UNITED STATES BOARD ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES

POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE STANDARDIZATION OF UNDERSEA FEATURE NAMES

Approved by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names
Advisory Committee on Undersea Features 6 April, 1999
With US BGN edits incorporated 19 July 2005
(Supersedes Guidelines approved 25 October 1978)

I. General

A. International concern for naming undersea features is limited to those features entirely or mainly (more than 50%) outside territorial waters (i.e., twelve nautical miles).

B. "Undersea feature" is a part of the ocean floor or seabed that has measurable relief or is delimited by relief.

C. Names used for many years may be accepted even though they do not conform to normal principles of nomenclature.

D. Names approved by national names authorities in waters beyond national limits (i.e., international waters) should be accepted if the names have been applied in conformance with internationally accepted principles. Names applied within the territorial limits of a state should be recognized by other states.

E. In the event of a conflict, the persons and agencies most directly involved should resolve the matter. Where two names have been applied to the same feature, the older name generally should be accepted. Where a single name has been applied to two different features, the feature named first generally should retain the name.

F. Non-Romanized names should be transliterated according to the system approved by the United States Board on Geographic Names (US BGN). When diacritical marks or special characters are used by the proposing individual or body, these will be incorporated into the ACUF names database.

II. Principles for Naming Features

A. Specific Terms

1. Short and simple terms (or names) are preferable.

2. The principal concern in naming is to provide effective, conveniently usable, and appropriate reference; commemoration of persons or ships is a secondary consideration.

3. The first choice of a specific term, where feasible, should be one associated with a geographical feature~~;~~ (e.g., Aleutian Ridge, Aleutian Trench, Peru-Chile Trench, Barrow Canyon).

4. Specific names may be used to commemorate ships or other vehicles, expeditions, or scientific institutes involved in the discovery of the feature, or to honor the memory of famous persons. Where the ship name is used, it should be that of the discovering ship, or if that ship has been previously used for a similar feature, it should be the name of the ship verifying the feature, e.g., San Pablo Seamount, Atlantis II Seamounts.

5. If names of living persons are used, surnames are preferable, and they should be limited to those who have made an outstanding or fundamental contribution to ocean sciences.

6. Groups of like features may be named collectively for specific categories of historical persons, mythical features, stars, constellations, fish, birds, animals, etc. Examples include the following:

Group: Musicians Seamounts
Constituent features: Bach Seamount, Brahms Seamount, Schubert Seamount

Group: Electricians Seamounts
Constituent features: Volta Seamount, Ampere Seamount, Galvani Seamount

Group: Ursa Minor Ridge and Trough Province
Constituent features: Suhail Ridge, Kochab Ridge, Polaris Trough

7. Descriptive names are acceptable, particularly when they refer to distinguishing characteristics (e.g., Hook Ridge, Horseshoe Seamounts).

8. Names of well-known or large features that are applied to other features should have the same spelling.

9. The specific element of the undersea feature's name should not be translated from the language of the nation providing the accepted name.

10. The use of acronyms in undersea feature names is discouraged, but may be considered, if the suggested name is otherwise deemed appropriate.

11. Inappropriate names include those that are:
    (A) applied to similar features elsewhere;
    (B) full names or unwieldy titles of individuals, institutions or organizations;
    (C) commercial products or their manufacturers;
    (D) friends or relations of the proponent;
    (E) of the individual proponent;
    (F) derogatory or offensive;
    (G) of persons occupying high offices who have not contributed directly and significantly to the knowledge of the oceans or undersea topography.

B. Generic Terms

1. Generic terms should be selected from the attached list of definitions to reflect physiographic descriptions of features.

2. Generic terms applied to features appearing on charts or other products should be in English. In those cases where feature names containing foreign generic terms have achieved international currency, that form should be retained.

III. Procedures for Naming Features

A. Individuals and agencies applying names to unnamed features in international waters should adhere to internationally accepted principles and procedures.

