

Notes

Queen Elizabeth Land

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Received December 2012; first published online 23 January 2013

doi:10.1017/S0032247413000016

ABSTRACT. This note considers the decision by the UK government to rename the southern portion of the Antarctic Peninsula - Queen Elizabeth Land. Named in honour of the UK Head of State, it was intended to be a 'gift' recognising her Diamond Jubilee. However, the 169,000 square mile territory in question is counter-claimed by Argentina and Chile. The circumstances surrounding this declaration, in December 2012, reveals both the contested politics of Antarctic place naming, and a growing willingness of the UK government to strengthen its 'strategic presence' in the Antarctic and wider South Atlantic/Falkland Islands region. This naming event provoked Argentina to issue a formal protest note to the UK Ambassador to Argentina.

Introduction

On 18 December 2012, Queen Elizabeth II visited the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London. It was the last official engagement of her Diamond Jubilee year. Her previous visit to the FCO had occurred in the year of the Falklands conflict, some thirty years earlier. After an official tour, the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, made an announcement while standing next to a large billboard with a map attached to it (Fig. 1). The map in question proved to be an important stage-prop for what was to follow. With the Queen behind him, Hague delivered a short speech, which included the following:

As a mark of this country's gratitude to The Queen for Her service, we are naming a part of the British Antarctic Territory in her honour as 'Queen Elizabeth Land'. This is a fitting tribute at the end of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee year, and I am very proud to be able to announce it as she visits the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The British Antarctic Territory is a unique and important member of the network of fourteen UK Overseas Territories. To be able to recognise the UK's commitment to Antarctica with a permanent association with Her Majesty is a great honour (Hague 2012).

The map in question depicted the newly named 'Queen Elizabeth Land'. Located at the southern portion of the British Antarctic Territory (BAT), the area in question was announced as encompassing some 169,000 square miles, around twice the size of the United Kingdom. This remote area of the BAT was previously unnamed, and is located between the Ronne and Filchner ice shelves, Coats Land, and lies close to the Norwegian sector and specifically Dronning Maud Land. Interestingly, the official press release associated with the naming of Queen Elizabeth Land noted that, 'Her Majesty has been on the throne for 60 of the 104 years since the UK claimed territory in Antarctica in 1908. This includes the whole time it has been known as the British Antarctic Territory' (United Kingdom 2012). It is worth recalling that Queen Elizabeth Islands in

the Canadian Arctic were named after the monarch in the year of her coronation (1953), and Princess Elizabeth Land in the Australian Antarctic Territory was named in honor of the young Princess Elizabeth in 1931. So 'Queen Elizabeth Land' follows earlier royal naming events in both the Arctic and Antarctic.

As noted in an earlier note, these kinds of public events need to be taken seriously, and seen for what they are; embodied performances of polar statecraft (Dodds 2010). Two themes are touched upon in this latest note. First, I address the politics of place naming, in the midst of the contested geopolitics of the Antarctic Peninsula region. The UK is perfectly entitled to declare that this part of the BAT is to be named 'Queen Elizabeth Land' on British maps, but other interested parties may not embrace this new addition to Antarctic toponymy. Second, I believe that this naming act needs to be understood within a new found determination to reinforce the 'strategic presence' of the UK in this most distant but largest overseas territory. An important element in this 'presence' remains the ongoing scientific/logistical labour of the British Antarctic Survey (and clearly the Royal Navy is another significant actor), which in October–November 2012 faced a highly publicised merger with the National Oceanography Centre. Even if the merger has since been called off, one point to emerge from the public debate in the UK Parliament and public media was that the relevant authorities (for example the National Environment Research Council) needed to recognise that the UK possessed territorial, scientific and strategic interests in the Antarctic and South Atlantic.

Place naming and British Antarctic Territory

The Antarctic Place-Names Committee (UK-APC) is a UK committee, which is part of the FCO, and enjoys responsibility for processing and recommending names of particular geographical features and locations within BAT and South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI). The Commissioners of BAT and SGSSI respectively have to approve all recommendations, and thereafter they are published in the BAT and SGSSI Gazetteers respectively. Approved names affecting the BAT will subsequently be published in the Scientific Committee of Antarctic Research's (SCAR) Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica. The UK-APC works closely with other naming authorities, and in particular the equivalent bodies in Norway, Australia, New Zealand, France and the US. It is worth noting that for marine features in international waters (that is more than 12 nautical miles offshore), the International Hydrographic Organization has the requisite authority to name. Within 12 nautical miles of BAT, interested parties are requested to apply to the UK-APC.

