

YUKON STREET, U.K.: Klondike Place-names in the United Kingdom

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Place-names provide a living link between the present and the past. They denote, in often convoluted ways, the influences that were determinant at the time of cartographic inscription. In the case of Australia, it has been argued, they have served the function of erasing aboriginal presence and permitting European occupation of the land.¹ It is perhaps easy to assume that the choice of place-names only involves imperialistic authority over "distant" lands. What is the meaning of the many transfers of place-names between Canada and the United Kingdom? What images of Canada were important enough to be etched into the geography of the United Kingdom?

For Canadians, the origins of place-names can frequently be traced to precise individuals and dates. Such place-names often reflect changing European settlement patterns. As a study of Scottish place-names outside of the country concludes, "The part that Scotland played in developing the colonies of the British Empire in America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and parts of Africa can be seen by simply picking up an Atlas."²

Indeed, Canadians grow up with British place-names all around them. We too, have a London, and ours is also on the Thames River. Our Stratford is on the Avon. There is a Cardiff, Ontario, a Liverpool, Nova Scotia, and a New Westminster, BC. Calgary is named after a house on the Isle of Mull off the west coast of Scotland.³ We almost ended up with two New Scotlands as provinces: alongside Nova Scotia, New Caledonia would have been the name for British Columbia, if a distant French island did not already have the name.⁴ Place names are often not unique to Canada—they have been somewhere else first, as indeed the ancestors of much of the country's population has been.

Surveyors and city founders might be forgiven for lacking some originality in their choice of names—though their decisions not to adopt more aboriginal place name say much about their attitudes to aboriginal peoples, and their belief in the possibilities of a so-called "new" country. Still, there are important exceptions to this suppression of aboriginal place-names

scattered throughout the country: Toronto, Ucluelet, Tagish, Winnipeg, Ottawa, and Batiscan. Nonetheless, as Paul Carter points out in the Australian context, the authority of such place-names rests not on the aboriginal voice but on the quotation of the name by European surveyors and explorers.⁵

In the United Kingdom, place names are important pieces of historical evidence for the settlement and invasion history of the land. Names like Dover recall Celtic occupation, Chester the Romans, Derby the Scandinavians, Birmingham the Angles, to take some examples at random.⁶ None of these various invaders is responsible for a place-name like that of the resort town near Bristol called "Westward Ho!" In this case, the town's name commemorates a Charles Kingsley novel (1855).⁷

Many of the place names in Britain have hazy, distant origins, themselves the only remaining scraps of evidence for the early settlement of the areas. A corollary of this is the fact that relatively few new towns—despite phenomenal urban growth—were established in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, and so few choices were made to adopt new names that might reflect the conditions of those times. Model industrial villages, for instance, reflected their benefactors' aspirations or egos: Titus Salt's Saltaire, Edward Akroyd's Akroydon, W. H. Lever's Port Sunlight.⁸ There was little desire to borrow names from the overseas colonies.

As a result, we are unlikely to see the influence of Canada on the signposts of Britain. This contrasts markedly with Canadian experience, where so many new towns were established, so many geographical features named (or renamed) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rare are the geographical features that testify to the close migration ties between Canada and the United Kingdom. Canada Hill, near Glasgow, now a golf course, was so-named because it afforded a good view of emigrant ships heading to the New World.⁹ There is a Newfoundland Bay near Dartmouth, Devon. One soldier returning from the battle of Quebec named a field in Derbyshire the Heights of Abraham.¹⁰

But relatively few towns in the United Kingdom boast Canadian place-names. There is a Toronto in Durham County, a colliery village, named apparently because a mining entrepreneur was in Toronto at the time he received news of a coal strike.¹¹ There is a Quebec in the same county. But these are the exceptions to the rule.

However, there are two Klondyke agglomerations in England. Klondyke in Barnsley, West Riding Yorkshire is a small settlement of four streets, whose more common name today is West Green.¹² Klondyke in Cramlington, Northumberland, is an old coal mining town. In Klondyke,

the Cramlington Chop Suey House and Gerry's Exhausts face the Aged Miners Homes across Front Street.

