Exotic yet often colourless

The imported place names of KwaZulu-Natal

Place names are bound up with the history of a country. Sometimes their etymology and literal meaning are significant; for others, the origin – the reason for the name, or who gave it – is more important. Then there are some for which none of this information is available, but which exist simply as symbols. Some names are fixed in public awareness by one moment in their history: Isandlwana, Majuba, Trustfeed. Place names seem immutable, and yet they are surprisingly slippery. They come and they go; they change in form; places may have more than one name; and the same name may be given to more than one place.

Before considering some aspects of place names in KwaZulu-Natal, a brief explanation of naming categories is necessary. The term 'geographical names', or 'toponyms', covers both natural features and those created by people, the latter including everything from cities down to streets, squares and bridges. In South Africa, there is an official advisory body to the government called the National Place Names Committee (NPNC), currently within the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, which since 1939 has supervised the official approval of names in five categories: towns and suburbs, post offices, railway stations and railway bus halts. The names of features in municipal areas such as streets and parks are the responsibility of local government. There are, of course, many features that fall outside these categories, such as airports, border posts, hospitals, dams, nature reserves and highways, which are named by various government departments. The names of natural features are recorded by the Department of Surveys and Mapping in consultation with the NPNC. Some of the most colourful names – which most immediately reflect fashion and mood – are those given to privately owned entities such as farms and buildings, and settlements spontaneously named by people but not submitted for formal approval. This article looks at some names of towns, suburbs and settlements, railway stations, post offices and topographical features, and includes names that have not been submitted to the NPNC.

Successive European visitors and settlers have left traces of their languages and countries of origin.[1] Though not much trace of the Portuguese remains, they did make their mark with part of the current name for the province. Natal was given its name by Vasco da Gama on Christmas Day, 1497. It was long thought, following Eric Axelson, that da Gama actually gave the name to territory to the south of the present border of the province, but Brian Stuckenberg has recently argued that the

fleet had probably reached the vicinity of Hibberdene.[2] The Voortrekkers kept this name when they called their republic Natalia on 16 October 1840.

Some Portuguese names have shifted. Don Stayt records, 'When survivors of the wreck *St. Benedict* in April 1554 reached the Tugela River on their long journey to Mozambique they called it St. Lucia. The name, however, was transferred to the estuary further north by Manuel Teresreco when he surveyed the coast in 1575.' The name Oro Point comes from the name meaning 'The Downs of Gold' which was first given to St Lucia and then also moved, this time to Kosi Bay. Among the Portuguese names that have not survived are Pescaria ('The Fisheries'), given to what is now Durban by the *St. Benedict* party. Terra dos Fumos ('Land of Smoke'), given to Tongaland by Manuel Perestrelo, and Rio dos Peixos for Cwebeni (Richards Bay).

White settlers and missionaries gave names to new places, hitherto unnamed, and to places that already had Zulu names. On the aesthetics of replacing the original names, Revd Charles Pettman, best known for his dictionary of South African English, *Africanderisms*, had this to say in 1914:

> Travellers and others have often remarked upon the sameness and baldness of much of our South African nomenclature; it is characterised generally by a want of nice and accurate discrimination, by not a little repetition, ... and also by a considerable amount of real ugliness, testifying to a lack of originality, a paucity of idea, and to an almost entire absence of poetic or aesthetic fancy on the part of owners of the soil – some of the native names would have been vastly preferable.[3]

After the Portuguese came the Dutch. The spelling of most Dutch names was changed to conform to Afrikaans orthography in the 1940s, such as Wasbank for Waschbank. Though to be found all over the province, they are particularly prominent in the north. The town of Utrecht was originally called Schoonstroom after the farm on which it was laid out in 1855. A year later it was renamed after the town in the Netherlands. The original meaning of Utrecht, 'Outside meadow', was irrelevant to the symbolism of this change, which was initiated by the local church congregation.