The announcement regarding 'Queen Elizabeth Land' usefully reminds us about the importance of place naming in the Antarctic. While the British authorities might not consider this decision provocative, it does incorporate an area of territory counter-claimed by Argentina and Chile. The South American states are not obliged to use it on their maps. However, place names are markers of national sovereignty, and over the decades the UK has contributed nearly 5000 place names to the Antarctic map. The place names applied to BAT, via the BAT Gazetteer reveal a great deal about UK priorities and interests,



Fig. 1 William Hague announces the naming of Queen Elizabeth Land on 18 December 2012. Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/12/22/queen-elizabeth-land-arge_n_2350678.html (accessed 20 December 2012)

acknowledging as they do a coterie of explorers, scientists, monarchs, political leaders, civil servants and, more prosaically, places like Deception Island, Forbidden Plateau and Mount Unicorn (BAT Gazetteer 2012). So while place names help to fix and establish specific locations, they are always caught up in wider circuits of sovereignty and nationalism. When the decision was taken to approve 'Queen Elizabeth Land', it was clearly recognised that naming a part of BAT after the head of state is an attempt to reinforce a sense of ownership and symbolic connection to the UK. As the historian Jerry Brotton noted in his essay in *The Guardian*, 'William Hague's announcement is a wonderfully retro- even quaint – neo-imperial decision. It's a seasonal gift for any wag acquainted with geography and empire' (*The Guardian* (London) 19 December 2012).

More broadly, therefore, place naming in the Antarctic as with other parts of the world (especially those parts which are deeply contested involving intra-state and inter-state schisms) reveal a great deal about geographical naming and power relations (Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009). Moments like the one outside the FCO building on 18 December 2012 should provoke us to ask at least the following questions. Who has the power to name? Why are some names selected for wider recognition and not others? How and where might such naming practices be accepted, resisted and/or simply ignored? Names such as 'Queen Elizabeth Land' not only connect the British and Commonwealth past with the present but also reveal something about the politics of race, gender and colonialism. The Antarctic map, for much of the twentieth century, was filled with place names commemorating in the main white men and women from imperial states such as France and the UK and a fairly select group of other states from the Euro-American world. Queen Elizabeth is not the first queen to be acknowledged in this way, as names like Queen Maud Land attest but it does remind us that women, including heads of states, have been invoked in varied forms of sovereignty manifestations including in the case of Argentina even giving birth to children in Argentine Antarctic Territory (Dodds 2009; Rosner 2009).

Place names in the BAT may not loom large in the everyday lives of British citizens but it is a notable intervention. In the highly contested Antarctic Peninsula region, Argentina, Chile and the UK frequently disagree on place names. A good example is King George Island, which is named Isla Mayo 25 by Argentina and Isla Jorge by Chile. So in one case the name

is directly translated into Spanish by the Chilean authorities while the Argentines decided upon a reference to their national revolution day. In other cases, the Spanish and English place names simply bear no relation to one another. Some examples include: Adelaide Island (Isla Belgrano), George IV Sound (Canal Sarmiento), Seymour Island (Isla Marambio) and Cape Alexander (Cabo Suecia).

To merge or not to merge? British Antarctic Survey and BAT

Hague's announcement regarding 'Queen Elizabeth Land' might seem to be only lightly connected to the strange affair regarding the proposed merger of BAS and NOC. But it might be argued that this naming act is, in small part, an act of re-assertion in the wake of concerns that a consultation document released in June 2012 by the National Environment Research Council (NERC) might have spelt the end of BAS as a distinct scientific/logistical organisation (NERC 2012). The document noted that:

the proposed merger would not change the commitment that NERC has already made to support the current level of UK activity in Antarctica and South Georgia. The merger will enable NERC (via BAS) to continue to perform the roles that it has in supporting UK participation and leadership in the Antarctic Treaty System and in providing the facilities and logistics supporting the delivery of the UK's programme of science in Antarctica (NERC 2012).

But the critics, including environments, parliamentarians, former vice President Gore, ex-BAS staff and former civil servants charged with polar matters, were not reassured (*The Independent* (London) 28 October 2012). Mike Richardson, a former head of Polar Regions section at the FCO, outlined the flawed premises informing the proposed merger. Rejecting claims that there would be research synergies and cost-savings, Richardson also highlighted how the consultation document completely misjudged the geopolitical implications that might follow if BAS' dual role, of generating scientific research and 'effective presence' in BAT, was downgraded (Richardson 2012). As he noted:

The research council has no expertise in polar geopolitics, nor indeed need it or should it have. The notion that it should be the sole arbiter of decisions with implications well beyond its remit is fundamentally flawed.

