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SURVEY UNDERTAKEN ON ACCESS TO CANADIAN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES, AND IN PARTICULAR ON POTENTIAL USERS' NEED FOR A NATIONAL GAZETTEER

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Although Canada has since 1952 produced various gazetteers on a regional basis, to date no one volume national gazetteer (as recommended by UN resolutions) is available. A survey was undertaken to obtain feedback from a sample of users of geographical names data, on the production of such a volume. A high level of interest was expressed in both a paper copy and a CD-ROM gazetteer. This paper describes briefly the objectives, development and content of the survey, as well as providing a general idea of the results.

SURVEY UNDERTAKEN ON ACCESS TO CANADIAN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES, AND IN PARTICULAR ON POTENTIAL USERS' NEED FOR A NATIONAL GAZETTEER

Helen Kerfoot and Barbara Farrell¹

1. Introduction

Since 1952, Canada has produced a variety of gazetteers, but so far all have covered but one province, or in the early days only part of a province, rather than the whole country being included in one volume. UN resolution I/4(E) emphasizes the need for such a national gazetteer as a fundamental tool in achieving goals of international standardization of geographical names. To respond to these needs, the current strategic plan for Canada's geographical names programme includes provision for the production of a "concise" national gazetteer in printed form and possibly also a national gazetteer in electronic form, before 1997.

Before producing a national gazetteer the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (CPCGN) decided it was necessary to obtain feedback from users and potential users of geographical names data. The CPCGN first wished to confirm the need for a national gazetteer and then to obtain user preferences relevant to information content and format. In addition, it was decided to seek information on access to electronic data at the same time. To gather these views from a reasonable sample of users of geographical names data it was decided to undertake a sample survey by mailing out a questionnaire.

In conjunction with Barbara Farrell, Map Librarian, Carleton University, Ottawa (also a member of the CPCGN's Advisory Committee on Canadian Digital Toponymic Services), the CPCGN Secretariat prepared and circulated a letter and a 24-item questionnaire to 300 individuals, who represented a specially-targetted audience of likely geographical names users. It must be realized that this survey was but a sample suited to the time and finances available, and in no way was to be regarded as appropriate for detailed statistical analysis. Rather, the survey was intended to provide some qualitative feedback from potential clients before we commenced the production stages of a national gazetteer.

In this paper some ideas on the survey itself, its results and interpretation will be presented. For those interested in a fuller account the CPCGN Secretariat would be pleased to provide (free of charge) any or all of the following documents:

- Covering letter and questionnaire as mailed out (in English and in French) (8 pages);
- Two reports written by Barbara Farrell:
 - Interim Report to the CPCGN - (4 pages)
(this contains the rationale for the survey, an outline of the procedures, objectives, an overview of the survey questions and the objectives they addressed, and a summary of the process of developing the questionnaire);

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- Report to the CPCGN, September 1993 - (10 pages) (this contains information on respondents, responses to survey questions, and conclusions in relation to the "Vision" adopted by the CPCGN for long-term toponymic services).

Another report (7 pages) on comments provided by respondents was compiled for in-house use.

Information contained in the above reports is used in full, or is paraphrased, within the following text.

2. Objectives of the survey

The survey was developed to answer three major questions:

- (1) Would a single-volume national gazetteer in printed form (as being developed by the CPCGN and in keeping with United Nations guidelines) meet the needs of reference users, including cartographers, librarians, educators, and researchers?
- (2) What information content would be required and what would be the desirable format specifications for this publication?
- (3) With the production of a national gazetteer (particularly a "concise" one) would the need for digital geographical names products and services still exist? If so, in what format?

During 1992 considerable thought had been given by the CPCGN Secretariat and various CPCGN members to the production of a single-volume national gazetteer. As the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base contains over 350 000 records of officially approved names, a single volume containing all current names appeared to be too large and perhaps of overwhelming detail, if all names of very small features were included. Hence production of a "concise" volume, containing up to 40 000 names was considered a more practical product. The process of selection of names for such a Canadian volume has previously been described in a paper to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in 1991 (Working Paper No. 62). From the survey questionnaire we were preparing it was important for us to receive comments from respondents on the usefulness of such a "concise" volume.

3. Development of the questionnaire

The development of the questionnaires can be summarized briefly as follows:

- (1) Preparation of initial draft
 - Review of methodologies and structures of existing questionnaires
 - Listing precise information needed and compiling preliminary questions
 - Sequencing questions and formatting the questionnaire
- (2) Review of the draft and preparation of the final version
 - Review, evaluation and revision of the draft (based on peer evaluation and test completion of questionnaires)
 - Ascertaining adherence to specifications and registration procedures for government surveys

- Review of question clarity, intent and sequence by governmental survey specialist
- Final revision
- Preparation of covering letter

(3) Identification of recipients and mail out

- Compilation of a matrix of recipient groups - to cover such variants as:
 - outside Canada/inside Canada
 - location within Canada
 - language groups (English/French)
 - type of affiliation (education, government, business, self-employed)
 - occupation (e.g. administrator, map producer, teacher, writer, researcher, map dealer, librarian, translator, genealogist, media worker)
- Decision on size of sample in each group
- Identification of individuals to be recipients; compiling a data base of addresses
- Mail out with return envelopes or instructions on response by fax

A total of 300 questionnaires were sent out. As a few were returned as undeliverable, these were mailed again to new recipients. About four weeks were provided before the deadline for responses. About seven months had to be allowed for the whole process from initiating the questions to production of the final report.