There are distinct differences between the sort of names that Afrikaners and English-speaking settlers gave. One is that places named after people in Afrikaans usually have a generic element added, such as 'drif' in Dejagersdrif, 'berg' in Biggarsberg and 'burg' in Pietermaritzburg, whereas English-speakers preferred to use the personal name on its own, as in Durban and Stanger, and sometimes with the possessive, as in Gillitts (though they also created compound names, such as Pinetown and Fynnland). The Afrikaans practice in fact conforms to the modern rules of the NPNC, based on the international guidelines of the United Nations, that place names based on personal names should include a generic element in order to avoid confusion with an individual. Unfortunately, adding a generic does contribute to the monotony that Pettman complained about, since South Africans do not choose from a very wide repertoire and end up with something unimaginative, whether it be 'drif' in Afrikaans or 'dale' in English.

Another distinctive feature of Afrikaans names is complexity of meaning, such as the use of abstract nouns to convey a statement (notably Vryheid), and names that tell a story. such as Weenen, Berou, Hongerspoort, Wondergeluk and Toggekry (meaning something like 'Got it after all'). Afrikaans nomenclature is also more like Zulu than English in being more descriptive of the landscape. such as Kloof, Kranskop and Boomlaer.

English-speakers were very fond of repeating place names from Britain. Sometimes this would be prompted by a perceived similarity, at other times by nostalgia; less charitably, one might ascribe this practice to arrogance or lack of imagination. From Ireland came Dargle and Donnybrook, and Scotland provided many – Balgowan, Ballengeich, Kelso, Glencoe and Dundee. At least two Welsh names can be found: Cymru itself, near Mtwalume, and Llewellyn, a station near Mount Currie. England is the origin of scores, all with their evocative associations, some well known, others obscure: Malvern, Henley, Sarnia, Mersey, Kearsney. One name from the old country that did not endure was Beaulieu, which the settlers found 'embarrassing' and changed to Richmond. The Commonwealth is marked by Ottawa and Malta.

An American connection is to be found in the names of mission stations founded by Americans. Adams Mission was named after Dr Newton Adams, and Groutville was named after Rev. Aldin Grout of the American Missionary Society, who established his mission in 1844.

German missionaries and settlers brought German place names. New Germany was established in 1848 with its name in German, Neu-Deutschland, which was subsequently translated as Germany and later became known as New Germany. Others that followed include New Hanover (1850) and Wartburg, and personal names (Otto's Bluff and Ahrens). Clausthal was named by Bernard Schwikkard in 1852 after his wife's birthplace in Hanover. It is now commonly called Clansthal, which illustrates how place names can be corrupted. Marburg, though intended by a German mission for German settlers, was settled in 1882 by a party of Norwegians, who then gave a Scandinavian name to Oslo Beach. The Netherlands, already mentioned, is also represented by New Guelderland, settled by eighty Dutch settlers brought out by T. Colenbrander. Roman Catholic missionaries brought Genazzano from Italy, and French Protestant missionaries created the name Mont-aux-Sources.

British names commemorate missionaries and clerics (Colenso), pioneers (Dunn's Reserve, Curry's Post), the sponsors of the 1850 settlers (Byrne, Estcourt, Lidgetton), military men (Richards Bay, after Sir Frederick Richards of the Royal Navy), officials and public figures (Bulwer, Port Shepstone, Escombe, Harding, Frere – the list is long). Royalty gave their names to three of the eight counties of Natal, Victoria, Alfred and Alexandra, and Marina Beach is not nautical, but was named after the Duchess of Kent in the 1930s. A couple of places bear a celebrity's given name, which is odd, considering the formality of Victorian protocol, but perhaps they were adopted because they are so distinctive: Pomeroy (Sir George Pomeroy Colley) and Melmoth (Sir Melmoth Osborn). Ladysmith, everyone knows, is named after Sir Harry Smith's wife, but the Aliwal Shoal is not connected with him in the way that Aliwal North commemorates his victory in India; it was first

recorded by the master of the ship *Aliwal* in 1849. In one odd instance, a postal agency was named after two people, Denny Dalton, the surnames of two Australian prospectors who had a profitable gold mine 84 km from Vryheid.