Beyond larger agglomerations, there are other, more appropriate, scales at which we can look for Canadian and Yukon reminders in the centre of the Empire. Kenneth Cameron's *English Place-names* lists Klondyke as a nickname "of a fanciful type" used in various parts of the country for fields. It is used, he states, to denote productive land.¹³ At least five English fields share the name Klondyke, although sometimes they do so ironically.¹⁴ A hillside in the Shetland Islands is also named Klondyke, though probably for somewhat different reasons than we might expect, which will be considered later. Part of the sea near the Shetlands is called "Klondyke" because it was first fished at the time of the gold rush.¹⁵

In addition to fields and hillsides, thirteen streets in the United Kingdom are named either Klondyke or Yukon.¹⁶ There is also a Robert Service Crescent in the Scottish town of Kilwinning in Ayrshire in which Service spent his childhood.¹⁷

There is, for instance, a Klondike Street in Belfast. As the architecture, and perhaps the politics of that city suggest, this is a city of the nineteenth century, a period of great economic prosperity.

There is also a Yukon Street in Belfast (see Figure 1), as well as a Klondyke Bar, established by a German man returning rich from the Gold Rush.¹⁸ The two streets and the bar all are located in Protestant areas of the city.

There is a Klondike Street near Edinburgh as well. It is named after the Klondike coal mine, the shaft of which was sunk at



Figure 1 Yukon Street, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

the same time that news circulated about the gold discoveries in the Yukon.¹⁹ Newcraighall's coal mine did not produce the riches of the real Klondike, but the dream or the irony was given to the street name. There is a Yukon Road in London, which also dates back to 1898, when the Klondike Gold Rush was covered in the British press with some enthusiasm.

These are not magnificent boulevards, the Klondyke and Yukon Streets. They tend rather to be short and residential. While the Victorian terraces in Bushmills, County Armagh, Northern Ireland appear well-appointed, many of the streets are located in modest, working-class housing developments. Six of these streets were named about the time of the Gold Rush, but the others are much more recent additions to their urban landscape. They refer in fact to the Klondyke Gold Rush at one remove, reminders of another local geographical sign: Klondyke Close in Clee Hill, Ludlow, Shropshire (for an old quarry), Klondyke Street in Edinburgh (after the coal mine), Klondyke Industrial Estate in Queenborough, Kent possibly after a Klondyke Creek.²⁰ Yukon Gardens in Middlesborough, Cleveland was part of a larger housing development with Canadian names. Likewise, Yukon Terrace in East Kilbride, near Glasgow, is around the corner from Whitehorse Walk and Vancouver Drive, part of a selection of Commonwealth names in the 1950s Westwood suburb.

In addition to street names, it is possible to identify house names that commemorate the Klondike. In Britain, houses are sometimes named, and that name is recognised by the postal service as an integral part of the address. Obviously, in a large, modern country with postcodes and postal workers who do not necessarily stay in the same job all their lives, it is only small towns that have the luxury of house names. Still, it is worth recognising that having a specified house name (instead of a street address) apparently adds value to one's house.²¹

Some 32 houses or groups of houses use the names Klondike or Yukon (the vast majority being the Klondike).²² House names, one could theorise, might be the most useful way of locating the symbolic impact of the Klondike Gold Rush on the United Kingdom. After all, houses-names are more likely to reflect the times in which they are built or purchased—the names of streets and agglomerations are perhaps less susceptible to the whims of fashion. Could these house names trace the spread of settlement of men and women returning from the Klondike; in other words, could house names provide the same evidence as Celtic and Roman place-names?

