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The treatment of non-toponymic text on national
topographical mapping

Submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland

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The treatment of non-toponymic text
on national topographical mapping

The purpose of this paper is to urge that a clear typographical distinction should be made on national topographical mapping between those items of text on the face of the map which are proper names (toponyms) and those which serve other purposes, usually as designations or descriptions of particular features. The first group comprises all the geographical names and usually constitutes the great majority of the text appearing on a map. The second group embraces a range of descriptive terms and phrases, in full or abbreviated form, frequently used in cases where a conventional sign is unavailable, inappropriate or inadequate: examples in English include "Monument", "Tower", and "Cemy" (for "Cemetery").

It is sound cartographic practice to differentiate between the ways in which these two types of text are presented on maps, since this contributes to the clarity of the information content and the elimination of possible ambiguity. It is of especial benefit to users whose native language is different from that used on the mapping, and who therefore experience particular difficulty in differentiating genuine toponyms from non-toponymic text.

The differentiation may be achieved in one of two ways: a specific type-face may be used for non-toponymic text, or all such text may be written with initial lower-case letters. For certain languages, where generic terms or other elements of some toponyms are in any case properly written with an initial lower-case letter, the second option would not be suitable since it would not provide a sufficient distinction between the two types of text.

A statement that such a differentiation is made, and an explanation of the method used to achieve it, would constitute a valuable additional paragraph in each nation's "Toponymic Guidelines".