It is surprising how people's names incorporated in place names can become misspelt over a period of time, in various places such as signboards and the usage of different government departments. In the late 1980s the NPNC rectified the spelling of the names of two passes in the northern part of the province. Lang's Nek had become known as Laing's Nek, even though it was named after William Timothy Lang, who purchased the farm at its base in 1874. Another pioneer was Thomas George Collings, who trekked with his wife from Oudtshoorn. They were the first whites to use the pass that was named after him. However, it was variously spelled as Collin's Pass and Colling's Pass, and this has now been standardised as Collings Pass, without an apostrophe.

Nowadays naming places after people is frowned upon in South Africa, because it is realised that the names can become controversial following a change of regime. Africans as well as whites have done it in the past, and the result is a colourful record of our history; but perhaps the time has come to avoid being needlessly divisive.

Indian languages are hardly represented in South Africa. One name with an Indian element (now obsolete in the home country) is Bombay Heights. There is one purely Indian one, but that was previously spelled incorrectly and had to be corrected in 1994: it is Luxmi, a post office in Pietermaritzburg named after the goddess of wealth. Generally, residential areas formerly reserved for Indians bear English names such as Reservoir Hills, although the situation with street names is very different. Research by Varijakshi Prabhakaran has revealed that although the Indian suburbs of Durban have English names, they include '306 street names of both Hindu and Muslim religious origins and of various [Indian] linguistic groups'.[4]

The military were responsible for names such as the many 'Forts', most of which have gone now, and names for obscure topographical features that were rendered suddenly significant in some campaign, such as Advance Hill, near Colenso. The 45th Cutting and the suburb in which it is located, Sherwood, are two reminders of the 45th Regiment, later known as the Sherwood Foresters, who formed the garrison there from 1843 to 1860. Camperdown has an obscure military connection, named by John Vanderplank after the British naval victory over the Dutch in 1787.

Other naming systems to be found in the province include those derived from shipwrecks. Wrecks gave their names to Ambleside and Fascadale (places near Port Shepstone named after wrecks of 1868 and 1895 respectively), the Annabella Bank, once a hazard at the mouth of Durban Bay (after a wreck of 1856), and the Tenedos Reef and Fort Tenedos (after a naval vessel damaged on the reef in 1879).

A whole informal naming system has been developed by the mountain climbing fraternity for the peaks, cliffs and rock shelters of the Drakensberg, some features of which have become official.

Other naming systems, which are rather rare in the province, are Biblical names such as Berea, and classical names, represented by Verulam, named after the Earl of Verulam, a sponsor of British settlers, whose title came from Verulamium, the

Roman town at St. Albans, and Halcyon Drift, a hamlet near Mount Currie, in which a classical name is incongruously linked with a very South African feature.

Some namers, and the meaning of some names, are unknown. Nobody knows who gave European names to two of the region's best-known geographical features, the Valley of a Thousand Hills and the Drakensberg. According to R.O. Pearse, the name Drakensberg 'was in use well before the Voortrekkers came to Natal in 1837'.[5] A name of unknown origin is Normandien, a pass and postal agency near Newcastle. There are two celebrated names of disputed meaning, Wyebank and Winklespruit. Wyebank could have been named after the River Wye in England, or the 'Y-Bank', an incline on the railway, or it could come from the Afrikaans 'wye' ('wide'). The origin of Winklespruit is hotly contested. It could come from the store ('winkel', as some people think the Zulus would have called it)[6] which Sydney Turner set up on the beach in 1875 to sell the contents of the wrecked schooner *Tonga* that he had bought the rights to salvage; or it could be derived from the periwinkles to be found in the lagoon. During the rule of the National Party government this became one of the place names that were a focus of conflict between English and Afrikaans, the other disputes being over the name Voortrekkerstrand, which was given to the post office at Munster on the South Coast, and the rival claims of Arniston and Waenhuiskrans in the Cape.

