

# An Experiment in Public Engagement with the Cognitive Toponymy Project

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## Abstract

The *Cognitive Toponymy* project is a collaboration between the Universities of Copenhagen, Glasgow and St Andrews. Funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh from 2014-2016, the project uses place names to investigate how people conceptualize place in Western Europe. As part of the Glasgow Science Festival (5-15 June 2014), the Cognitive Toponymy team organized a stand at the University of Glasgow's Science Sunday event. Visitors were shown photographs of ten landscape features from different parts of Scotland, and invited to suggest names for them. The aim was to identify naming strategies, and to find out which aspects of the images were considered most salient. The responses revealed a number of common themes, including colour, shape, size, and links to the supernatural.

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## Introduction

The *Cognitive Toponymy: People and Places in Synergy* Research Network is funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh from January 2014 to June 2016, with the primary aim of developing new approaches to the study of place names focusing on the role of human cognition in mediating external reality. The project is a collaboration between the Universities of Glasgow, Copenhagen and St. Andrews, and involves participants from a range of academic disciplines. Network members are Alison Burns (Glasgow), Thomas Clancy (Glasgow), Barbara Crawford (St Andrews), Peder Gammeltoft (Copenhagen), Carole Hough (PI; Glasgow), Henrik Hovmark (Copenhagen), Johnny Grandjean Gøgsig Jakobsen (Copenhagen), David Simmons (Glasgow) and Simon Taylor (Glasgow). The project draws on evidence from Scotland and Denmark to investigate how human beings conceptualize place, and how the conceptualization of place has impacted on the development of Western society. Academic activities focus around three one-day symposia held in Copenhagen and Glasgow. In addition, the project includes a lively programme of Knowledge Exchange events, one of which is reported in this paper.

## Glasgow Science Festival

As part of the *Cognitive Toponymy* project, an informal survey was carried out at a public engagement event which took place as part of Glasgow Science Festival (5-15 June 2014). The project team organized a stand at the University of Glasgow's Science Sunday event on 15 June 2014. This is one of the main public engagement activities of the year, showcasing

the University's research projects in a family-friendly way. Alongside a display relating to a range of place name research at Glasgow, visitors were shown photographs of 10 landscape features from different parts of Scotland, and invited to suggest names for them. The aim was to identify naming strategies, and to find out which aspects of the images were considered most salient. The responses were then collated and analysed, and some of the results are discussed below.

## Photographs

The 10 photographs used are shown in Figures 1-10.

