

The Australian National Placenames Survey

In **1969** the Australian Humanities Research Council was reconstituted as the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Foundation President Sir Keith Hancock had earlier played an important role in establishing the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, and he judged it important to lay the foundations for long-term cooperative projects that would lead to standard authoritative reference works of Australian scholarship. For example, he strongly supported the Academy in instituting work on a historical dictionary of Australian English, which was eventually published in 1988 as the *Australian National Dictionary*.

In May **1970**, the Council of the Academy set up a national committee, convened by the distinguished historian Prof. Manning Clark, to establish guidelines for research in Australian placenames and coordinate work in this field. These scholars decided that *dictionary* had too strong a linguistic association, and that it would be preferable to work towards a '*survey of Australian placenames on historical principles*'. Its planners judged that it would contribute to the recording of disappearing Aboriginal languages and to a detailed history of the spread of settlement. Work was planned to begin in South Australia under John Tregenza of the University of Adelaide, but when Dr Tregenza had to change these plans the committee settled on northern NSW as a suitable location for a pilot project.

A.T. Yarwood and J.S. Ryan obtained grant funding for **1972-4**, to support a research fellow (John Atchison) and part-time research assistant (Judith Waters). By 1974 the project had developed a basic library of the key literature, and a regional register (by copying placenames by hand from maps onto index cards); the initial methodology and liaison networks with government departments and community organisations were reasonably well established; and John Atchison had written the first draft of his *Guidelines for research in Australian place names*. Both the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales were eager to take over the project on a reduced (state rather than national) scale, but the Academy was unable or unwilling to resolve the matter, and decided to 'rest' the project.

In **1984** the Surveyor General of WA, J.F. Morgan, convened a meeting that led to the formation of the Committee for Geographical Names in Australia. This consists of representatives from state and territory geographical names authorities, and Commonwealth defence and civilian agencies. Since 1998, with New Zealand's admission to membership, it has become the Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia, and the ANPS is now also a full member. Nevertheless, the role of CGNA members is very much technical, being concerned with determining the official form of placenames and the exact location of the features to which they refer. With limited budgets they have been able to do relatively little in respect of the complementary cultural aspects -- research into the history, origin, and meaning of placenames -- which is now the mission of the ANPS.

In **1987** Ian Donaldson reviewed the Australian National Dictionary Project, which after ten years had completed a text for publication, and recommended that an Australian National Dictionary Centre be formed to continue the work, and be mandated to sponsor placename studies.

In October **1990** a meeting of interested parties was convened by W.S. Ramson, Director of the ANDC, and a funding application was made to the Australian Research Council, but rejected --

largely, it is believed, because the project was data-oriented rather than theoretical.

In winter **1995** Bill Noble encouraged a meeting between John Atchison, David Blair, and Prof. Ian Jack of the University of Sydney, and later Prof. Jack hosted a meeting of 25 delegates from academic and government agencies. Under the presidency of Prof. Margaret Clunies Ross the Australian Academy of the Humanities, long-term godparent of the project, obtained funding from the special projects fund of the Australian Research Council's Learned Academies Program.

The National Place Names Project was established at Macquarie University under the directorship of David Blair, and Research Fellow Flavia Hodges was appointed in early **1998** to manage a two-year pilot project developing a methodology and organisational structure for the long-term survey. Following her success in building a network of contacts with interested parties, expanded funding for **2000** allowed the launch of the Australian National Placenames Survey proper and the appointment of Research Associate Susan Poetsch and IT Officer Rob Iverach.

In **2001** a contraction of funding led to staffing cutbacks and a pause in the development of the database, but since **2002** the ANPS has formed part of the Asia-Pacific Institute of Toponymy at Macquarie University, and is assured of base funding from the Vice Chancellor's Millennium Innovations Fund through **2006**. Although now retired, David Blair continues as honorary Director; Flavia Hodges is a part-time Research Fellow; and Clair Hill and Susan Poetsch are Research Associates.

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