While the origins of some well-known places are forgotten, there have also been names, and even settlements, that were stillborn or shortlived. The site of Port Edward was bought by T.K. Pringle, who called it Banner Rest, where he planned to 'lay down his banner'. There he laid out a township which it was proposed to call Kennington, after his name, Ken, but when it was established in 1924 it was renamed in honour of Edward, Prince of Wales. Winder was a name originally proposed for the new town of Ladysmith, after a trader, George Winder, but Lt Governor Pine would not allow it as he had already decided to honour the wife of the Governor of the Cape Colony. Springfield was the original name for Winterton, which also had to give way for the honouring of a VIP. Eugenie, named after the Empress of France, was to have been a port that the New Republic planned to establish at St. Lucia, but nothing came of it. In the 1960s Westlands and Morelands were alternatives suggested for renaming Cato Manor (just as Sophiatown was changed to Triomf), but they did not stick.

Two settlements of the immigrants of 1849–1851 that are ghost towns today are York and Byrne. Blackburn was a hamlet on the south bank of the Umhlanga River, north of Red Hill, that sprang up when a bridge was erected there in 1872, but it is gone today. A town that has died in recent years is Burnside, which was still flourishing in the 1950s while the coal mine operated there.

Countless names that were given in one language have been replaced by names in another. This is most obviously the case with Zulu names which were replaced by the 'official' names put in place by Afrikaans- and later English-speakers. In many cases, the old names have not fallen into disuse, leading to a system of dual names which is well known and recognised informally. Most Natalians know that Thekwini (or Thekweni) is Durban. Where a new town was established with a non-Zulu name, Zulu-speakers have often developed their own version, such as Efilidi

for Vryheid. Since there are many dual place names in African languages and English or Afrikaans in South Africa, and certain pairs in English and Afrikaans are already recognised by the NPNC, thus creating a precedent, it will be incumbent on the NPNC in the future to develop a policy on the recognition of these names that is feasible, acceptable to all the people of the country, and in keeping with United Nations guidelines on multiple naming.

In addition to English replacing Zulu, English replaced Afrikaans when Houtboschrand gave way to Curry's Post. However, there have also been instances of the power of colourful Zulu outweighing effete English names. An attempt at the time of Captain Gardiner's map of 1835 to call the Umbilo River the Avon failed; and although the township known as South Barrow, on the south bank of the Umkomaas River, kept that name from 1862 to 1924, it was eventually superseded by Umkomaas. The township of Ixopo, founded in 1878, was renamed Stuartstown after the resident magistrate, Marthinus Stuart, was killed at the Battle of Ingogo, but it later resumed its Zulu name (albeit in a form which is currently disputed).

Naming patterns since 1977

Place names are not simply part of the early history of the province. Names for all sorts of new entities continue to be given, and occasionally names are corrected or changed. Some of these are officially recognised and recorded by the NPNC, while others are recorded by other government agencies or remain unofficial. Names approved by the minister on the recommendation of the NPNC include existing names, such as those of suburbs, approved for the first time or given to new entities, particularly post offices. The last published list, which covers the period 1977 to 1988, gives useful data on naming patterns in that period.[7]

In the twelve years 1977–88 the Minister approved 1 274 names, of which 111 were in Natal and KwaZulu. The proportion of names in English, Afrikaans and other languages compared to names in African languages in the province was fractionally more than the national proportion, namely forty-seven per cent to fifty-three per cent. Of the non-African names, eighty-two per cent were English, eleven per cent Afrikaans, and seven per cent 'other' (which includes made-up names).

The history of development in the region during that period is reflected in the number of names approved for entities in a particular town. Richards Bay received two (Birdswood and Brackenham), and so did Pietermaritzburg (Lotusville and Mysore Ridge). By far the largest number for a single town went to Newcastle, which received twenty-two new suburbs, racially segregated residential areas and post offices. The kinds of names chosen for Newcastle reflect the tastes that dominated the national scene at that time: seven 'parks', two 'villes', a 'rand', an ugly coinage (Ferrax), Lennoxton, Schuinshoogte, Vlam, and a string of bland clichés: Bergview, Fairleigh, Fernwood, Rickview, Riverside, Signal Hill, Sunny Ridge and Sunset View. The 'parks' are where the commemoration of people is to be found, in names such as Barry Hertzogpark and Viljoen Park.

The rest of the province saw its share of similarly nondescript names: Ashwood, Brookdale, Forest Haven, Palmview, Waterberg Wood, Westmead. Local colour was added to the conventional elements in Caneside and Mangrove Park. Ballitoville

bucked the trend by officially shedding the 'ville' part. 'Modern' coinages comprised Arbex, Conmarine, Durmail and Prospecton. Indian names could be spotted in Lotusville and Shastri Park, and Afrikaans, true to form, produced a picturesque complex name, Meer en See.[8]

The next published list of place names in the province is one published in 1992 by a non-governmental organisation, the Human Rights Commission. Entitled *The Two South Africas: A People's Geography*, it was an attempt to identify and map the 'African, Indian and Coloured townships in South Africa'.[9] The list is probably incomplete, especially when it comes to informal settlements. In Natal and KwaZulu, thirty-one per cent of the 143 names are in English, Afrikaans and other languages, and sixty-nine per cent in Zulu. Most of those with non-Zulu names are townships that were assigned to Indian and Coloured people, but there are a few notable African ones as well, such as Limehill (once notorious as a 'dumping ground') and Taylor's Halt.

The landmark year of 1994 saw the publication of a comprehensive list of informal settlements in KwaZulu-Natal, painstakingly collated from information gathered for a research project on the subject that was undertaken by the Steering Committee on Informal Settlement Development in Natal.[10] It contains 230 names, of which 118, or fifty-one per cent, are in English, Afrikaans and languages other than Zulu. Although these settlements are occupied almost entirely by Africans, this proportion of non-Zulu names is higher than it was for all the official names approved from 1977 to 1988. An explanation could be that many of the names by which the informal settlements were recorded are simply descriptive of their situation, such as Duffs Road Station, Effingham Quarry, Clare Hills Dump, Stanger Municipal Dump and Stop 8, and the researchers have used English for this. Cold official designations are also given in English, such as Block AK, Buffer Strip, DD Section, and Ixopo Transit Camp. Included in this number are also all those that have alternative names in Zulu, it being a feature of informal settlements that many of them have several names.[11]

The names of these settlements reflect a naming process that had been taking place over several decades. Many of them are not original, but take their name from existing nearby places, of which farms or the names of the farmers are typical: Brooks Farm, Glade Farm, Nenes Farm, Ngcobo's Farm, Pakkies Plaas. Missions (such as Reichenau Mission and Springvale Mission), a factory (Sarmcol), and the names of well-known places such as Mountain View and Plessislaer are used. Hence old names have been given a new lease on life, as illustrated by the Dutch spellings of Valsch River and Welbedacht.

A feature which is common among informal settlements in South Africa is the transfer of place names from elsewhere, even when they are names which most people would think had unpleasant associations. In KwaZulu-Natal there are at least two like this: Soweto, situated near Inanda, and White City (which is a section of Soweto in Gauteng as well as another township at Saldanha Bay), situated near Nongoma.

It is difficult to tell the origins of some of the names without undertaking field studies to obtain oral evidence, but a couple that obviously show that they were

named by their inhabitants are Tin Town (also known as Gamalakhe) near Port Shepstone, and Zig-Zag, a community of 200 people near Pinetown.

