

10

Of Named Places

Throughout this book I have referred to named places—rivers, lakes, communities, and the like—as well as to generic place kinds, also called ecotopes. What kinds of places get names? And are there any regularities to which places get singular names, rather than a generic geographic or ecotopic designation? Jett, describing Navajo named places in the American southwest, commented that some features are so unusual as to constitute singularities, that are unique, distinctive, and highly salient features of the landscape, such as Shiprock, Naat’áanii Nééz (Stephen Jett, pers. comm., 2008). Large rivers, and often prominent mountains are named, but not in all cases. Instead, as Hunn commented (1990), smaller features such as resource sites may be named, but a large mountain not named. Areas too may be named, as in the larger regional terms documented by Kari (1989). Instructive differences in the kinds of features names are found in Waterman’s descriptions of Puget Sound (1922, quoted in Thornton 1997):

Waterman observed that “A special name will often be given to a rock no larger than a kitchen table while, on the other hand, what we consider the large and important features of a region’s geography

have no names at all.” (1922:178) “Persistent inquiry among the Indians concerning romantic-looking peaks, towering up against the sky arouses no reaction except boredom,” he confessed (n.d.a:17). Mountain ranges, rivers, islands, and bays might remain nameless, although dozens, even hundreds of place names might be applied to portions of these features. For example, Yuroks gave Waterman twelve names for places on the slopes of a single mountain, but no name for the mountain as a whole.

Apparently Bainbridge Island, a large island in Puget Sound, had no name at all, but 300 smaller features on the island were named. The size of features named is a question of scales of interest, and distances travelled. If you live on the mountain or island, there may be no need to name the entire large feature. Thornton (1997, 2008) provides an enlightening discussion of named features in the Glacier Bay area of southeast Alaska. In Glacier Bay, Thornton tells us, English place names prominently designate glaciers and mountains, while Tlingit place names often focus on creeks, camping places, and fishing sites.

Obviously not every place is named or worthy of a specific name. There must be some distinctive feature to this forest, that hill, that rock formation, a reason to keep specific places in mind. Food and sources of food are obvious motivators, and numerous place names of indigenous North Americans refer to food resources such as fish or berries (An Sim ‘Maa’y, ‘black huckleberry on it’; Bik’it digi Ts’oyin, ‘we pick black huckleberry on it’; Xsigunya’a, ‘Spring Salmon River’). The needs of travellers are another. Kari’s detailed investigation of Denai’ina and Ahtna place names suggests one reason to name features—navigation (Kari and Fall 1987; Kari 1989, 1996, 2008). He describes systems of regional place names that encompass the major waterways, routes, and a variety of significant creeks, ridges, peaks, and other features which serve as navigational aids to travellers, enabling people to find safe passes and crossings as they traverse regions for hunting or trade. This resonates with the descriptions of Inuinnait trails with their strings of named places and songs, which help people to remember the landmarks, camps, and resources in areas strung along the trails (Collignon 2006).

Names also record travel hazards or customary activities that take place or formerly took place, at specific sites, such as Chuu tr’idaojich’uu or Chuw tr’ina’odiih’uu (meaning ‘water-rough hateful’), the Peel River Canyon. According to the description on the Gwich’in Place Name Map web page,

the canyon, which is both beautiful and dangerous is passable by boat only with a skilled boatman who can “read the water, can avoid eddies and is comfortable with fast flowing water.” The canyon requires respect and caution. The description gives a sense of the historic importance of such sites, and why they would be accorded names:

In early historic times, it [the canyon] was considered so treacherous, that when Teet’it Gwich’in families who had spent all winter in the upper Peel hunting in the mountains arrived at the canyon in the spring, only the men would take the moose skin boats through the canyon. Each boat had a captain responsible for steering the boat with a large wooden oar and directing the paddlers. The women, children and dogs walked over the portage trail on top of the high cliffs and met the men at the downstream end. If all went well, there was a big celebration here where the best foods would be brought out and a great feast held. After the feast, they would continue their trip down the Peel River meeting other families along their way to Fort McPherson to trade their meat and furs at the Hudson’s Bay Company post.

(<http://www.gwichin.ca/Research/placeNamePeel.asp?num=25>)

Legat et al. (2001) in their report on Dogrib Tłı̄chq̄ habitats and place names found that river names tended to encode travel hazards, while land place names frequently were rich in ecological information.