Of the twenty-five individual houses with the name Klondyke and Yukon in the United Kingdom, some 17 occupants responded to my queries. What I found was of some surprise—these were often not old houses at all. There had been a direct link between the Gold Rush (or even later residency in the North) and the house name in a small number of cases: a stately house in Gunnislake, Cornwall was built by people returning from the gold fields.²³ Likewise, another large dwelling in Bath was built by a descendant of the Mallet family, who made much of their money in the Gold Rush.²⁴ "Yukon"

in Ruan Minor, Helston, Cornwall, was so called because some distant relatives had left for the Gold Rush some seventy years previously.²⁵

But around half of the house names designate bungalows built since the Second World War. Some of these had more distant—one could say second-hand—references. A Klondyke house built in the post-World War II period in Bury-St-Edmunds, Suffolk is a reminder of another house owned by the builders' father, which had since been sold and had had its name changed.²⁶ A bungalow built in 1970 in Colden Common, Winchester, was named after a part of Dartmoor known locally as Klondyke, nearby where the owner's mother lived.²⁷

In other circumstances, the general connotations of wealth determined the allure of the name. A Klondyke cottage near Penzance in Cornwall owes its name to a field the owner's father cultivated. At the time of the Gold Rush, he planted the field in potatoes, from which he made a tidy sum. As a result, the father named his field Klondyke and the name was passed on.²⁸ In Cemaes Bay in Gwynedd County, Wales, a man named Klondike Jones set up a brickworks called Klondike. A house built in the area in the 1960s adopted this name as well.²⁹ Similarly, the 1920s building Klondyke in Hastings, East Sussex, may simply reflect the builders' success on the Stock Exchange.³⁰ As these last cases suggest most clearly, the key element must be the use of Klondyke and Yukon to denote dreams of success.

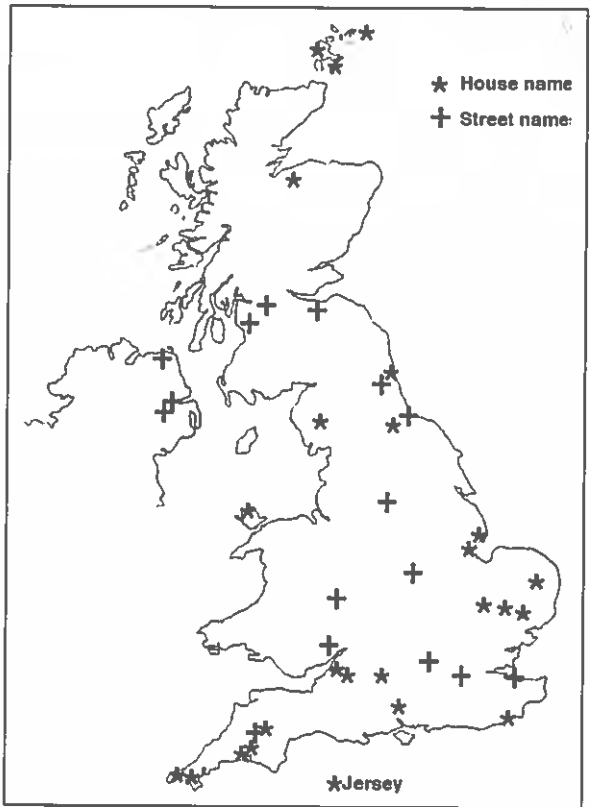


Figure 2 Map showing location of houses with the name "Yukon" or "Klondike."

Table 1
Names of Territories and Provinces
in Postcode Address File Database

Names of Territories and Provinces	Number of Entries ³²
Yukon	13
Northwest Territories	0
British Columbia	3
Alberta*	168
Saskatchewan	2
Manitoba	42
Ontario	35
Quebec	198
New Brunswick	7
Nova Scotia	41
Prince Edward Island	0
Newfoundland	41

The map of the houses (Figure 2) suggests that many are located in areas of depopulation in the early twentieth century.³¹ These are areas from which people left in order to make their fortunes. Not all made their way to the Klondyke goldfields, but they had other substitutes. The fortune for Klondyke Jones of north Wales was made in building Liverpool.

Though the total number of references to the Yukon is not large, among Canadian place-names in the United Kingdom, Klondike and Yukon are well represented (See Table 1). Of all the territorial and provincial names, by far the most popular one is Quebec, there being only thirteen mentions of Yukon. However, Klondyke is a well-used name, especially in comparison to much larger cities and provinces.