B. The attached form is recommended as a model for new proposals.

C. Prior to the naming of a feature, identification of its character, extent, and position must first be established sufficiently for identification. Positions should be given in terms of geographic coordinates. Whenever possible, newly discovered features should have geographic positions determined by GPS. Care must be taken to

ascertain that features are unique, and not simply previously named features for which incorrect geographic positions have been recorded. If modern navigation techniques more accurately determine the position of a previously approved feature, the file should reflect the new position as the most accurate site.

D. New names must be approved by ACUF and US BGN before being published.

E. If ACUF has reason to change the name of a feature it approved originally, information explaining the change should be circulated to other concerned authorities. If there is opposition to a name change, the involved authorities should communicate with each other to resolve the question.

F. ACUF will regularly publicize its names decisions.

G. It is recognized that official national and unofficial international authorities for the naming of Undersea Features exist, such as GEBCO SCUFN (General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans, Subcommittee on Undersea Feature Names), which is also the *de facto* authority for the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) Ocean Mapping Series. Although some of GEBCO SCUFN feature-description standards and rules differ in wording from those of ACUF consideration for acceptance of other-authority-approved names should be granted by ACUF. In cases where a conflict in feature names, types or descriptions appears, evidence for prior usage in published literature or maps should be utilized to determine the correct name of the feature.

H. It is recognized that some national, international and unofficial or *ad hoc* naming authorities do not regularly meet or routinely inform ACUF of their undersea feature discoveries and/or naming thereof. Efforts should be made to identify and correspond with these authorities to inform them of ACUF decisions.

I. Newly discovered and proposed feature names identified by individuals, institutions or agencies, which fall outside of territorial limits but within established EEZ claims by nations under United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982, (UNCLOS-82) should be identified and referred to naming authorities in those nations and GEBCO SCUFN. This procedure in no way acknowledges national or international claims by any nations under UNCLOS-82, or accepts international boundaries set under that Convention, but will be in force as a courtesy to other toponymic bodies.

United States Board on Geographic Names
Undersea Feature Terms and Definitions

Feature Designation Name	Definition	Feature Designation Code
apron	a gentle slope, with a generally smooth surface, particularly found around groups of islands and seamounts	APNU
bank	an elevation, typically located on a shelf, over which the depth of water is relatively shallow but sufficient for safe surface navigation	BNKU
banks	elevations, typically located on a shelf, over which the depth of water is relatively shallow but sufficient for safe surface navigation	BKSU
basin	a depression more or less equidimensional in plan and of variable extent	BSNU
*bench	a small terrace	BNCU
borderland	a region adjacent to a continent, normally occupied by or bordering a shelf, that is highly irregular with depths well in excess of those typical of a shelf	BDLU
canyon	a relatively narrow, deep depression with steep sides, the bottom of which generally has a continuous slope	CNYU
canyons	relatively narrow, deep depressions with steep sides, the bottom of which generally has a continuous slope	CNSU
continental rise	a gentle slope rising from oceanic depths towards the foot of a continental slope	CRSU
cordillera	an entire mountain system including the subordinate ranges, interior plateaus, and basins	CDAU
deep	a localized deep area within the confines of a larger feature, such as a trough, basin or trench	DEPU
escarpment (or scarp)	an elongated and comparatively steep slope separating flat or gently sloping areas	ESCU
fan	a relatively smooth feature normally sloping away from the lower termination of a canyon or canyon system	FANU
*flat	a small level or nearly level area	FLTU
*fork	a branch of a canyon or valley	FRKU
*forks	branches of a canyon or valley	FRSU
fracture zone	an extensive linear zone of irregular topography of the sea floor, characterized by steep-sided or asymmetrical ridges, troughs, or escarpments	FRZU
* furrow	a closed, linear, narrow, shallow depression	FURU
gap	a narrow break in a ridge or rise	GAPU
*gully	a small valley-like feature	GLYU
hill	an elevation rising generally less than 500 meters	HLLU
hills	elevations rising generally less than 500 meters	HLSU
hole	a small depression of the sea floor	HOLU
knoll	an elevation rising generally more than 500 meters and less than 1,000 meters and of limited extent across the summit	KNLU
knolls	elevations rising generally more than 500 meters and less than 1,000 meters and of limited extent across the summits	KNSU
*ledge	a rocky projection or outcrop, commonly linear and near shore	LDGU
levee	an embankment bordering a canyon, valley, or seachannel	LEVU
Feature	**Definition**	**Feature**