Another reason to name specific sites is related to ownership. For Gitksan, knowing the names to features on the territory demonstrates ownership, and also encodes history as it is emplaced on the land. The history itself is an aspect of relationship to and ownership of places on the land. As Dinim Gyet said (see Chapter 3), “You say you own this, your land, most of the place names are all in our language, hey, cause they say that the Creator gave it to us and he give us the names to go with it.” In my discussion of the Gitksan storied landscape, I likened the named places to mnemonic pegs on which to “hang” a good deal of information about places and the nature of the land, a metaphor earlier employed by Basso (1990a:128). So, to paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, one might say that names are good to think with, adding specificity and precision to one’s recollections of routes and of sites of travel hazard, of sites for specific resources, and through histories and sacred sites, for significant guidance in proper and effective relationships to the land. Or

as Thornton would have it, “Toponyms embody both ecological and sociological knowledge, and Tlingits learn to *think with the landscape* to achieve a variety of material and social goals” (2008:66, emphasis added).

When I think of “Stekyooden,” the magnificent and prominent massif that rises above Hagwilget, Gitanmaax and the Hazeltons in northwest BC, I think about the cautionary tale of the One Horned Mountain Goat, and the necessity for a balanced and respectful relationship with the animals one hunts (Harris 1974). For Gitksan, this story is owned, and versions are part of the House and Chiefly property of two Gisg’aast (Fireweed) Houses. Antgulibixw, the late Mary Johnson’s totem pole in Ansbayaxw has a carving of the one horned goat at the top (Figure 10.1).

For northern Dene such as the Gwich’in, while names for places of habitation or special sites along rivers need not signal ownership, they nonetheless signal history and long use. Alestine Andre’s fishing site at Tree River, Dighe’ tr’aajil, has an ancient name¹ and a history, as does her uncle Gabe Andre’s cabin site Tr’inehht’leet’iee about five miles upriver.

Sites such as Shiltee Rock (Shıldii) also signal history from ancient times, which guide succeeding generations of Gwich’in in appropriate respectful behaviour for the land and the beings who share it with them. The rock is a prominent and unusual rock formation that is visible to all who travel along the Peel River. Other sites of unusual rock formation along the Mackenzie are also named, and record the deeds of Yamoria from ancient times (Andrews 1990).

Names pertain to places rather than to ecological types. Places often form nodes along the trails and rivers that traverse the landscape. Places vary from sites of very limited areal extent to larger clusters of sites that share names, as Thornton pointed out for Tlingit sites. This is clearly evident for other peoples too: “Road River” (in English) refers to a whole suite of sites along a several-kilometre section of the Peel River, including the winter and summer camps (Figures 7.3–7.6), and the sites of old spring and fall camps and associated berry patches. It does not designate in particular the exact confluence of the Road River with the Peel. This area has extent, but does not have hard boundaries; it is characteristic of places generally that they have areal extent, and lack hard boundaries.² Some are broad, such as areas which in Athapaskan languages get special words that indicate ‘in the area of’ (Kari 2008:12; The Hagwilget [Tse Kya] Band 1995:53), and others are more or less linear features, such as tracks. Rivers, and Australian Dreaming Tracks (*Tjukurpi*) are places with linear extent. Ridges may also be considered linear



Figure 10.1 Totem pole of Antk'uilbixsxw (the late Mary Johnson) in Ansbayaxw Totem poles instantiate the linkage of House groups to place, through crests which memorialize emplaced history.

places, though not as lengthy as rivers or Dreaming Tracks. I was struck by the cross-cultural encounter revealed in trying to understand these linear places presented in an anecdote by Robert Layton about landscape in the Western Desert of Australia (Layton 1995:213). He wrote:

The rules of a discourse determine which statements are sensible and which are deemed irrelevant, marginal, or unscientific. The rules specify what is possible. "How wide is a dreaming track?" is, for instance, a nonsensical question within discourse on the Dreaming, though it was one posed at an earlier land claim clearing.