4. Content of the questions

The final version of the questionnaire (available in English or French) contained 24 questions spread over seven pages. Most questions required the checking of one or several boxes to indicate the response selected from several provided; nearly all allowed for the addition of personalized comments as part of the response. The questions were divided into four main categories to make the process as clear as possible for those completing the survey.

- (1) The first seven questions were designed to provide background information on the respondent's current use of geographical names information - sources, frequency, accessibility to current volumes of the *Gazetteer of Canada Series* (i.e. volumes issued by province/territory), and perceived usefulness of a one-volume gazetteer.
- (2) Questions 8 to 16 pertained to the content and format of a concise gazetteer of Canada: purposes for which the respondent needs the information; attribute fields that are important; user preferences regarding page size, maximum number of pages, type of cover, size and style of print; opinions on desirable introductory material and the inclusion of reference maps.
- (3) Questions 17 to 19 were included to obtain information on the requirement for geographical names in digital form, i.e. whether it was required, search capabilities desired, and the media appropriate for distributing the digital data. Two other questions were included to gather information on (a) the degree of importance attached by the users to the currency of data, the cost, and comprehensive coverage; and (b) geographical names users' comments in general about digital data and gazetteers.
- (4) The last three questions provided a picture of the respondent as part of particular user category, based on their occupation and the type of organization for which they work.

5. Results

At the time the responses were originally tabulated we had received 1 letter and 145 responses (including 76 with individualized comments). Subsequently, three more responses were received. Overwhelmingly general support was expressed for the venture of producing a one-volume national gazetteer. The results are presented here in a very general summary form.

(1) Respondents:

<i>Location:</i>	Canada	76%	<i>Language</i>	English	82%
	World	18%		French	18%
	Unidentified	6%			
<i>Affiliations:</i>	Government	37%	Education	36%	
	Business	21%	Other	6%	
<i>Occupations:</i>	Librarians (government, academic, public, map)			43%	
	Research and communication			26%	
	Map making and sales			21%	
	Teaching and education administration			10%	

(2) Consultation of geographical names

(a) Reference

- A high percentage of respondents (69%) do use the published volumes of the *Gazetteer of Canada Series* and significant use is made of the *Répertoire toponymique du Québec* (38%)
- Microfiche versions of the gazetteer have relatively low usage (12%)
- Use of other lists (40%) suggested a significant need for more products

(b) Searches

- Over 90% of respondents had consulted geographical names references once or more during the past month
- 84% searched less than 10 names on each occasion, and were looking for a reference resource rather than downloading capabilities

(c) Access

- Very few respondents had their own gazetteer volumes and 61% had to access the gazetteers through a library

(d) Volumes

- Most users did not have a difficulty consulting twelve separate provincial/territorial volumes, but they did comment about such problems as incomplete sets, scattered volumes, the necessity to search several volumes for the appropriate information, and consistency of content between volumes

(e) Concise Gazetteer of Canada

- The vast majority of respondents (>90%) would either recommend or buy it for their work or public library - however, concern was expressed regarding the restriction of content in a "concise" gazetteer

(f) Main use

- Of all respondents, 95% consult gazetteers to assist users of cartographic materials; over 60% use them for historical or genealogical research, or to make

or revise printed maps; over 50% of consultations were for travel or recreation, for the collection of cartographic materials and in literary work, translation, legal documentation and the media

(3) Content and format of a Concise Gazetteer

(a) Fields of data

A variety of data elements are being considered for inclusion in a concise national gazetteer. Potential users ranked possible fields as follows:

- Correct spelling or correct form of the name
- Province or territory in which a place is situated
- Latitude/longitude
- National Topographic System map sheet (1:50 000 in most cases)
- Type of feature
- Variant forms of a name
- Administration sub-division
- Population
- History of the name
- Elevation

(b) Format

- 65% of respondents were satisfied with the 8.5" x 11" format
- Between 500 and 1000 pages were favoured by the largest group (59%)
- Over 40% felt that a soft cover was acceptable to keep the cost low
- 70% favoured a Times Roman serif type style
- 68% favoured 9 point type - however, a variety of comments showed that there were strong advocates for sans-serif type and/or larger type size

(c) Introductory material

Six items received the highest support:

- Instructions on how to use the gazetteer
- Agencies responsible, principles of naming and name changes
- Glossary in English and French
- Explanation of data selection
- Explanation of the National Topographic System
- Explanation of administrative divisions

(d) Maps

- Over 50% of the respondents wished to see at least one map included - the majority favoured one map showing a selection of named places
- A map folded in a pocket was more popular than one that folds out

6. Conclusion

Quite clearly respondents to the survey expressed a high level of interest in a concise gazetteer. While recognizing that everyone does not agree on the content of a "concise" version, we are confident that it will fill a very useful role for reference purposes both in Canada and abroad. Individual comments, as well as numerical data, will help us to focus on the client as we move into production of our one-volume paper copy national gazetteer.

In addition, there was considerable support for a CD-ROM gazetteer of Canada, a product which we hope will also be a reality in the next couple of years.