The names of informal settlements have not been submitted to the NPNC unless they are part of existing residential areas that have been submitted. However, developments in the 1990s are contributing to the official recording of these names elsewhere. Both the Central Statistical Service and the Independent Electoral Commission are mapping and recording all residential areas, and these developments are monitored by the Department of Surveys and Mapping as part of its ongoing updating of the official maps of the country. The SA Post Office has declared its intention of ensuring that every citizen gets an address, and it is making rapid progress in establishing post offices all over the country which will make this possible. This is reflected in the lists of names which have been submitted to the NPNC for official approval since the beginning of 1994.[12]

The recent lists of the NPNC also reflect in other ways the transition that the country is experiencing. It will be recalled that the NPNC currently has jurisdiction over the names of towns and suburbs, post offices, railway stations and railway bus halts. New legislation is expected to alter these, particularly extending jurisdiction to the names of natural features, and giving the Commission (as it will be called) powers to be more proactive over issues such as recording names regardless of whether they have been submitted, and reviewing undesirable names. Clarity over the role of provincial and local governments in the recognition of place names will also be ensured.

In the meantime, almost the only category of name that has been submitted since 1994 is that of post offices, which are being set up at an unprecedented rate. The SA Post Office works closely with the NPNC to ensure that the precepts of the NPNC and the United Nations Guidelines are observed, ensuring that local communities are consulted and invited to suggest names for their new post offices. The result is that the new names reflect local demographics rather than ideology, as happened in the past. There has been a drop in the proportion of new names in English, Afrikaans and languages other than African languages since 1988: of the sixty-one new names approved for KwaZulu-Natal between March 1994 and January 1998, they represent thirty-nine per cent. Of those, the proportion of English names has dropped slightly from eighty-two per cent to seventy-six per cent, and the proportion of Afrikaans names has also dropped, from eleven per cent for 1977–88 to eight per cent.

Among the new post offices are several with bilingual names: Buffelsdale, Tugela Mouth, Umvoti Slopes, KwaPett, and perhaps Folweni could be included here, since it is derived from the Africanised form of the Afrikaans word 'voor', meaning 'furrow'. The old favourites among generic terms seem to be dwindling: there is only one 'ville' (Copesville), one 'view' (Landview, in Pietermaritzburg) and, remarkably, no 'park'.

The most interesting development arises from the new policy of the Post Office to locate post offices in shops and shopping centres. Previously, the NPNC applied a strict rule that official place names could not have a commercial connection because that provided free advertising, but it has had to concede that although the names of

shopping malls and shops may be regarded as commercial, it makes sense to the public that the post offices bear the same name. Some of these names are quite peculiar, and might not have found favour with the language purists of the NPNC in the old days, but the new spirit of tolerance in the country has found its way here as well. And so there are South Africans whose address in future will be a box number at Four Three or Hyper by the Sea – a far cry from the cosy Paddocks and Inglenooks that the residents of the province created for themselves in the past.

NOTES

1. The historical information in this article is drawn largely from *Where on Earth?* by Don Stayt.
2. Brian Stuckenberg, 'Vasco da Gama and the Naming of Natal', in *Natalia 27*.
3. Reverend Charles Pettman, *Notes on South African Place Names*, p. 37.
4. Varijakshi Prabhakaran, A Study of Indian Names for Streets in Durban, *Nomina Africana*, p. 5.
5. R.O. Pearse, *Barrier of Spears*, p. i.
6. The word *i(li)vinkili* is given as an alternative to the Zulu word *isitolo* for 'shop' in both the *English and Zulu Dictionary* by Doke, Malcolm and Sikakana and the *Zulu-English Dictionary* by Doke and Vilakazi.
7. Department of National Education, *Official Place Names in the Republic of South Africa, Approved 1977–1988*.
8. For an analysis of national trends during this period, see E.R. Jenkins, P.E. Raper and L.A. Möller, *Changing Place Names*, pp. 63-68.
9. Roddy Payne and Philip Stickler, *The Two South Africas*.
10. The list was compiled by Rob Evans for *Here to Stay*, edited by Doug Hindson and Jeff McCarthy, pp. 215-230.
11. For an analysis of national trends in the naming of informal settlements, see E.R. Jenkins *et al.*, *Changing Place Names*, pp. 70-76.
12. Minutes of the National Place Names Committee, 1994-1998.

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