Place names serve as a reflection of how a people view a landscape, and can reveal the kinds of places conceived of by a certain culture. There is an extensive literature on place names, or toponyms in papers (e.g. Tom 1987; Cruikshank 1990a, 1990b; Basso 1990a, 1990b; Correll 1976; Müller-Wille 1983, 1993; Kari and Fall 1987; Kari 1989; Boas 1934; Hunn 1996; Thornton 1997, 2008; Fowler 2009), and a wide range of rich local reports (e.g. Kritsch and Andre 1993, 1994; Greer 1999). As Cruikshank (1990a, 1990b) emphasizes, history is written on the land and is recounted and revisited by mentally travelling over the land, with place as the key to the past, a description very like that given by Dinim Gyet of mentally travelling the trails of his Lax Yip (House territory) under the tutelage of his grandmother. Moral narratives too, are given force by their connection with the land "in this place—it happened *here*" (Basso 1990), as with Shiltee Rock and Stekyooden.

Landmarks along travel corridors are given names, which serve as an orientation system. Apparently in Alaska, a set of consistent place names is widely recognized, and may remain the same across language boundaries, with phonological adjustment and substitution of the variant of generic terms such as 'river' of each language (Kari 1989). Place names can also be used to reveal kinds of places recognized by a culture in the form of what Kari has called "place name generics" (Kari 1989; Kari & Fall 1987), though Kari also comments that not all landscape terms function as "place name generics." He analyses Dena'ina and Ahtna place names to consist of a generic term, plus a modifier, much as plant and animal species are named scientifically. Generics found in Dena'ina include: 'where, place of'; 'the one which'; 'stream, river, creek'; 'river mouth'; 'headwaters'; 'glacier'; 'straight stretch of a river'; 'river-bank'; 'lake'; 'head of a lake'; 'lake outlet, lake outlet stream'; 'land, country'; 'mountain'; 'ridge'; 'hill'; 'flat, clear area, swamp'. With the exception of the

first two, which simply specify the domain of 'place', the other terms all have content as types of geographic features with ecological entailments. Other languages may not customarily include a place term generic as the head of place names, though other Athapaskan languages and Gitksan frequently do.

My analysis of a smaller corpus of place names from unpublished files of the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute, carried out in 1998, also revealed a series of place kind generics which occurred in the set of 184 place names from two 1:250,000 map sheets (Table 10.1). The types of features named in this set (Table 10.2) reveal that creeks were the most frequently named feature (69), followed by lakes (30), and hills (including "rocks") (15). A number of places were called "place of ____" ("____ *k'it*") but it is not possible to describe what kinds of sites these were as this is a rather artificial grouping of descriptive names of areas. Referents for these place names were quite variable, and included descriptions and characterizations of the sites, people, vegetation, topographic position, fish or animal species, history, dwellings, hydrology, personal names, anatomy, birds, trails, human uses, rivers, or travelling (Table 10.3).

In a study of Gwich'ya Gwich'in place names published by the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute in 1993 (Kritsch and Andre 1993:21), the authors list the categories of place names:

- names referring to a Gwich'in person
- places known by two names; the Gwich'in name describing the place and the English one referring to a Gwich'in person
- places known by two names; the Gwich'in name describing a place or a resource and the English name referring to a white trapper and/or trader
- names referring to a white trapper and/or a trader
- names referring to a resource or an aspect of traditional resource economy
- descriptive name
- Ts'ii Dejii names where the meaning has been lost
- names referring to a legendary place
- names referring to a story

This listing is interesting in that names which refer to use or occupancy by a person, whether Gwich'in or white, are prominent, and a dual naming system encompassing Gwich'in names and an overlapping set of English place names is evident. The importance of description and of the traditional economy in place names is reiterated here, as is the significance of "legend"

Table 10.1 Gwich'in Place Name Generics and Vegetation Terms

(TG = Teetl'it Gwich'in dialect, GG = Gwichya Gwich'in dialect)