Any changes to BAS's status, such as the loss of the survey's dedicated director and its world-famous name, would reverberate across the international polar community. Concerns are already rife that NERC's proposals would be perceived as a weakening of the UK government's commitment to Antarctica.

Argentina has always claimed the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and the British Antarctic Territory as part of greater metropolitan Argentina, and maintains a close scrutiny of British activities throughout the area. A perceived weakening in the UK's presence in the region may well encourage Buenos Aires to increase its influence (Richardson 2012).

What followed in October and November 2012 were several parliamentary debates and an evidence hearing of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. The committee proceedings were arguably the most significant. Parliamentarians attached to the Science and Technology Committee heard from the Science and Universities Minister David Willetts and later cross-examined the head of NERC (Duncan Wingham), the chair of NERC council (Ed Wallis) and the interim

director of BAS. Put concisely, the committee's report cast doubt on the claims made by NERC senior management that the merger would lead to synergy-related savings of around £500,000 per year, and that NERC failed to make appropriate consultations over the possible geopolitical consequences of interfering with BAS' activities in BAT, SGSSI and even the Falkland Islands where BAS maintains a forward operating base (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee 2012).

On 2 November 2012, Willetts announced that the merger plan was being dropped and that henceforth there would be a discrete funding line for Antarctic infrastructure and logistics within a ring-fenced science budget. It was noted that, 'The British Antarctic Survey is a national and international asset that delivers world-class environmental science, and this country's strategic presence in Antarctica and the South Atlantic. The UK's commitment to continuing this dual mission in the region is as strong as ever' (cited in Dodds 2012b: 19). While it remains to be seen what, if any, changes will unfold with regard to BAS it has been noticeable that the statement released by the Minister noted 'the strategic presence in Antarctica and the South Atlantic'. In other words, it is recognised that BAT, SGSSI and the Falkland Islands, while legally separate UK overseas territories, are indeed inter-connected and that agencies such as BAS link all three together.

So we might reasonably see the naming of 'Queen Elizabeth Land' as contributing to the reinforcement of this 'strategic presence' by a more symbolic means. It also appears in keeping with the spirit of the June 2012 White Paper addressing 'The Overseas Territories: security, success and sustainability'. Both the UK Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary added forewords to the document and William Hague spoke of being the UK as '...stewards of these assets [vast and pristine environments]. . .The White Paper . . . focuses on the security of the Territories, their economic development and their natural environment' (FCO 2012). As Anglo-Argentine relations have arguably worsened in the last 12–18 months over the Falkland Islands, it has highlighted those other territorial-resource disputes that exist in the SGSSI and the Antarctic Peninsula region.

Conclusion

The naming of 'Queen Elizabeth Land' brings to an end a momentous year for observers of UK polar and South Atlantic related matters. The 100th anniversary of the ill-fated Scott expedition, the 30th anniversary of the Falklands conflict, and the worsening of Anglo-Argentine relations over the Falklands *have* all been heavily profiled in television reports, documentaries, radio shows, newspapers and online media including twitter. For a while, the story pertaining to 'Queen Elizabeth Land' was the top 'tweet' in the UK, for example (Pinkerton and Dodds 2012).

The UK is perfectly entitled to name the southern portion of BAT, 'Queen Elizabeth Land'. But it should also be noted that other countries, including counter-claimants Argentina and Chile, are perfectly entitled to ignore this naming act. While it may be a highly symbolic gesture recognising the Queen's 60th year on the throne, it serves as a useful reminder that place names and maps are implicated in power relations. They are never politically innocent, and reveal in this case a determination to cement further the UK's regal and legal connec-

tions BAT. As past generations of British and other European explorers and political leaders recognised, it was no accident that geographical features such as waterfalls, mountains and vast plateaus were named after monarchs. Europeans, past and present, understood that place naming helps to impose claims to authority on the map and on the ground. When it comes to an area as remote as 'Queen Elizabeth Land', this previously 'un-named area' proved an ideal accomplice to an expression of polar statecraft.

Within a week of Hague's announcement, the Argentine Foreign Ministry issued a formal protest note to the British Ambassador in Buenos Aires, and rejected the UK's 'imperial ambitions' in Antarctica (The Times (London) 22 December 2012). As Hunter Christie would have recognised, 'the Antarctic problem' remains intact (Hunter Christie 1951).