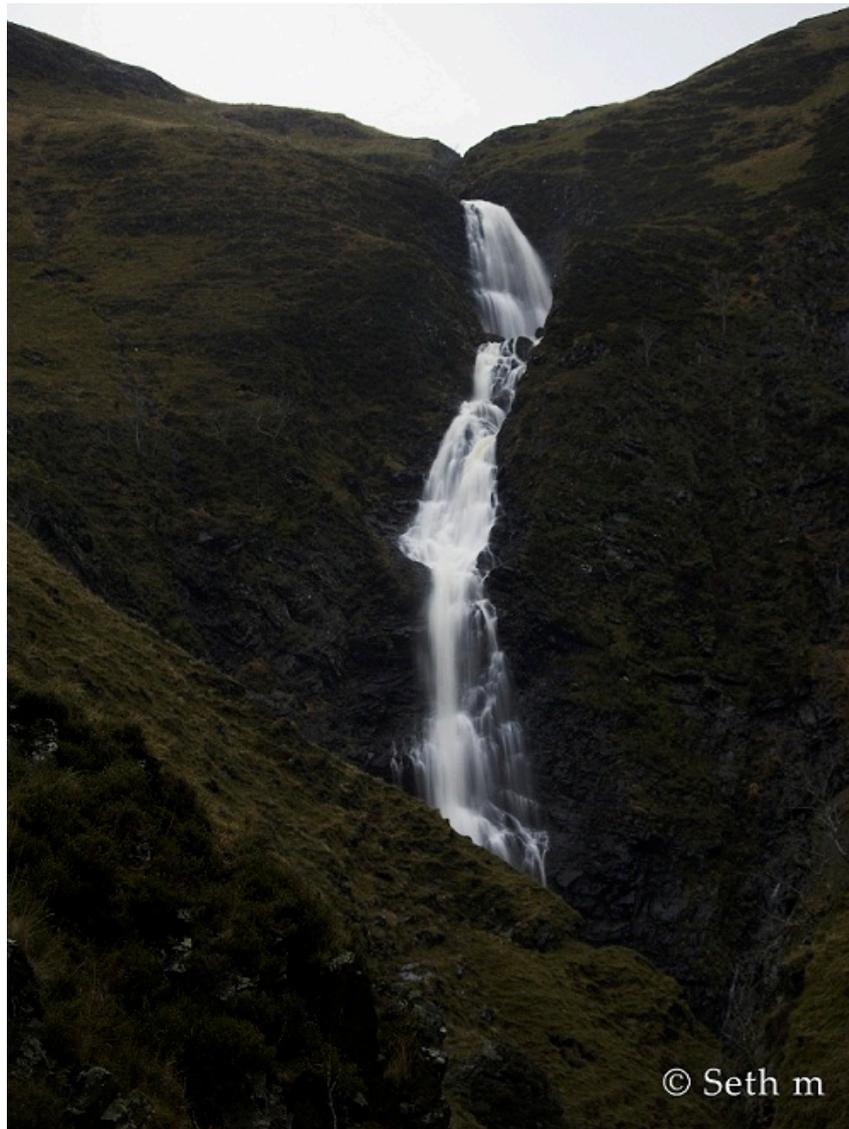


Fig. 1. Grey Mare's Tail, near Moffat

This landscape feature is a 60-metre waterfall named from its likeness to a horse's tail.



Fig. 2. Tongue Burn in Kinross-shire

The shape of a tongue can clearly be seen in Fig. 2. This and many other places are named from human or animal body parts (see also Figs. 1, 7, 9 and 10).



Fig. 3. The Sleeping Warrior, part of the north Arran hill range

The Sleeping Warrior is named from a resemblance to a resting human figure.



Fig.4. The Inneans, a range of hills in eastern Scotland

The hill range is named from Gaelic *innean* ‘anvil’. Fig. 4 is of Middle Innean, showing the anvil shape which gave rise to the name.



Fig. 5. Cauldron Linn in Kinross-shire

As in a number of place names in Scotland (and other parts of the world), the pool below the waterfall is conceptualized as a cauldron of boiling water.



Fig. 6. Shepherd's Hat, an island in the Sound of Mull

Shepherd's Hat is named from the shape of a traditional shepherd's hat. Such hats are no longer worn and suggestions for this feature included more salient phenomena from present day life such as submarines.



Fig. 7. The Paps of Jura

The Paps of Jura are named collectively from their rounded shape. As with many other hills, they are likened to breasts, known in Scots as *paps*.



Fig. 8. The Cobbler

The Cobbler, one of Scotland's most famous mountains, is thought to resemble a cobbler sitting over his work. An alternative name for the mountain is Ben Arthur.



Fig. 9. Fiaclan Dearg, Skye

Fiaclan Dearg has a Gaelic name meaning 'red teeth', in allusion both to the shape of the rock and to the colour of the red sandstone.



Fig. 10. Foinaven

Foinaven, described by Drummond (2007: 105) as ‘a long raw bone of whitish quartzite rock sticking out of the green and brown peat moors of the north-west’, has a Gaelic name that may mean either ‘wart mountain’ (from its protuberances) or ‘white mountain’.

## Responses

With around 200 visitors to the *Cognitive Toponymy* stand during the course of the day, we might in theory have expected to garner 200 survey responses. In fact there were 69. This was due to the fact that although the survey forms were initially intended for completion by individuals, in the event many were group or family efforts, unexpectedly mirroring the way place names are arrived at through consensus. Not all respondents offered suggestions for all 10 names, and a few of the entries were illegible. Some respondents recognized, or thought they recognized, individual place names, so these too were discounted, leaving a total of 656 usable pieces of data.

## Languages

Responses were in four languages: English, Gaelic, Scots and Spanish. Although all conversations during the Science Sunday event were in English, visitors clearly felt it appropriate to use their vernacular language for place naming. Again, this mirrors actual naming practices. No guidelines or instructions regarding response languages were given on the question sheets.