Gwich'in term	Dialect	English Gloss	Comments
Gwich'in Place Name Generics			
<i>han</i>	TG	'river'	
<i>han</i>	TG	'channel'	
<i>van</i>	TG	'lake'	
<i>tsbik</i>	TG	'creek'	
<i>njik</i>	TG	'creek'	
<i>k'it</i>	TG	'place'	'among, area of' (cognate with other Athapaskan terms; a locative, not a generic)
<i>njuu</i>	TG	'island'	
<i>tsbii (cbii)</i>	TG, GG	'rock'	
<i>tsbii (cbii)</i>	TG	'hill'	
<i>vihsbraiï</i>	TG	'riverbank'	
<i>vihsraït</i>	GG	'riverbank'	
<i>thidii</i>	TG	'point'	
<i>thidiyee</i>	GG	'point'	
<i>òk</i>	TG	'eddy'	
<i>nitainlaii</i>	TG	'waterfall'	
<i>nidiilaiï</i>	GG	'waterfall'	
<i>nàn</i>	TG	'hill'	this may really refer to 'land'
<i>ddbàa'</i>	TG	'mountain'	
<i>eyendak</i>	TG	'slough' or 'backchannel'	spelled <i>iyendak</i> in the Gwich'in noun dictionary
<i>git</i>	TG	'glacier'	
Vegetation related terms			
<i>t'oo</i>	TG	'grass'	
<i>dachan</i>	TG	'timber'	
<i>k'ài</i>	TG	'willows'	also 'red willows' (includes shrub willow & alder)
<i>gwahsri'</i>	TG, GG	'meadow'	
<i>gwahsri'</i>	TG, GG	'open place'	
<i>guzrii kak</i>	GG	'barren land'	

from unpublished place name files of Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute
compiled by L.M. Johnson 1998

Table 10.2 Gwich'in Place Name Analysis: Named Feature Types

Feature type	Number named
creek	69
lake	30
places §	15
hill (incl. rock) *	15
island	8
river	6
mountain	4
dwelling	4
river reach	3
high bank	3
fishing site	3
channel	3
small creek	2
rock	2
headwaters	2
eddy	2
dry channel	2
waterfall	1
trail	1
small mountain	1
portage	1
point	1
glacier	1
creek mouth	1
community	1
channel divergence	1
back channel	1
animal habitat	1
Total places	184

§ "Places" are areas characterized by a feature, as in ___ k'it.

*One, Shiltee Rock, is also a sacred place

Based on database of Teetl'it Gwich'in Place Names prepared by Ingrid Kritsch.

Canadian NTS Map Sheets 106M and 106L

Table 10.3 Gwich'in Place Name Analysis: Referents for Place Names

Referent	Number of names
description	61
personal area (3 also coded as dwelling)	20
vegetation (7 also coded as description, 1 as animal, 1 as timber, 1 as topography)	19
place	18
position (2 coded also as description)	14
fish	14
history	12
unknown	10
animal (1 coded as history, 1 also as vegetation)	10
dwelling (1 coded as house; several as personal areas, and 1 as community)	6
substrate (3 coded also as description)	5
topography (4 coded also as description)	5
fish harvest (most also coded under fish)	5
hydrology (2 also coded as description)	4
behaviour (2 are fish, and 2 animal, of which 1 is also history)	4
personal name	4
timber	4
anatomical	3
artifacts	3
bird	3
trail (2 also coded as description)	3
confluence	2
culture	1
human use	1
mountain	1
community (also coded as position)	1
river	1
travelling	1
Total referents	235

and “story.” It is also interesting to compare with Waterman’s classification of the corpus of Yokuts place names he recorded in 1922 (page 185). His Table 1 includes the following types of place names:

- Descriptive terms, 202
- References to mythic episodes, 67
- References to animals, 35
- References to food supply, 34
- References to human activities, 33
- Unclassified terms, 49
- Untranslated terms, 137

Kaska place names are similar to the place names discussed by Kari (1989) for the Dena’ina and the Ahtna. Rivers or creeks are apparently often named for the lakes at their head, or lakes may be named for adjacent mountains and then the rivers carry the same name. Kari comments that virtually every lake in a drainage system has a name, unless it lacks fish and is remote from routes of travel or resource harvest. This certainly appears to be the case for Kaska too, where lakes are the most frequently named entities in the sample given in Kaska Tribal Council (1997) (Table 10.4). Mountains in contrast are less frequently named in the Dena’ina/Ahtna corpus. This may also be true for Kaska, but differences in geography make comparison difficult. Mountains and ridges are named in both Kaska and Witsuwit’en, and may have considerable regional or cosmological importance. Elder Mida Donnessey took care to point out three significant mountains and their names from our vantage point by the Tom Creek lookout in 1999, and she mentioned these mountains again on several other trips. Although in the Dena’ina/Ahtna corpus, different sites are infrequently reported to have the same name—Kari 1989 reports five instances of repeated names in a sample of 3200 place names—Kaska naming seems to be more flexible. Three different mountains in the sample of 129 Kaska place names were all called variants of ‘Mountain Goat Mountain’, two different creeks bore the name ‘Lick Creek’, and two different lakes, one not associated with a creek of the same name, were called ‘Lick Lake’. I also documented a different Ts’ih Tué ‘Red Ochre River’ than the one reported in the Dictionary.

