

# Placenames and compass points: Questions

There's no end of placenames that contain a cardinal compass point (CCP) (i.e. *North*, *South*, *East* or *West*). The use of intercardinal (or ordinal) points (e.g. *North-East*) is not nearly as common (e.g. *South West Rocks*), probably because it convolutes the name—so I'll not include them in this discussion.

Interestingly, the position that the CCP takes in the toponym is not fixed. The Sydney suburb *North Epping* has its CCP as a **premodifier** while in nearby *Denistone East* it is a **postmodifier**.

CCP toponyms aren't all that common—a mere 2% of the approximately 370,000 toponyms registered in the National Gazetteer of Australia contain a CCP. Of all the CCP toponyms in Australia 68% of them have a premodifying compass point (and 32%, of course, take a postmodifying compass point). This means that, of all the toponyms in Australia, only 1.4% have a premodifying compass point and those with a postmodifying CCP comprise a mere 0.6%.<sup>1</sup>

In these counts I did not include solid (form) compound toponyms such as *Eastwood*. The reason is that you would never get a \*Woodeast or \*Wood East. I am only dealing with open (form) complex toponyms such as *West Wyalong* and *Footscray West* (see Tent 2016). This, naturally, raises the question as to why some CCP toponyms are solid compounds while others are open complex.

I'll propose an answer to this in the next issue of *Placenames Australia*. In the meantime, let's return to the issue of premodifying vs postmodifying CCPs in open (form) complex toponyms. Are there any types of toponyms that tend to have a premodifying CCP structure as opposed to a postmodifying CCP structure? And what, if anything, does a postmodifying CCP signify?



An example might bring the issue into focus and help produce a potential answer. The local public school in North Epping bears the official name *Epping North Public School*. Why is this? There is also an Epping Public School and an Epping West Public School, but no West Epping suburb. We've already seen that premodifying CCPs are the prevailing pattern in the general toponymy,

and that postmodifiers are very much in the minority. However, if we search particularly for the names of schools we discover that the general pattern does not hold. The gazetteers of NSW and Victoria provided the opportunity to search on school names—and I discovered that 83.4% of schools in NSW had a postmodifying CCP (leaving 15.6% with

a premodifying CCP). A similar picture emerges in Victoria with 86% of schools having a postmodifying CCP. Why would it be so?

I'll give my proposed answers to all these questions in the September issue of the *Placenames Australia*. Do you have any theories to offer in the meantime? Send them to the Editor and we'll acknowledge the best next time!

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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> In New Zealand, the proportion of CCPs is even lower: of the 51,000 toponyms in the Gazetteer of New Zealand, a mere 0.9% (or 469) have a CCP. And in contrast to the Australian pattern, very few of them (only 11) have a postmodifying CCP.

## Reference

Tent, Jan (2016). 'Toponymy 101 B: The structure of toponyms'. *Placenames Australia*. March, pp. 6-7. <[http://anps.org.au/documents/March\\_2016.pdf](http://anps.org.au/documents/March_2016.pdf)>