

# Diacritics — to be or not to be: nomenclature, pronunciation and early history of Faure Island, Shark Bay, Australia

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**ABSTRACT** – The correct spelling, pronunciation and origin of the name Faure Island (pronounced ‘four’) are explained and a critique on spelling and pronunciation of foreign names in English for Australasia is given. An Aboriginal name for Faure Island was searched for and is considered lost.

**KEYWORDS:** diacritical marks in Australasian place names, Malgana language group, French exploration of Australia.

## INTRODUCTION

*In Paris they simply stared when I spoke to them in French; I never did succeed in making... [the French] understand their language* (Mark Twain 1869).

Faure Island in Shark Bay, Western Australia, is of special biological interest, because it is positioned at the convergence of three ecological boundaries: biogeographical, vegetational and climatic (see Johnstone et al. 2000; Richards and Wilson 2008). The region has been visited by biologists and naturalists/explorers since Dirk Hartog Island was first visited in 1616 and in 1699 William Dampier made the first description of the island’s vegetation (Abbott 2007).

Faure Island, named by the French, can be pronounced differently depending how it is spelt (Bougard 2008). French and English both share a common ancestor in Latin. Many words are similar between the two languages yet often pronunciation is dependent on whether or not diacritical marks (accents) are used; these marks alter the vowel sounds in words (Bougard 2008). A geographic location given in a scholarly article is part of the descriptive text: it needs to be precise, unambiguous and specific. Inconsistency in spelling provides none of these. Accurate communication in the spoken language is equally important; imprecise pronunciation can lead to an imprecise, incorrect or nil understanding of the subject.

Australian Aboriginal languages also have grammars, and sets of rich speech sounds, typical of other well-known languages such as the European Languages (Blake 1991; Fulton 2001). If Aboriginal names are to be adopted into English it is important to learn to pronounce the names as correctly as possible (Abbott 2009), again it is crucial to be precise, unambiguous and specific.

The aims of this study were 1) to give detail to the nomenclature and pronunciation of Faure Island and to search for the Aboriginal name of the island, 2) to advocate the themes of accuracy and consistency using diacritical marks and 3) to help embrace the idea that a geographical name carries more information than place – it provides a sense of history, sentiment, culture and ecology.

*‘Part of the sense of place is surely not mangling the pronunciation of the name (whether Indigenous or European) of the place!’* (Ian Abbott in litt. 2010)

## METHODS

Current pronunciations were determined by listening to residents of the Shark Bay area: by travelling to the Island and over the telephone. Literature searches were made of the French historical literature and its translations in English, the Libraries Australia database of The National Library of Australia, the Department of Environment and Conservation Library, The Corella Seabird Island Series, Google and Google Scholar. The relevant literature was followed, which included following references found in citation lists. A literature search for a Malgana name of Faure Island also searched in the holdings of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Library. This search included books, pamphlets, reference material and language material and was conducted by the Senior Reference Librarian, Eleanor Galvin. In addition, Eleanor Galvin and I queried Landgate the Western Australian Government database of place names. Landgate searched their Genoma Database, which is the Geographic Names database. Marika Oakley of the Yadgalah Aboriginal Corporation, in