Referents of Kaska place names show similarities with Gwich’in, and also with Witsuwit’en (discussed below). Table 10.5 shows the types of referents in the set of place names in the Dictionary corpus; descriptive names, those which refer to animals, fish, birds, animal habitats, other named features, fish habitat,

Table 10.4 Kaska Place Name Analysis: Types of Features Named

Types of features	Number
lakes	59
mountains	22
rivers	16
creeks	13
meadow areas	2
hills	2
slough	1
settlement	1
animal lick	1
glacier	1
river confluence area	1
Total named features	119

animal harvest and anatomy were most important (≥ 5 examples). History, vegetation, implements and minerals were less significant in place naming.

The phenomenon of sets of linked toponyms, where the stem is the same and the place kind generics vary or where “related parts” are named by reference to the basic place name, is described by Thornton (2008:99) as an “ensemble.” Sets of this sort are evident in Athapaskan place names, especially when dealing with terms relating to integrated drainages. Witsuwit'en Widzin Bin and Widzin Kwikh, the headwater lake and the river of the Morice-Bulkley system, for example, or Kaska Tehkēdenîā a mountain whose name means ‘Standing Alone,’ the associated lakes Tehkēdenîā Mené (‘Standing Alone Lakes’) and the river which flows from them, Tehkēdenîā Tuē (‘Standing Alone River’) known in English as Ross River, a tributary of the Pelly. In English, the suite of sites designated by “Road River” (the Road River winter camp, the Road River fish camp) would also be an ensemble of the functional sort given in a number of Tlingit examples.

For the Witsuwit'en, there is a need to recognize landmarks both for orientation and for delimitation of permitted areas for travel and resource harvest. This leads, then, to a sense of the specificity of place. For example, the consequences of being in the wrong place, in pre-contact times, might well be death, giving a high motivation for recognition of boundaries and of one's own place (Mills 1994). The Witsuwit'en had to travel over other Clans' territories to reach their winter trapping grounds. The major trails

constituted a kind of ‘no-man’s land’ and one was not guilty of trespass if legitimately travelling along a trail. One could even take animals for one’s immediate subsistence in the immediate vicinity of the trail (Gottesfeld 1993:50), but harvest of other resources was not permitted to travellers.

As an aspect of the Territory system, Witsuwit’*en* place names may be proprietary and therefore relatively few are general public knowledge. The following discussion is based on a small set of names for features of regional importance, a set of place names around Hagwilget compiled in Tsë Cakh Wit’*en* (The Hagwilget [Tse Kya] Band 1995), and a smaller number of names mentioned to me during interviews. The set of names included in the Witsuwit’*en* literacy book is, unfortunately, mostly not translated, though indications of what kinds of places are named in the Hagwilget area, and what kinds of names are considered acceptable to share publicly can be gleaned from this list. The name of Hagwilget itself is Tsë Cakh³ (‘under the rock’). Many of the names on the list included in Tsë Cakh Wit’*en* are small local landmarks, some of which are in the village and in the immediate Hazelton area, and places along regional trails connecting Hagwilget with Babine Lake and the Bulkley Valley. The Babine Trail was a major trade trail,

Table 10.5
Kaska Place Name Analysis: Referents for Place Names

Referent Type	Number
fish	17
animal	11
bird	10
animal habitat	9
other named place	8
fish habitat	6
animal harvest	5
anatomical	5
history	4
locative	4
human reference	4
implement	3
bird habitat	2
vegetation	2
mineral resource	1
personal name	1
Total referents	135

which traversed both Gitksan and Witsuwit'en territories and was used as a pack trail in historic times. Many landmarks or resource areas around the Hagwilget area are actually on Gitksan owned territories immediately adjacent to Hazelton, and some of their names are loanwords from Gitksan. I re-analysed this list together with the names I had recorded in more recent years, this time excluding the local and Gitksan derived place names, to get a sense of the content and structure of Witsuwit'en place names.

