

Name makeover for islands

Dutch, French and English sailors had a go at naming Marion and Prince Edward Islands. Now, finally, it is the turn of South Africa's children to give names to unique features on the nation's southern-most territories

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PERHAPS one could be named *Entabeni* - Xhosa for at the mountains? Or what about *Emoyeni* - where the wind blows?

South African school pupils are being given a unique opportunity to name five geographical features on the most remote piece of this country's territory: Marion Island, part of the Prince Edward Island Group, which is almost 1 800km from Cape Town in the heart of the vast Southern Ocean, about half-way to Antarctica.

The five geographical features range from a rugged volcanic outcrop and a wild, seldom-visited lake to ponds with such neat edges that they appear to be manicured gardens.

Marion Island gets more than 2 500mm of precipitation every year, including a lot of snow in winter, and gale force winds blow on average one out of every three days.

The Prince Edward Island management committee, responsible for the management of Marion and neighbouring Prince Edward Island, has decided to broaden the range of languages used to name features on the island, in order to reflect the cultural diversity of the country.

The committee has asked pupils to come up with appropriate names, in any of the 11 official languages other than English or Afrikaans, in a "Marion Island: Name-that-Feature" competition.

"The competition is being used to generate some distinctly South African names for features and to create awareness about South Africa's most remote island amongst the younger members of our society," explained spokesman Richard Mercer.

The winning entries chosen for each of the features will appear on the new map for the island, and the win-



Untamed beauty: this wild, seldom-visited, semi-frozen lake is at the heart of Marion Island.



Wild twins: Prince Edward Island glows in the twilight on the northern horizon of its neighbour, Marion Island.

ning pupils and their schools will receive prizes donated by the South African National Antarctic Programme, operated by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

The competition is open to all pupils from Grades 1 to 12 and the closing date is February 28.

● Marion Island was first sighted on March 4, 1663, by a Dutchman, Barent Barntszoon Ham, aboard the *Maerseveen*, while sailing to Java.

Although he didn't land on either of the two islands in the group, he named the more northerly one (now Prince Edward Island) *Dina*, and the other (now Marion Island) after his ship.

Ham incorrectly reported

their position as 41° South; not surprisingly, they could not be found again by subsequent Dutch expeditions as he was about four degrees - 240 nautical miles, or about 450km - too far north.

The next visitor to the island group was the French navigator Marion du Fresne, captain of the frigate *Le Mascarin*, on January 13, 1772, who was on his way south looking for Antarctica. Because no map had these islands (Ham had incorrectly positioned them) listed.

He named the islands *Terre de l'Esprance* (Isle of Hope, now Marion) and *Ile de la Caverne* (Cave Island) respectively, but was also unable to land as the weather was too rough.

He initially believed the



Naturally artificial: these ponds on Marion Island have such neat edges that they appear to be manicured and are informally called Japanese gardens. They are some of the geographical features which pupils are being asked to name in one of the official languages other than English or Afrikaans.

island pair were part of Antarctica, and when he discovered his mistake, renamed them *Ile des Froides* (The Frigid Islands). He then sailed on to discover Crozet Islands, now Australian territory.

Five years later, the islands were renamed again, this time by British explorer Captain James Cook, who, sailing in the ships *Discovery* and *Resolution*, reached

December, 12 1776 them on his third voyage of exploration. Since his charts did not show the names du Fresne had given the islands, he named them both the Prince Edward Islands, after the fourth son of King George III (father of Queen Victoria).

But he later learned that the French navigator had named the larger island

Marion in honour of Du Fresne.

As with many other sub-Antarctic islands, it was the sealers who first landed on Marion. Arriving in 1799, they plied their gory trade through the 19th century and well into the 20th.

In 1947, in the aftermath of World War 2, the British government decided to give Marion and Prince Edward islands to South Africa, in

order to prevent them falling into hostile hands. The South African naval vessel HMSAS *Transvaal* was dispatched to the island group in great secrecy to complete the formalities.

Marion Island was formally annexed on December 29, 1947 and Prince Edward six days later, on January 4, 1948.

A research and weather station on the island has

been operated continuously since then.

● Photographs of the five features and further information about the competition can be found on the web at www.sun.ac.za/zoo/competition.htm, or by contacting Richard Mercer during office hours on 021 808 2571 or 083 718 9513 (mercercer@sun.ac.za) in the Department of Zoology, University of Stellenbosch.

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