



P.E. RAPER. *Dictionary of Southern African place names* (second edition). Jonathan Ball Publishers: Johannesburg, 1989. 608 pp. R44,95 (exclusive).

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Peter Raper's first edition of *Dictionary of Southern African place names* (1987) generally received favourable comments. Some reviewers commended it as 'an excellent book from the point of view of content, coverage (and) style ...'; others saw it as 'a fascinating work ...', 'rich with evocative historical detail ...', and 'an essential addition to any South African library.'

Those who would have expected the second edition to be an improvement on the first, will by no means be disappointed: with an extra 240 pages and the addition of some 2 000 new entries — virtually doubling the dictionary section — this revised and enlarged book constitutes the most comprehensive collection of Southern African place names ever published. And with only a R10 increase in price, it is indeed value for money.

On its dust jacket this second edition of the *Dictionary* is claimed to be an 'indispensable guide' for 'the motorist, adventurer and armchair traveller alike' who wishes to discover the origins of 'the names of the most important cities, towns, townships, villages, regions, mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, and other features' (p. 5) of Southern Africa.

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Apart from their instructiveness and significance for the man in the street, place names are also an important source of information for the professional historian. According to Nicholas Gould the study of place names could be as fascinating and valuable historically as that of archaeology. Since they are to a large extent resistant to change, place names sometimes survive for centuries. Therefore a place-name study can reveal much about the pattern of early settlement, the pioneers and their language, their beliefs or way of life, the original landscape, historical events and socio-economic development. On these and other matters Raper's *Dictionary* thus provides the local and regional historian with invaluable research material. Another asset of this book proves to be the officially approved spelling of names, which is preceded by an asterisk.

Although I agree with Sheila Embleton, an expert on toponymy, that Raper's book is so excellent that there is almost nothing that one could criticize, it has a few shortcomings. First of all the author did not bother either to explain geographical and topographical concepts such as *city*, *town*, *village*, *settlement* and *community centre*, or the differences between those. Secondly, the term *Southern Africa* in the title is somewhat arbitrary: the inclusion of Botswana and Namibia but not Zambia, Zimbabwe or Angola is a strange decision. The author's motivation that it has not been the 'intention to cover all Southern African countries' (p. ix) lacks sufficient substantiation.

Issues such as criteria for the selection and the comprehensiveness of place names are almost inevitably to be raised in a review of the present publication which actually 'may be regarded as a step towards the final work' (p. 5) on this topic. The accomplishment of something of such magnitude obviously is an ongoing and possibly endless process.

At the same time the completeness of the future publication(s) will remain debatable: many readers of the new edition(s) will be looking in vain for specific names of interest to themselves. Admittedly the author makes no pretence to being exhaustive — the 'modest' title *A dictionary* ... is even used on the dust jacket and spine of the book (that, incidentally, does not accord with merely *Dictionary* ... on the title page)! Raper's attempt to include such a vast number of entries deserves merit, though it is regrettable that the revised edition of the bilingual *South African place names by magisterial areas* (Johannesburg, 1982) has seemingly not been consulted.

Another criticism is the absence of a map to orientate the user, a flaw which has also been pointed out by some of the reviewers of Raper's first edition. Finally, a brief historical summary (as an introduction) might also be useful.

In sum, this semi-popular guide to the major place names in Southern Africa is based on sound scholarship. It provides a wealth of information as well as hours of reading pleasure to both the layman and the expert.

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