The most frequently named features in my sample of 71 named places (Table 10.6) are creeks, mountains, hills and berry patches, with camps, lakes, animal habitat and constructed improvements on trails also being noteworthy. This listing is a reflection of the significance of landmarks and the importance of berry patches in Witsuwit'en ecology, but the sample is neither comprehensive nor representative. Naming sites of trail improvement also suggests the significance of maintaining infrastructure. My decision to eliminate places on Gitksan lands, and the current state of the Hagwilget fishery, are responsible for the lack of named places for fishing and smoke-house sites, and the fact I have not travelled in the mountains with hunters causes an under-representation of animal-related named places.

Examining the sample for the referents of the names (Table 10.7) is also instructive. In the Tsë Cakh Wit'en corpus, there are ten local names that are wholly or partially Gitksan in derivation, an unusual situation for Athapaskan languages. The long relationship between the Witsuwit'en and neighbouring Gitksan, and the significance of correct names in the territory system are likely responsible for this. Thirty-six of the remaining names were unanalysed in the Tsë Cakh Wit'en listing, and the meaning of one place name that was independently shared with me was not known to the speaker. Of the remaining names whose referents were apparent to me, nine had a botanical reference, eight were descriptive, and seven referred to animals,⁴ animal habitat or animal anatomy. Five names referred to another named place, forming groups with the same base toponym. Three of these ensembles are evident in my sample of names. Hydrography and 'hydrology' (flow direction), relative size, and position were also features of Witsuwit'en place names. I also analysed place name generics included in the sample of 71 names (Table 10.8). Thirty-seven percent of the names in the sample contained such generics. The four generics which were most frequent were *kwikh* 'creek, river'; *tsë* 'rock'; *dzil* 'mountain'; and *bin* 'lake'.

In Witsuwit'en, as with Kaska and other Athapaskan languages, it seems that drainage systems are perceived as integrated entities, so Wízdzin Kwikh

Table 10.6
Witsuwit'en Place Names: Types of Features Named

Feature Type	Number	other feature types/comments
creek	14	
mountain	13	1 also animal habitat
hill	6	
berry patch	5	also 2 hill, 1 ridge
camp	3	
lake	3	
animal habitat	3	
ridge	3	
constructed trail spot	2	
river	2	
rock formation	2	
trail	2	
vegetation	2	excludes berry patches and wetlands
hillside	1	
creek mouth into lake	1	
grassy slope	1	also animal habitat
flat/mythic site	1	
mountain basin?	1	
lake head	1	
large river	1	
single peak of mountain	1	
foot of mountain	1	
lake narrows	1	also animal habitat
[mountain] pass	1	
small lake	1	
spring	1	
trail end	1	
wetland	1	named for sphagnum
wetland/lake shore	1	named for cattails
Total features	76	

rises from Widzin Bin, and carries the name all the way to its confluence with the Skeena River (Ksan) at Hazelton. In contrast, to the English name Bulkley River is given to the river below Houston, but above Houston, "Bulkley" is attached to an easterly tributary stream with a much lower discharge, presumably for historical reasons, as that was the route of overland access by Euro-Canadians into the Bulkley Valley from the south and east. The proprietary nature of place names restricts the possibility of analysing frequencies of types of reference of place names, or of possible repeated names, though the status of place names as indications of rights to defined, bounded Clan territories suggests that repetition would be infrequent.

Table 10.7
Witsuwit'en Place Names: Toponym Referents

Referent	Number
Unanalysed	36
Gitksan	10
Botanical	9
Descriptive	8
Other named place (ensemble)	5
Animal	5
Hydrology/hydrography	4
Size (big or little.....)	4
Positional (under, or standing up)	3
Mythological	2
Flow direction	2
Unknown	1
Substrate	1
Human activity	1
Anatomical	1
Animal behaviour	1
Bird behaviour	1
Animal anatomy	1
Total referents	95

Analysis of 2008 sample; n=81; some double indexed

Table 10.8
Witsuwit'en Place Kind Generics

Toponym Generic	Gloss	Number
<i>dzil</i>	'mountain'	4
<i>bin</i>	'lake'	4
<i>kwikh</i>	'creek, river'	6
<i>ts'iy</i>	'ridge'	1
<i>weggiz</i>	'pass'	1
<i>to</i>	'water'	1
<i>kun kēt</i>	'camp'	2
<i>tīy</i>	'trail'	2
<i>tsē</i>	'rock'	5
Total names with generics		26
Percentage of names with generic		37%

**this analysis is based on the 71 name sample which is of Witsuwit'en derivation*

2 versions of 1 trail name; uncertain if 'rock' should be substrate referent or place kind generic

As with other Athapaskan groups, Witsuwit'en place names can frequently be descriptive, and may "paint a picture" of the place named, as with 'water flowing from among the cattails', or the name of a flat-topped mountain, 'sawed off bentwood box'. There is also a relatively large number of place names of Gitksan origin which is due to the particular historical circumstances of the location and origin of Hagwilget, Tsë Cakh. The village was established as an enclave in Gitksan territory due to a landslide blocking fish migration further upriver in the 1820s.

