

# Map-makers give NZ a digital makeover

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Geographx uses virtual reality software to help create maps so realistic that even the air force wants a piece of them. Sue Allen reports.

**E**VER heard of Annoyance Bluff, Awkward Spur or Boo Boo Stream? Wellington company Geographx has literally put those names back on the map.

Geographx's latest project has been to put together a *Geographic Atlas of New Zealand*, a 264-map atlas in which text, buildings and roads come second to the art of New Zealand's landforms.

A side-effect of designing the map was finding some of New Zealand's most unusual place names, tucked away in material supplied by the Government's land department, Land Information New Zealand.

Geographx cut about 60,000 place names to about 20,000 for the atlas. