal communication, Penneshaw, 2009.

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