Witsuwit'en place names may well be associated with histories, and encounters of a supernatural nature may well be grounded in certain places, such as the 'Stone Beaver Dam' site near Quick. Special places also apparently served for orientation and calendrical reckoning too. The famous "footprints" by the place known in English as Sam Goozley Lake are such a Witsuwit'en place, mentioned to me by two different Elders who were related (on the Father's side) to Namaks, the Chief (Dineza) of that Territory (Alfred Mitchell pers. comm.; Pat Namox, pers. comm.).

It seems clear that Athapaskan speakers in northwestern North America organize their perception of the land as people who travel across the land. Place names and kinds of places both make sense from that perspective. Kari says, regarding Ahtna and Dena'ina understanding of place:

Clearly the place names are *mental maps* that have been learned by careful memorization, and are a stable, conservative portion of the lexicon. . . .

There are clear principles of *economy* and *memorizability* to the Ahtna-Dena'ina place names system, which make it well suited for long-distance overland travel. (Kari 1989:134-135, emphasis added)

He goes on to discuss travel narrative as a genre in Athapaskan speech, and gives examples which exemplify the linkage between place, individual experience, ecological knowledge, and history.

For other northern Athapaskans such as the Dogrib (Tłı̨ch̨o) and Gwich'in, toponyms, strung together along trails and waterways, serve to link mythos and history, the resource potential of the country, the proper order of the world, and the risks of the lands and waters. These are all expressed through the process of travelling over land to specific places, and the narratives of such travel (cf. Andrews 1990).

Andrews and his co-authors' papers on the Įdaà trail (Andrews and Zoe 1997; Andrews et al. 1998) highlight the importance of the sequence of places along the trail as keys to the sacred, links with the power of the land. Interestingly, formerly important resource sites, such as places of good rock for stone tool construction, are often associated with power places which require ritual acknowledgement along this important travel and trade corridor. Places of harmful power also exist, and require either avoidance or special care to minimize risk. More recent remembrance and personal history may also be associated with particular places along the trail, and portage trails seem to be places especially rich in story. Andrews et al. (1998) write:

The Dogrib landscape is a mosaic of significant places, all with names and stories attached to them. Place and narrative transform a physical geography into a social geography, where culture and landscape are transformed into a semiotic whole. In Dogrib cosmology, these places represent the physical embodiment of cultural process, which is realized through the combination of *travel* and *story-telling*. By travelling traditional trails, which link places like beads on a string, Dogrib youth are told stories as each place is visited. The stories provide all the knowledge necessary for living within the Dogrib landscape, and in later life *these places become mnemonics for recalling the narrative associated with them...* (emphasis added)

Andrews and Zoe (1997) write:

The Dogrib landscape is infused with the presence of innumerable entities, or "powers," both benevolent and malevolent. In travelling across the landscape, one must constantly mitigate the impact of personal actions by appeasing these entities with votive offerings, and by observing strict rules of behaviour. For example, at each new water body encountered en route, offerings are left. (page 162)

The *trail* appears to be a preeminent Athapaskan metaphor or organizing principle. Ridington (1990) eloquently expresses the pre-eminence of the *trail* as an organizing principle of experience and understanding for the Beaver (Dane *zaa*):

The Beaver people viewed human experience as a life-sustaining network of relationships between all components of a sentient world. They experienced their world as a mosaic of passages and interactions between animate beings in motion against the backdrop of a terrain that was itself continually in process through the cyclical transformations of changing seasons. *They looked upon the trails of people and animals as a record of these interactions.* Each trail, they believed, continued backward and forward beyond the point at which it could no longer be followed physically. The trails that lay ahead, as well as those that lay behind, could be followed by people in their dreams. The trail of every adult could be followed in the mind back to the point of visionary encounter with a medicine animal, just as the trail of a successful hunter could be followed ahead to his point of encounter with the spirit of an animal. Each actual point of meeting between person and animal was believed to be the manifestation of antecedent meetings in the medium of dream or vision. (emphasis added)