Designation Name		Designation Code
median valley	the axial depression of the mid-oceanic ridge system	MDVU
*mesa	an isolated, extensive, flat-topped elevation on the shelf, with relatively steep sides	MESU
moat	an annular depression that may not be continuous, located at the base of many seamounts, islands, an other isolated elevations	MOTU
* mound	a low, isolated, rounded hill	MNDU
mountain	a well-delineated subdivision of a large and complex positive feature	MTU
mountains	well-delineated subdivisions of a large and complex positive feature	MTSU
peak	a prominent elevation, part of a larger feature, either pointed or of very limited extent across the summit	PKU
peaks	prominent elevations, part of a larger feature, either pointed or of very limited extent across the summit	PKSU
pinnacle	a high tower or spire-shaped pillar of rock or coral, alone or cresting a summit	PNLU
plain	a flat, gently sloping or nearly level region	PLNU
plateau	a comparatively flat-topped feature of considerable extent, dropping off abruptly on one or more sides	PLTU
platform	a flat or gently sloping underwater surface extending seaward from the shore	PLFU
province	a region identifiable by a group of similar physiographic features whose characteristics are markedly in contrast with surrounding areas	PRVU
*ramp	a gentle slope connecting areas of different elevations	RMPU
range	a series of associated ridges or seamounts	RNGU
*ravine	a small canyon	RAVU
reef	a surface-navigation hazard composed of consolidated material	RFU
reefs	surface-navigation hazards composed of consolidated material	RFSU
ridge	a long narrow elevation with steep sides	RDGU
ridges	long narrow elevations with steep sides	RDSU
rise	a broad elevation that rises gently, and generally smoothly, from the sea floor	RISU
saddle	a low part, resembling in shape a saddle, in a ridge or between contiguous seamounts	SDLU
seachannel	a continuously sloping, elongated depression commonly found in fans or plains and customarily bordered by levees on one or two sides	SCNU
seachannels	continuously sloping, elongated depressions commonly found in fans or plains and customarily bordered by levees on one or two sides	SCSU
seamount	an elevation rising generally more than 1,000 meters and of limited extent across the summit	SMU
seamounts	elevations rising generally more than 1,000 meters and of limited extent across the summit	SMSU
shelf	a zone adjacent to a continent (or around an island) that extends from the low water line to a depth at which there is usually a marked increase of slope towards oceanic depths	SHFU

Feature Designation	Definition	Feature Designation

Name		Code
shelf edge	a line along which there is a marked increase of slope at the outer margin of a continental shelf or island shelf	EDGU
shelf valley	a valley on the shelf, generally the shoreward extension of a canyon	SHVU
shoal	a surface-navigation hazard composed of unconsolidated material	SHLU
shoals	hazards to surface navigation composed of unconsolidated material	SHSU
sill	the low part of a gap or saddle separating basins	SILU
slope	the slope seaward from the shelf edge to the beginning of a continental rise or the point where there is a general reduction in slope	SLPU
spur	a subordinate elevation, ridge, or rise projecting outward from a larger feature	SPRU
tablemount (or guyot)	a seamount having a comparatively smooth, flat top	TMTU
tablemounts (or guyots)	seamounts having a comparatively smooth, flat top	TMSU
terrace	a relatively flat horizontal or gently inclined surface, sometimes long and narrow, which is bounded by a steeper ascending slope on one side and by a steep descending slope on the opposite side	TERU
tongue	an elongate (tongue-like) extension of a flat sea floor into an adjacent higher feature	TNGU
trench	a long, narrow, characteristically very deep and asymmetrical depression of the sea floor, with relatively steep sides	TRNU
trough	a long depression of the sea floor characteristically flat bottomed and steep sided, and normally shallower than a trench	TRGU
valley	a relatively shallow, wide depression, the bottom of which usually has a continuous gradient	VALU
valleys	relatively shallow, wide depressions, the bottom of which usually has a continuous gradient	VLSU