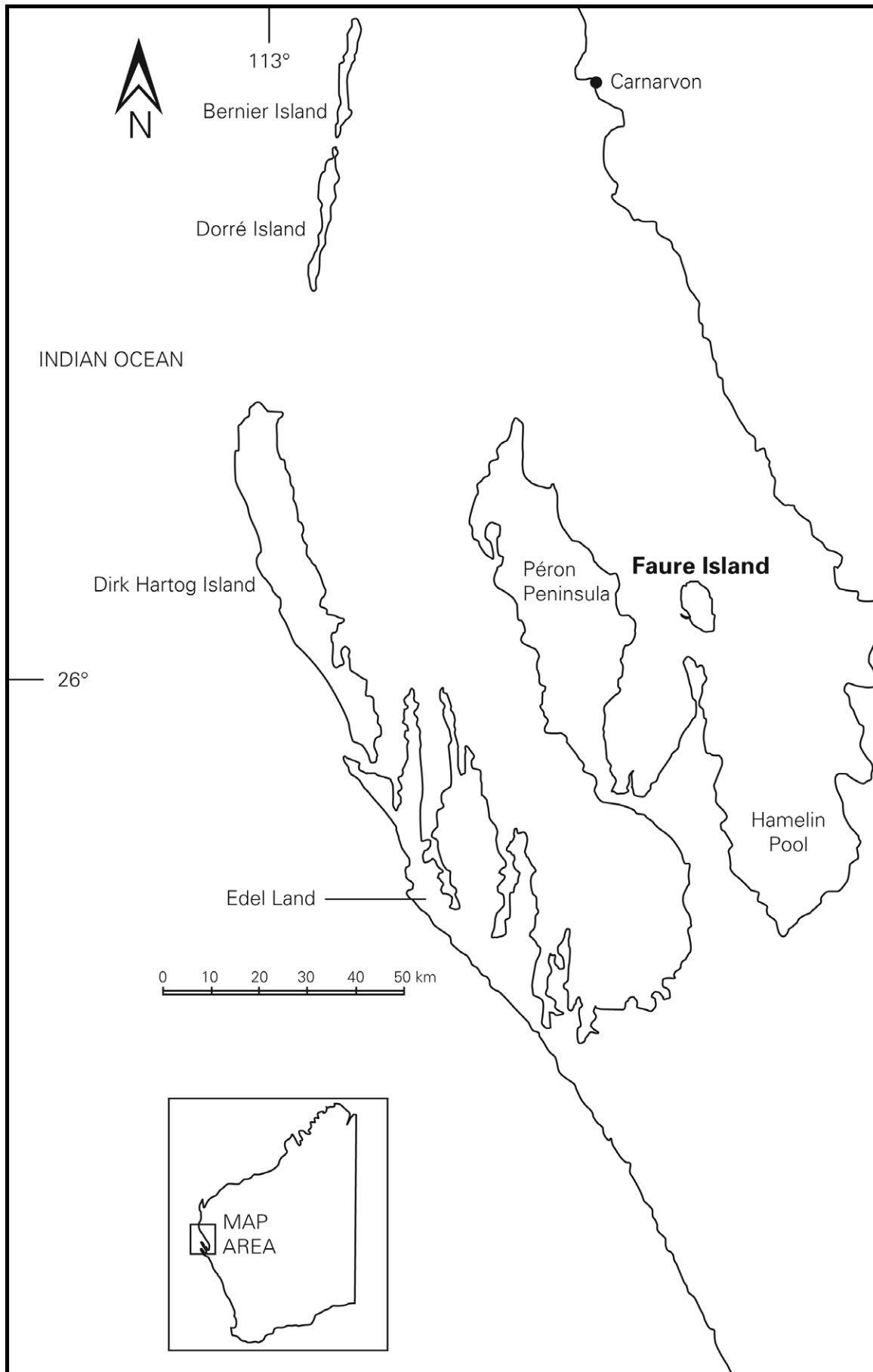


FIGURE 1 Faure Island showing its position in Shark Bay; the inset shows where Shark Bay is situated in Western Australia.

Shark Bay, spoke on my behalf with several Aboriginal elders who use the local Malgana Language.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### BRIEF HISTORY

Faure Island (Figure 1) is situated in Shark Bay at 25°51'S, 113°53'E and is 5,148 ha (Abbott and Burbidge 1995). It was first charted and given a European name during Nicolas Baudin's (pronounced Beau dan) expedition to Australia between 1800 and 1804 (Péron and de Fréycinet 1807–1816; Cornell 1965; Marchant 1998). The island was first charted by Faure in August 1801 when the *Naturaliste*, Commander Hamelin, spent some weeks (from 16 July to 4 September) in Shark Bay – Baudin on the *Géographe* having departed four days previously (Fréycinet, *Voyages de Découvertes*, vol. III, *Navigation et Géographie*, 1815 – from *Île de France* to Timor). The island was valuable for the abundance of turtles and Baudin on his second visit to Shark Bay in 1803 refers to it as *Île aux Tortues* (Cornell 1974: 505, 513). The island was given its French name *Île Faure* by Baudin in 1801, in honour of the engineer/geographer, Pierre Ange François Xavier Faure (Péron and de Fréycinet 1807–1816; Péron 1809; Marchant 1998). Pierre Faure first saw the island and landed on its west coast with Charles Moreau (Péron and de Fréycinet 1807–1816; Péron 1809). Faure drew a sketch which was later used by Louis de Fréycinet to draw the first chart of the area (Fréycinet 1812; Reynolds 2001). Note that de Fréycinet's chart names the island as *Île Faure*.