## Structures

The vast majority of suggested names were compound (481), containing a defining term modified by one or more descriptors (e.g. White Falls, Black Spray Falls). The next largest group were simplex (140), containing a single term (e.g. Waterfall, Mountain). A small minority were phrasal (29), characteristically comprising a genitive phrase (e.g. Hill of Doom, Rise of Four Points). Definite or indefinite articles were included in 71 instances (e.g. The Waterfall, A Green Meadow).

## Literal and Metaphorical Names

Many suggested names comprised literal descriptions (e.g. Grassy Hill, Green Mound), while others were metaphorical (e.g. Camel Hump, Sleeping Giant). Some included both a descriptive and a metaphorical element, as with Whale Mountain, while The Whale was fully metaphorical. All of these were suggested for Fig. 4, alongside others such as Humpback Hill, Poker Face, Turtle Hill and Wangy. In total, 525 names were wholly or partly descriptive, while 138 were wholly or partly metaphorical.

Some photographs inspired the imagination more than others. Figures 3, 7 and 8 elicited 24, 22 and 20 metaphorical names respectively, whereas most names suggested for Figures 4, 5 and 10 were straightforwardly descriptive, with fewer than 10 exceptions each. The well-known LANDSCAPE IS A BODY metaphor was represented in no less than 30 suggested names, with a range of both human and animal body parts. Examples include Snake Tail Falls (Fig. 1), A Green Eye (Fig. 5), The Breasts (Fig. 7) and Red Shoulder (Fig. 9). The most striking unanimity was found for Figure 8, where all 5 suggestions containing body parts related to the face (Face; Faces; Faces Rock; The Four Faced Lighthouse; The Grumpy Face), and for Figure 3, where all 9 suggestions containing body parts related to the teeth (The Broken Teeth; Crooked Teeth; The Deil's Teeth; The Devil's Teeth; Dragon's Teeth (x2); Saw Tooth Rock; The Tooth Rocks; The Wise Tooth).

## The Supernatural

A common theme was the supernatural. Even though the images were seen in isolation and therefore had no traditions associated with them, mythological creatures featured in 18 of the responses. The Devil appeared in 5 names, fairies in 3, giants in 3, dragons, elves, pixies and witches in one each, and Janus, Rapunzel and Thor in one each. Some respondents came up with the same idea, but expressed it differently. As well as The Deil's Teeth and The Devil's Teeth mentioned above for Figure 3, suggestions for Figure 1 included Devil's Drop and Deils Fall (Scots *deil* 'devil').

## Colour Terms

Colour terms featured prominently in the responses for all except Figure 8. Out of a total of 78 colour terms across the remaining 9 photographs, 21 appeared in suggestions for Figure 6, and 19 in suggestions for Figure 9, with fewer than 12 for each of the other images. Responses to Figure 6 were dominated by the colour red, with 16 occurrences of *red* itself and one each of Scots *broony-red* and Spanish *roja* ‘red’, but also two occurrences of *brown* and one of *green*. Again, colour salience is a recurrent feature in the toponymica of different languages (see e.g. Hough 2006; Dunlop and Hough 2014).

## Transferred Names

Another unexpected parallel to the historical place name corpus was the use of ready-made names. In 8 instances, suggestions appeared to be motivated by a resemblance to another place. Hence a Spanish visitor gave the name *Velo de la novia* (‘Veil of the bride’) to Figure 1, clearly influenced by similar landscape features in New Zealand, British Columbia and North Carolina (all alluding to waterfalls called Bridal Veil Falls). Similarly, the name Los Gigantes applied to Figure 8 was clearly transferred from the holiday resort on the coast of Tenerife (see Fig. 11). These and other transferred names were noted with interest, but excluded from further analysis.



Fig. 11. Los Gigantes, Tenerife

## Conclusion

Overall, a number of naming strategies were identified from the survey responses. The data show that people perceive landscape in terms of colour, shape, size, and links to supernatural phenomena, and that they also draw parallels with other places they have experienced. In this experiment, the visual aspect of the landscape was the most prominent sensory feature used in the naming process, with both literal and metaphorical descriptions being common. Moreover, visitors of all ages clearly enjoyed the activity, finding it fun to engage with naming. Group approaches, rather than an individual approach, to naming during the experiment were noticeable, and reinforce the fact that everyday interactions between human beings and the world are often social encounters.

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