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NAMES IN ANTARCTICA,  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Submitted by Roger L. Payne, Executive Secretary  
U. S. Board on Geographic Names  
United States of America

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The United States has conducted programs to select names of features in Antarctica for cartographic products since 1941. With the recreation of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names in 1947, it was found useful to continue those efforts through the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (ACAN), an auxiliary committee comprised of experts in fields of Antarctic science, cartography, and geography. This body has worked effectively to provide names for features in this area to support a variety of purposes, particularly scientific research and the production of maps.

In 1988, an interim gazetteer of names in Antarctica was published by the United States to supplement the comprehensive gazetteer published in 1980, with approximately 1,000 officially approved additional names. This interim gazetteer provided names and geographical coordinates and included variant (unofficial) names as well. A new comprehensive gazetteer of Antarctica with more than 13,000 names, has been published (1994) in a similar format as the 1980 edition including name, geographical coordinates, physical description, and reason for naming. Variant (unofficial) names are alphabetically cross-referenced to the official name, and additionally, are also listed with the official name.

All of the information in the newly published gazetteer is maintained in a digital file as part of the Geographic Names Information System of the United States and is readily accessible for analysis and export to various media. This digital file

will be available as a digital gazetteer (compact disk) later in 1994. The requisite software for searching, analyzing, and exporting information will be packaged as an integral part of the disk. Furthermore, the data will be enhanced to include map sheet reference and year of recognition by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names.

The United States continues to collaborate with other nations active in naming Antarctic features. At present, ACAN's most active collaborators are the British Antarctic Place Names Committee, the New Zealand Geographical Names Board and the Australian names authority. Naming in Antarctica, as in other places subject to exploration by several national research teams, often exhibits variations in nomenclature. For example, one nation may name a feature but never record it officially. Years later another nation may apply a different name; and additionally, a second nation may modify the original name by translation. It is possible that a third nation will find only the translated name and approve it. ACAN attempts to record all such names. Acting on the recommendation of ACAN, the U.S. Board will approve one, according to its principles and policies, but list others as variants. Approval of a geographical name by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names authorizes the name for official use by the United States Federal Government. The designation of a geographical name as a variant form or as an approved name is not intended to be either implicitly disparaging or prescriptive for other nations.

The basic goal of the Board is to provide standardized names that English-language users may readily understand. To achieve this goal, ACAN applies a set of rules and procedures for approving names in Antarctica. Decisions on names are based

upon priority of application, appropriateness, and the extent to which usage has become established. Names of physical features are generally grouped into first, second, and third order divisions according to the geographical extent or historical significance of the feature. Commemorative geographical names are assigned based upon a published scheme relating the order of feature to level of individual contribution. Non-personal commemorative names, such as for events, ships, and organizations as well as descriptive names may be applied to any order of magnitude with which there is feature association.

Generally, based upon trends of use, favorable consideration is given by ACAN to names displaying brevity, simplicity, and lack of ambiguity. Therefore, the full name and/or title of individuals is not considered appropriate. Non-personal names that are unduly long will be shortened into some meaningful form. English generics are preferred, and translated names will be avoided, although well-established translated forms may be considered. An English generic may be substituted or added for a foreign generic term in the case of non-personal, non-English, single word names that include a generic or definite article. Finally, romanization systems approved the by U.S. Board on Geographic Names are used to transliterate names from non-Roman writing systems. These systems and policies have proven to be extremely relevant and useful in standardizing the geographical nomenclature of Antarctica.

As a member of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), the United States is involved in many programs affecting that continent. At a meeting of SCAR in June of 1992, the United States agreed to support a new SCAR activity to develop a central repository of Antarctic names publications. The United States

believes the publication of a compendium of approved names would be valuable, but it does not endorse any plan to create an international authority to select or approve names, at least until such a plan is formulated, analyzed, and approved by all interested parties. In addition, all nations with established naming programs for Antarctica must be invited to participate in such an activity. ACAN recommends that nations engaged in naming features in Antarctica fully exchange reports of their activities and also suggests that nations follow comparable principles, policies, and procedures for naming features.