### PRONUNCIATION

The current pronunciation of Faure Island, spoken on the island and in the Shark Bay region, is Fauré (fo'ray or for eh) or Faurë (for ee) (pers. obs.). These are incorrect: it is correctly pronounced 'four' and correctly spelt Faure. The name is mentioned many times in Péron and de Fréycinet (1807–1816) and always spelt as Faure and never with an e-acute diacritical mark (P. Akoun [*Bibliothèque nationale de France*], pers. comm., 25 March 2009).

### DIACRITICAL MARKS IN AUSTRALASIAN PLACE NAMES

Faure is a French name, which theoretically can be pronounced with different endings, when either the acute diacritical mark (é) or the diaeresis (ë) are used in its spelling (Simpson and Weiner 1989). The diacritical marks enable readers to distinguish the correct pronunciation. Thus, Faure is pronounced 'four'. The use of the acute diacritical mark enables speakers to pronounce words correctly, e.g. café, sauté and résumé, while the diaeresis indicates that the second vowel should also be pronounced, e.g. the names Chloë and Zoë (Simpson and Weiner 1989). Alas, diacritical marks do not appear on English geographical maps or in common usage because geographical names in Australasia follow the protocol set down by the Committee for Geographical Place Names in Australasia (2001), which states: 'English

language place names do not have diacritical marks. In the case of place names derived from languages other than English, any diacritical marks are not to be carried over to the English form' (4.13.), e.g. Géographe Bay. Thus the spelling of other languages in Australasia is inconsistently incorrect.

### AN ABORIGINAL NAME

The traditional owners of Shark Bay including Faure Island are the Malgana people (Thieberger 1993). Thieberger (1993) reported the Malgana language as poorly known with no publications on its grammar or spelling in English. However, there are a limited and growing number of publications on grammar, syntax and pronunciation in the Malgana language group (e.g. Barlee 1886; Blevins and Marmion 1995; Mackman 2003). Literature searches (see methods) found no Aboriginal name for Faure Island. Cooper (1997) reported that archaeological research found no evidence of occupation and suggested that this may be a reason that there is no Aboriginal name for Faure Island. Abbott (2007) found that Aboriginal people from southern coastal regions had had no watercraft, thus they did not use the islands and therefore were unlikely to name them. However, Faure Island is clearly seen from the surrounding mainland and during the lowest ebbs of spring tides the Faure Sill (see Burling et al. 2003) is exposed (though there may be a small channel flowing) and provides the potential to walk to the island and Emus are known to swim to the island (S. Davies [Curtin University of Technology], pers. comm., 17 July 2009).

Marika Oakley, granddaughter of Dick and Margaret Hoult, who grew up on the island, asked Malgana local elders and she did not find a Malgana name for Faure Island. In particular, she spoke at length with Aboriginal elder Jimmy Poland who, at 83 years of age (in 2009), is the most respected authority on Aboriginal knowledge in the area. He was not aware of an Aboriginal name for Faure Island. Thus, it appears that the Malgana name for Faure Island has been lost. Jimmy Poland is the brother of Margaret Hoult who was, along with the Hoult family, the lease-holders of Faure Island (1904–1999) before it was taken over by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC 2009).

### WHY TO USE DIACRITICS

The modern English language consists of 26 letters of Latin origin. Diacritics are used in English to aid in pronunciation of other languages or to pronounce words borrowed from other languages (loanwords), e.g. déjà vu or cliché (from French). Some loanwords words are commonly recognisable with their diacritical marks, e.g. naïve or *naïveté* (feminine, from the French), while others commonly show no diacritical marks, e.g. zoölogy (zoology) (from Greek). In the latter example, the diaeresis explains that the 'ö' is pronounced separately. Most native English speakers will intuitively know how to pronounce zoology, so a diaeresis is typically not used in this example. However, the diacritics in the noun résumé differentiate

it from the verb resume and these diacritics aid in both pronunciation and recognition. Diacritics, in English, are either used for words from other languages or loanwords – they carry a sense of culture, which facilitates an empathic engagement with the origins and meanings of the words. Not using diacritics to spell foreign words shows both an indifference to accuracy and cultural insensitivity. I can see no practical reason for not using diacritics in geographical place names, because they enable correct pronunciation and spelling, and convey more meaning than position – they convey a sense of place.

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