There are more Klondikes in the United Kingdom than Ottawas, Winnipegs and Saskatoons. (See Table 2.) This point suggests one quick conclusion about the image of Canada in the United Kingdom: there are probably two events in Canadian history (and only two) which are well known in Britain: General Wolfe's victory on the Plains of Abraham and the

Table 2
Canadian Place-names in the United Kingdom

Selected Geographical Names	Number of Entries in Postcode Address File Data Base
Klondike/Klondyke	53
Toronto	103
Montreal	72
Vancouver	117
Saskatoon	6
Winnipeg	27
Ottawa	48
Yellowknife	0

Klondike Gold Rush. Probably many of the other names are reflective of personal ties to a particular Canadian locale. These various geographical names reflect the interest in the Klondike Gold Rush. After all, Klondike was big news in Britain. News of the discovery of gold reached British newspapers in July 1897. "Hundreds of miners are preparing to start for the new gold region on the Klondyke," wrote the *Times* correspondent based in Victoria in the 21 July issue. "Intense excitement prevails." A further story on the same day added that "Gold seekers have been warned that the Klondyke district is in British territory, and is governed accordingly."³³

A few days later, the *Times* provided a caution: "Those who are best informed strongly advise no one from Great Britain to start this year. The climate in winter is cold, but not so rigorous as to prevent work."³⁴ Despite attempts on the part of solemn newspaper editors to discourage the rush, the stampede to this, the last great nineteenth-century Gold Rush, was on. (It took a few days for the editors to sort out their geography. At first, stories referred to Klondike, British Columbia, before moving the location to Alaska, finally settling it in Yukon.)

Short-lived newspapers appeared in London specifically dedicated to news of the Gold Rush. *The Klondyke Review: A Journal of Authentic Information on the Yukon Valley Gold Fields*, published from London, appeared in two issues in December 1897. In the more serious Victorian periodicals, lengthy

accounts of trips provided the reader with the latest true-life experiences from the northwestern edge of continent.³⁵

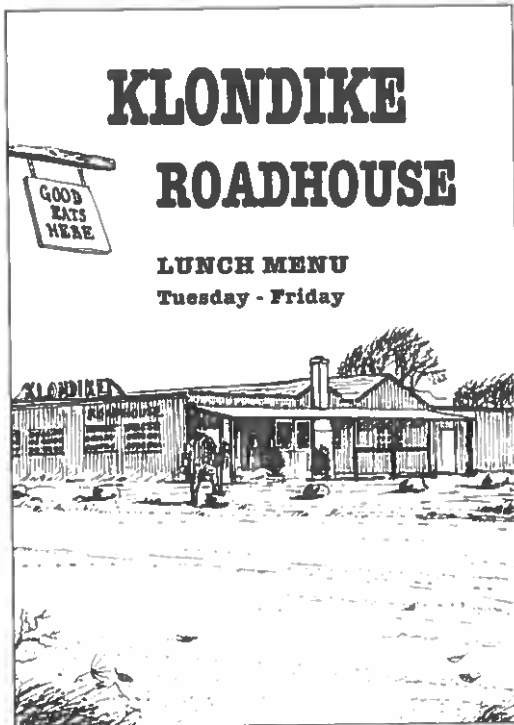


Figure 3 Menu cover, Klondike Roadhouse, near Froxfield, Wiltshire.

Beyond the most active years of the rush, the image of the Klondike remained an effective symbol. It may be useful to draw on Pierre Berton's discussion of the depiction of Canada in Hollywood picture films. The marketing agents were aware that Canada by itself was not alluring enough to attract large crowds. Therefore, they developed a series of code words for Canada, in which Yukon or Klondike were much more common than Canada itself.³⁶

One important reason why the Yukon and the Klondike retained such a strong pull through the twentieth century can probably be explained by one man: Robert Service. Service grew up in Scotland, training in Glasgow for his

earlier and less lucrative career as a bank teller. Service was probably the best read versifier of this century. A survey conducted by the Manchester Public Library in 1953 noted that Service's works were by far the most popular books of poetry in the library.³⁶ His *Songs of the Sourdough* sold some three millions copies by 1940³⁷ and is still in print ninety years after its first release. Service is, apparently, the favourite poet of both Ronald Reagan and the Queen Mother.