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An Arctic char observed in a glacial Spitsbergen river

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Received July 2013; first published online 20 January 2014

doi:10.1017/S0032247413000879

ABSTRACT. An anadromous Arctic char (male) was recorded in southwestern Spitsbergen, in a very muddy glacial river, in August 2008. This is apparently the first specimen of this species observed in such an unfavourable habitat in Svalbard.

Arctic char (*Salvelinus alpinus*), the only freshwater native fish in Svalbard, is rather common (occurring in more than 100 lakes and watercourses) and is differentiated into two forms: stationary and anadromous (Overrein and Prestrud 2006).

In southern Spitsbergen (south of Van Keulenfjorden), the Arctic char ecology is well investigated and described. There are several papers on this fish in the water bodies of Wedel Jarlsberg Land, north of the Hornsund fjord (for example: Gullestad 1975, Witkowski and others 2008).

The Svartvatnet lake (0.8 km²), connected with the sea by the Lisbetelva river 3.5 km long, is considered to be the only habitat of the Arctic char in Sørkapp Land, the southernmost peninsula of Spitsbergen (south of Hornsund). It was known to the trappers before the establishment of the South Spitsbergen National Park in 1973 as is evidenced by remains of their fishing activity found on the lake in 1982, and recognized by researchers (Gullestad and Klemsten 1997, Kuznierz and others 2008). However, apart from Svartvatnet, the fish was observed by the author in a small lake on the Sergeevskaret pass between the Sergeevfjellet and Lidfjellet mountains, with the water-table at an altitude of ca. 150 m, in the summer seasons 1983 and 1984. This fish does not exist in any other water body of Sørkapp Land, according to observations made during nine summer seasons in the period from 1982 to 2008.

Hence, it appeared extraordinary to discover, on 8 August 2008, that it was also present in the glacial Bungeelva river. A single fish was seen in a very shallow lateral bed and was caught by hand, after walking across this very muddy (silted up) and braided river 250 m from its mouth on the Greenland Sea during low tide. It was a male 46 cm long, completely dazed

because of a huge amount of suspended material in the river water (Figs. 1–4). Two colleagues of the author, Justyna Dudek and Jan Niedzwiecki, were witnesses.

Undoubtedly, the (anadromous) fish had mistaken its way to its maternal stream for spawning during a high tide because the thaw-lakes within the marginal zone of the Bungebreen glaciers (from which the Bungeelva exits) are extremely muddy and making fish life impossible.

According to opinions expressed by some biologists in my discussion, the event described above is a very interesting observation of a natural way of animal colonisation (expansion) to new potential habitats which can appear as a result of glaciers' recession under climate warming. Of course, this unintended trial made by our fish was unsuccessful because the Bungebreen glacier still exists (in spite of shrinking) filling its valley and delivering a huge amount of the suspended material to the new water bodies in its marginal zone and fore-field.

However, even there, the situation could be changed in future, after transformation of today's extensive valley glacier into a smaller new cirque or slope glacier (or glaciers) and thus cleaning the river water. Such a transformation is very probable in the case of further climate warming or stabilising at the present temperature level during the next few decades (Ziaja 2004, 2011a, 2011b).

A more difficult question is what a water body the fish wanted to swim into. According to the cited literature, the nearest habitat of the anadromous Arctic char is in the Revvelva river basin (with the Revvatnet lake) north of Hornsund. However, the thesis that the Svartvatnet lake can not contain any anadromous form of the fish because the Listelva river is 'impassable to ascending fish' due to 'the steep rise in the lower part of the stream' located 'about 50 m before entering Hornsund' (Gullestad and Klemsten 1997) or 'numerous waterfalls' (Kuznierz and others 2008) is rather doubtful in the light of the author's geomorphological and hydrological observations of the river. Moreover, the specimen from Bungeelva (Fig. 2) is very similar to specimens 'from the landlocked population of (...) Svartvatnet' and not to the anadromous ones from Revvatnet (Figs. 3 and 4 in: Kuznierz and others 2008). In addition, the fish from Bungeelva is practically identical with 7–8 male fish caught by the author in Svartvatnet during mid-August 1983, 1984, and 1986. Nevertheless, no fish have been observed in the lower part of Lisbetelva (which is very clean non-glacial river) despite careful explorations during six summer seasons (1982, 1983, 1984, 1986, 2000, and 2008).