The Witsuwit'en 'kungax' (*cin k'ib*) are "trails of song" (Mills 1994:122) linking past, present and future, and situated in place (Mills 1994; Hugh Brody, address to TC Convention 1987). The *cin k'ib* can be represented by a historical narrative, or can be shown by enactment in the feast hall of the crest of the House Chief, and make publicly manifest the connection of people and Territory. Witsuwit'en stories which relate the early shaping of the world, the stories of Estes, too are linked to places in this world, at least in that they are said to have happened near modern recognized places such as the village of Moricetown (Kyah Wiget and nearby locations), François Lake, or along the Skeena River.

In contrast with Athapaskan languages, Gitksan has to some extent a different logic and structure to its names. Some are similar in structure to Athapaskan names in their descriptive structure, such as Miinhl Sga'nist ('Under the Mountain') for a settlement name. One creek is called Ksa Endilgan ('Creek from the Beaver Dam'). The name of the river, Ksan, is unanalysable, though some derive it from Xsi 'Yeen ('River of Mist'). Communities and settlements commonly are named Git-___ or Kit-___, 'People of _____', as in Gitwingak, 'People of the place of the rabbit'.⁵ Similarly, another village is Gitsegukwhla 'people of the sharp pointed peak', and at the confluence of the

Skeena and Bulkley is Git-an-maaxs 'people of the birckbark torches', a name alluding to the story of its founding. Names record boundaries of territories, such as Ensidel Aks in Figure 5.3; resource sites such as berry patches and groundhog hunting area (referred to in Figure 5.3), or the salmon fishery at Xsigunyaa'a⁶ ('spring salmon river'); sites of activity such as "Place where you make Wedges" (unpublished Gitksan document, GTO Library); sites of habitation, the names of the villages and other camps; physical or hydrologic features such as Gwat Ts'a'lixs, in reference to the whirlpools at the canyon; and, as Dinim Gyet recalled, specific landmarks on trails which describe features needful to know, such as En sgazel ts'el, the 'eyes' in the wood at the avalanche track crossing. Some locations also had botanical referents. A small creek across the river from my former house is called Xsi Gwin Gaanaxw ('water-repellent liverwort creek'), because there is an unusual water repellent leafy liverwort or moss that grows on the ridge near its headwaters.⁷ Dinim Gyet could reach into his inventory of place names to pull out landscape terms, and eloquently demonstrated the linkage of trails, named sites, history, memory and knowledge of the landscape. Gwaans, the late Olive Ryan, told me names of several features on the territory where I lived and gave a sense of their meaning. The little creek flowing into the Skeena just downstream of our former land is called Xsi Gwin Kaiwin ('Seagull Creek'), named as Gull Creek on the highway sign. The fishing site on the flat downstream of that land was "They Never Sleep at Night," in allusion to its high productivity. The rocks obstructing the main channel just off our upper pasture were Xswinik Xstaat,⁸ and mark the area of two oral narratives of the Lax Gibuu (Wolf Clan) recorded by Barbeau (1929 [1973]:129-131). And the prominent red shale outcrop and scree slope above that land recorded the trickster creator 'Wii Gyet's wetting in the river, and gained its colour when he shook off his red dyed cloak, permanently staining the rocks. For Gitksan, the landscape is close grained. Names key very detailed knowledge of ancestral and more recent history, supernatural occurrence, landmarks on trails, resource sites, and boundary markings. Gitksan presence on the landscape is ancient, and knowledge of the land and its changes is deep. Gitksan travel too, but in a landscape of owned places, where the social environment has as much prominence as the natural, and where proving ownership of resources and territory in the feasthall continues to have relevance.

For the Gitksan, as for the Tlingit, the landscape is crossed with storylines, or trails of story, and the toponyms are keys to a whole network of knowledge. Memory is tied to sequences of toponyms which express relationship

to land, history and society. As Thornton writes regarding discussion of such storied routes:

Inevitably this would lead to further reminiscences on the social history of named places, as elders began to connect geographic names to one another and to people in *storylines* of individual and collective experience. Such storylines ultimately weave together in to maps of experience and configurations of *shagóon* ('heritage'), which in resonance and interanimation with the canonical myths and sacred clan histories and geographies (and other *at'óow*) help Tlingits make sense of the world and their place in it. (Thornton 2008:73)