The very name Klondyke has developed connotations far from its historic origin. It has entered the world's lexicon as a synonym for "wealth." In Scotland, the word "Klondyke" has a very particular meaning. According to the *Scottish National Dictionary*, klondyke is a verb, meaning "To export

fresh herring packed in salt and ice by fast steamer to the Continent."³⁹ During the peak period of the herring fishery in Northern Scotland at the turn of the century, klondyking was a more profitable way of exporting the fish to Germany and Norway than was curing.⁴⁰ A herring-boat is a klondyker. Today, klondykers tend to be boats from Russia, visiting the rich fishing grounds off the Shetlands or the Orkneys for herring or mackerel.

The three Klondyke houses in the Orkneys, as well as the Klondike hillside on the Shetlands to which I referred earlier, likely derive their name from the herring trade, rather than the gold rush.⁴¹

As a commercial marker, Klondyke is used in Scotland to sell garden plants. In Edinburgh and elsewhere in Scotland, the Klondyke Garden Centre refers back to the Gold Rush. On their opening day, they published a newsletter inviting customers to "Join the Rush to the Klondyke."⁴²

A final noteworthy commercial use of the gold rush image is the Klondyke Roadhouse. Located in Wiltshire, between London and Bristol, the Klondyke Roadhouse is a road-side restaurant on a Yukon theme (see Figure 2). It was founded ten years ago by an entrepreneur returning after a stay in Canada,⁴³ who chose to accentuate the Klondike theme. This is a Tex-Mex restaurant, but the names of the meals clearly recall the Gold Rush: Dan McGrew's Potato Shells, the Klondike Burger (tomato, bacon, cheese on a burger, topped with a fried egg), Skagway Scampi, and Chilkoot Pass Chili.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Many people on both sides of the Atlantic look on the process of imperial expansion and colonisation as having a one-way focus: the influences came from the mother country and spread to the colonies. But important influences headed back the other way too. The Klondike Gold Rush captured the imagination of British people, as it did people throughout the world. For a few brief years, at least, the Yukon provided the location for the dreams of the world—the continuing use of house and street names that refer to the Yukon and the Klondike reflect that fact. These were often the dreams of those from modest circumstances. The coal miners' cottages that line a number of the Klondike Streets are witness to that fact. The study of Klondike and Yukon as geographical markers in the United Kingdom, reveals the geography of dreams, dreams apparently as relevant today as they were in the hey-day of the Gold Rush. As a result, to paraphrase a well-known poem, "There will always be a corner of Britain that will be Yukon."

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Endnotes

1. Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).
2. Stuart Conroy, *The Name's the Same: Scottish Placenames Worldwide* (Glendaruel, Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1996), p. 12.
3. Ged Martin and Jeffrey Simpson, *Canada's Heritage in Scotland* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1989), pp. 104-5.
4. Ged Martin, "The Naming of British Columbia" *Albion X* (1979): 257-263.
5. Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, p. 328.
6. Kenneth Cameron, *English Place-Names* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1961), *passim*.
7. A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of English Place Names* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 353.
8. P. J. Waller, *Town, City & Nation: England, 1850-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 173-5.
9. Martin and Simpson, *Canada's Heritage in Scotland*, p. 129. In keeping with the theme of migration links, it is worth noting the name Canada Bay in Australia, a reference to the exiles of the 1838 Lower Canadian Rebellions to the penal colony. Beverley Boissery, *A Deep Sense of Wrong: The Treason, Trials, and Transportation to New South Wales of Lower Canadian Rebels after the 1838 Rebellion* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1995), p. 280.
10. Jeffrey Simpson and Ged Martin, *The Canadian Guide to Britain, vol 1: England* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 192, 305.
11. C. Surtees, *The History of the Township of Newton Cap* (1922), p. 15.
12. Ian Ireland, Barnsley Central Library to author, 28 November 1996. A section of Bolton near Manchester is named Klondike, though this does not appear in the Gazetteers or the Postcode Address File CD-Rom consulted for this paper. My thanks to Frank Duerden for this comment.
13. Cameron, *English Place-Names*, p. 209. My thanks for this reference to Dr John W. M. Peterson.
14. John Field, *A History of English Field-Names* (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 160-1.
15. C. A. Goodlad, *Shetland Fishing Saga* (n.p.: Shetland Times Ltd., 1971), p. 222.
16. These street names were located on the Postcode Address File CD-Rom database.
17. This street only dates back to 1980. Jill McColl, North Ayrshire Library Services

