

# Placenames, prepositions and space on Norfolk Island

Placenames can be formed in many ways, but one of the most unusual is by incorporating prepositions. There are several examples of this process in Norfolk, the Norfolk Island language. Figure 1 shows some cases well-known on the island.

It is notable that the incorporated prepositions in these examples are markers of spatial orientation. Apart from *Out Yenna*, which can only find its English equivalent in ‘Out Yonder’, the translation equivalents for these examples can be spatial prepositions such as *in* or *at*.

Norfolk does not have a single calque for *at* but must employ other prepositions; *in* cannot be used at all in these contexts in Norfolk.

Interestingly, there is a large amount of crossover in the use of this spatial system into Standard Australian English, which is also spoken on Norfolk Island. That is, when Norfolk residents speak English, they use absolute spatial descriptors, e.g. ‘we’re going out Steels Point’, inspired by the Norfolk, *we gwen out Steels Point*, instead of ‘we’re going to Steels Point’; and ‘we’ve been up Up in a Stick’, derived from *we bin Up in a Stick*, instead of ‘we’ve been up in the mountainous wooded area in the north of the island’.



Figure 1. Map of incorporated prepositions in Norfolk toponyms (adapted from Edgcombe, 1999, p. 102)

Some of these placenames, plotted in blue, indicate general areas of the island; others, plotted in red, are precisely located names. Table 1 below gives English translations of these toponyms:

Norfolk	English
Out Yenna	Out Yonder
Out ar Station	Out at the Cable Station
Out ar Mission	Out at the Melanesian Mission
Out ar Windmill	Out at the Windmill
Down a Town	Kingston
Round Country	The area around the airport
Up in a Stick	Up in the mountainous wooded area in the north
Up Chats	Up at Chat Evans’ house
Cross ar Water	Across the water

Table 1

Incorporated prepositions in Norfolk toponyms (adapted from Edgcombe, 1999, p. 102)

Specific descriptions of location and place in Norfolk were historically more practical for way-finding than the use of the cardinal system, and these terms of reference, location, and movement have become an integral part of Norfolk grammar. This reliance on these few prepositions and their importance in creating linguistic and cognitive space on and of Norfolk Island have resulted in an orientation system which does not use the cardinal axes of *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west* common in English, but instead has established its own colloquial system unique to this island setting. The incorporation and lexicalisation of these few prepositions into a concise yet useful corpus of placenames is a fascinating toponymic side product.

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## Reference

Edgcombe, Jean. (1999). *Norfolk Island - South Pacific: Island of History and Many Delights*. 2nd ed. Thornleigh, NSW: The author.