

GENERIC TERMS USED IN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN BOARD ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES GAZETTEERS OF COUNTRIES IN THE AMERICAS SOUTH OF THE UNITED STATES*

Report presented by the United States of America

This list of geographical terms¹ was compiled from the Board on Geographic Names gazetteers covering the countries of Central and South America and the Caribbean. Terms from Mexico, Portugal and Spain have been added. The gazetteers, produced under the direction of the United States Board on Geographic Names, contain place names recommended for official use by agencies of the United States Government. The generic term is part of the recommended name; other gazetteer data — designation, co-ordinates, and area number — are for information purposes.

The first column is the alphabetic list of generic terms in several languages. The second is the list of designator terms used to describe features named by each generic. The third indicates gazetteers in code in which each designator is used with the generic shown. The code employed is one recently set up for use by agencies of the United States Government. *BW* and *FW* were added to replace codes for individual islands of the Lesser Antilles because of the nature of the gazetteers concerned.

The list of generics in Dutch, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and several Indian languages offers an opportunity for the comparison of terms. Words derived from French and Portuguese appear along Spain's frontiers; in Brazil, derivatives from Spanish turn up in the southern and western marches, terms like "arroyo", "banhado", and "coxilha". In the West Indies, French and Spanish generics are often retained in English-speaking islands, reflecting earlier sovereignties and settlement. Some Danish words ("baek", "strand") survive in the United States Virgin Islands. Some similar terms, though, are less adaptable to rationalizing, such as the Portuguese "sapal", the Colombian "zapal" and the "zibal" in British Honduras.

Unfortunately, the list cannot show the area of coverage or the frequency of usage of the words. Gazetteers are based on best available mapping, and often complete coverage could be found only in small-scale cartography when the gazetteer was compiled. That for Brazil, for example, was provided by a map on the scale of 1:1,000,000, whereas Portugal was covered at 1:25,000, and many types of features named on the larger scale maps cannot be shown on the smaller-scale ones. As mapping improves, added detail results in an increased volume of names, including generic terms. Then, too, such cultural features as named mines and bridges were not included in earlier gazetteers. And frequency of use cannot even be estimated without reviewing the file or publication entry by entry, because the glossary of each gazetteer does

not indicate how many times each generic is used — some generics may have been used only once.

A generic term is defined in dictionaries either by means of equivalent words or in a statement telling what sort of feature it is applied to and the characteristic that sets the sort of feature in question apart from similar sorts. This is a standard meaning and must be accepted as correct. But generics in place names are often applied to features of a different but related sort — sometimes related only in the eye of the person doing the naming. The application of these words cannot be standardized. Hills are called mountains, and mountains hills. Ponds are called lakes, and lakes ponds. Brazil's long escarpment, the Serra do Mar, probably did look like a mountain range from the deck of a ship off shore. Saltwater inlets called rivers in the shores of Chesapeake Bay seemed perhaps to be river mouths from boats in the bay. The North Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Black Sea are each less than half the size of the Gulf of Mexico or Hudson Bay. The Aral Sea is smaller than Lake Superior. What is a sea, a gulf, a bay, or a lake?

In gazetteer compilation the generic term is accepted as found. The choice of a designator, though, rests primarily on evidence from maps showing the feature itself; the commonly understood meaning is of secondary consideration, though it is always in mind. Features named on modern large-scale map sheets are easier to identify, because cartographic programmes have been developed in the Americas, and mapping has been much improved since the gazetteer programme was begun.

More complete glossaries are needed to cope with the secondary uses mentioned above. Certainly it is impossible to include in a glossary every conceivable application of each generic term. But as an aid to the selection of more accurate designator terms and thus to the production of better gazetteers, it is clear that the generally accepted meaning of the terms used within each country should be understood by the compilers. Terms derived from Indian words deserve particular attention, because most are restricted in use to one country. In other cases, generics are applied to different features from one country to another, as illustrated by the contrasting use of "pampa" in Argentina and in Guatemala, or by the use of "creek" to mean a freshwater stream in the United States and a saltwater inlet in the United Kingdom. Another interesting point is the difference between one land and another in the types of features named. The word "slope", well understood and widely used in English, rarely appears in a geographical name in North America; on the Iberian Peninsula and in Latin America the general equivalents, "falda", "umbria" and "solana" are found as parts of place names, and a distinction is even made between sunny and shady slopes. They should be as important in North America as elsewhere, as landmarks and crop-bearing tracts. The "bight" has been so named for centuries on coasts of English-speaking countries, but no word seems to exist in

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¹ Copies of this list are available, for reference, at the Map Collection of the United Nations.

Spanish or Portuguese to distinguish the bight from any other bay or cove. It has been found advisable to define many of the words used as designators as meaning

particular things in particular gazetteers. More glossaries of geographical terms have been published, and there is a need for more still to keep pace with modern mapping.

Annex I

COUNTRIES WHOSE GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS ARE REPRODUCED IN THE LIST

Country	Code	Date	Entries	Remarks
Argentina	AR	1968	48,300	
Bolivia	BL	1955	18,800	
Brazil	BR	1963	62,500	
British Guiana (Guyana)	GY	1954	3,200	in <i>The Guianas</i>
British Honduras	BH	1956	2,000	
British Lesser Antilles	BW	1955	2,600	in <i>British West Indies and Bermuda</i>
British West Indies and Bermuda		1955	10,500	omitting Bermuda and The Bahamas
Canal Zone	PQ	1969		in <i>Panama and the Canal Zone</i>
Chile	CI	1967	39,700	
Colombia	CO	1965	27,000	
Costa Rica	CS	1956	3,700	
Cuba	CU	1963	44,000	
Dominican Republic	DR	1957	14,000	
Ecuador	EC	1957	14,850	
El Salvador	ES	1956	4,860	
French Guiana	FG	1954	2,800	in <i>The Guianas</i>
French West Indies	FW	1957	3,250	
Guatemala	GT	1965	14,900	
The Guianas		1954	8,500	
Guyana (British Guiana)	GY	1954	3,200	in <i>The Guianas</i>
Haiti	HA	1956	3,000	
Honduras	HO	1956	19,000	
Jamaica	JM	1955	4,450	in <i>British West Indies and Bermuda</i>
Mexico	MX	1956	53,000	
Netherlands Antilles	NA	1952	600	
Nicaragua	NU	1956	3,800	
Panama and the Canal Zone	PN	1969	19,000	
Paraguay	PA	1957	2,300	
Peru	PE	1955	24,100	
Portugal	PO	1961	25,700	
Puerto Rico	RQ	1958	5,000	in <i>United States Possessions in the Caribbean</i>
Spain	SP	1961	50,400	
Surinam	NS	1954	2,500	in <i>The Guianas</i>
Trinidad and Tobago	TD	1955	1,850	in <i>British West Indies and Bermuda</i>
United States Miscellaneous Caribbean islands	BQ	1958	100	in <i>United States Possessions in the Caribbean</i>
United States Possessions in the Caribbean		1958	8,500	
United States Virgin Islands	VQ	1958	3,400	in <i>United States Possessions in the Caribbean</i>
Uruguay	UY	1956	8,600	
Venezuela	VE	1961	17,200	

Annex II

ABBREVIATIONS

admd	administrative division
agri.	agricultural
cont.	continued from previous column
drg.	drainage
entr.	entrance
int.	intermittent
irg.	irrigation
mtn.	mountain
nav.	navigation
ppl	populated place

resvn.	reservation
rk(s)	rock(s)
r.r.	railroad
sect.	section
stm.	stream
wtr.	water

Plural forms are indicated in parentheses, as (s), (es), (en), (len), where sometimes used either as generic or as designation. In cases where a diacritic is dropped in forming a plural, the latter is spelled out.

The note "(as suffix)" means the word is added to the specific name to form a compound, like "berg" and "dal" in the United States Virgin Islands and "tepyu" in Venezuela. "Tepuy" is joined by hyphen and is not capitalized.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL ENTITIES AND GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES*

Report presented by France

The National Geographical Institute, being a public cartographic establishment, classifies geographical names and the objects to which they refer not only according to the nature of the objects but also in the light of traditional conventional symbols. The Institute's classification is not as systematic as it would be if it were a classification directed towards the geographical names alone, regardless of the technology applied to them. It suffers, too, from limitations imposed by a two-figure code, which is used for automatic data processing. However, since the classification has a definite practical value, it is reproduced below in detail together with the relevant code-numbers.

1. *Miscellaneous objects*

- 00 Road, avenue, track, ride, fire-break, path
- 01 Roundabout, crossroads, square
- 02 Bridge, foot-bridge, ford, tunnel, arch
- 03 Monument, cross, statue, tumulus, dolmen, menhir, inscribed stone
- 04 Marker post, pylon, transformer, electricity sub-station
- 05 Ruin, remains
- 06 Water-tower, reservoir
- 07 Spring, tapped spring, fountain, well, wash-house, resurgence
- 08 Quarry, sand-pit, marl-pit, mushroom bed, gravel-pit
- 09 Fish farm
- 10 Lock
- 11 Hole, cave, swallow-hole, chasm, cavern
- 12 Beacon
- 13 Viewpoint, observatory
- 14 Pool, pit
- 15 Characteristic tree
- 16 Road numbers and special cartographic information
- 17 Sports ground, racecourse
- 18 Cemetery

2. *Named places*

- 19 Named place, meadow pasture, grassland, arable land, vineyard, field, clearing, heath, brushwood

3. *Woods and forests*

- 20 State forest
- 21 Forest
- 22 Wood, grove, park

4. *Populated places*

- 23 Prefecture
- 24 Sub-prefecture
- 25 Canton
- 26 Municipality
- 27 Hamlet
- 28 Isolated group of buildings
- 29 District, quarter
- 30 Group of dwellings
- 31 Isolated house
- 32 Forest lodge, chalet, mountain refuge
- 33 Country house, estate
- 34 Farm, agricultural tenement

- 35 Hut, shed, shelter, shack, store, warehouse, wine depot, barn, pen, glasshouse
- 36 Market, covered market
- 37 Sheep farm, livestock station
- 38 Official building, public hall
- 39 Railway station, bus or coach station, marine terminal, air terminal, halt
- 40 Airfield
- 41 Penitentiary establishment
- 42 Health establishment
- 43 Teaching or research establishment
- 44 Religious establishment
- 45 Industrial establishment, pumping station, slaughter-house
- 46 Mine
- 47 Tower
- 48 Mill
- 49 Citadel, fort, blockhouse
- 50 Barracks, quarters
- 51 Military camp
- 52 Training ground
- 53 Deconsecrated church
- 54 Religious building

5. *Hydrography*

- 60 Ocean, sea
- 61 Island
- 62 Peninsula
- 63 Strait
- 64 Isthmus
- 65 Cape
- 66 Bay
- 67 Rock, reef
- 68 Beach, strand
- 69 Lighthouse, light
- 70 Harbour, quay, dike, pier
- 71 Marine activity; salt-pan, oyster-bed etc.
- 72 Estuary, mouth
- 73 River
- 74 Stream
- 75 Brook, torrent, cascade, ditch
- 76 Lake, pond
- 77 Aqueduct
- 78 Marsh, peat-bog, swamp, fen, moat
- 79 Canal
- 80 Dam, sluice

6. *Orography*

- 81 Mountain, aiguille, peak, pinnacle, summit, point, massif
- 82 Ridge, crest
- 83 Hillside, slope, rise, flat, flank, shelf, ledge
- 84 Mountain range
- 85 Plateau
- 86 Valley, vale, glen, ravine, transverse valley, coomb, gorge, defile, thalweg
- 87 Hill, hummock, bank, mound
- 88 Pass, saddle
- 89 Basin, dolina, closed basin, hollow, amphitheatre
- 90 Plain
- 91 Glacier, firn, crevasse
- 92 Dune, sand
- 93 Rocks, scree, landslip

* The original text of this paper, submitted in French, was contained in document E/CONF.61/L.66.