- to author, 3 February 1997.
18. Bill Kirk, *The Klondyke Bar: Photographs from the life of a Belfast Public House* (Belfast: Balckstaff Press, 1975).
 19. Stuart Harris, *The Place Names of Edinburgh: Their Origins and History* (Edinburgh: Gordon Wright Publishing, 1996), p. 378. The author adds that "In Scots [i.e. Lowlands Scots language], Klondyke has acquired the figurative meaning 'gold mine'."
 20. Richard H. Thomas, South Shropshire District Council to author, 3 December 1996; Lois Pratt, Sheerness Library, Sherness, Kent to author, 2 December 1996.
 21. Rosalind Russell, "Name of the Rose Cottage", *The Independent* (London), 29 March 1997, p. 23.
 22. Since the nature of the source excludes all large cities altogether, there are undoubtedly many more Klondike and Yukon houses.
 23. S. Davies to author, 3 April 1997. Klondyke Farms in Thorpe Satchville, Leicestershire and in Burwell, Cambridge both date from the 1890s as well. Adam Goodwin, Leicestershire Record Office to author, 26 November 1996; letter to author, 19 April 1997.
 24. E.G. Janiak to author, 9 March 1997.
 25. Emma Rancoud-Guillon to author, 13 January 1997.
 26. P.M. Smith to author, 13 January 1997.
 27. Beryl and George Newman to author, 19 January 1997.
 28. J. Thomas to author, 7 April 1997.
 29. E. Watson to author, no date.
 30. Letter to author, 27 March 1997.
 31. Compare the map of areas of depopulation, 1851-1911, in John Langton and R.J. Morris, eds., *Atlas of Industrialising Britain, 1780-1914* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 13.
 32. This table and the next are based on the number of postal codes that relate to a particular place-name. Thus, a particularly long street may include a number of different postal codes. Although this method of calculation does not account for the multiple references to the same street name, it has the advantage of indicating the scope of the various place-names. Thus, a longer street will provide more references than a short one. The name "Alberta" is starred because the mentions of it in the table do not with any certainty refer to the province of Alberta, it being Queen Victoria's daughter's name.
 33. *Times* (London), 21 July 1897, 5d.
 34. *Times*, 26 July 1897, 5c.
 35. For instance, Alexander Macdonald, "Pioneering in Klondyke" *Blackwood's*

- Edinburgh Magazine* CLXV (May, June, July 1899), pp. 781-801, 986-1002, 71-87; T. C. Down, "Adventurers at the Klondike" *The Fortnightly Review* LXIV n.s. (1898), pp. 745-755.
36. Pierre Berton, *Hollywood's Canada: The Americanization of Our National Image* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), p. 19.
 37. James Mackay, *Vagabond of Verse: Robert Service, a biography* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2nd ed., 1996), p. 397.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
 39. *The Scottish National Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Scottish National Dictionary Association, 1960), p. 438. This definition adds that the term derives from "Klondyke, Alaska." The more recent *Concise Scots Dictionary* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985), p. 345, adds that the term now chiefly refers to mackerel.
 40. On klondyking, see James R. Coull, *The Sea Fisheries of Scotland: A Historical Geography* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1996), pp. 128-9; C. A. Goodlad, *Shetland Fishing Saga* (n.p.: Shetland Times Ltd., 1971), pp. 192, 216. Mary Murray adds that "A klondyke box held two baskets of herring well sprinkled with ice." *The Skipper's Notebook* (Anstruther: Scottish Fisheries Museum, 1986), p. 57.
 41. R. P. Hall to author, 13 March 1997.
 42. National Library of Scotland, *Klondyke Garden News*.
 43. Ann Fisher to author, 1 April 1997.
 44. In the East Midlands, "Klondike" refers to sliced, battered potatoes. My thanks to Colin Nicholson for this comment.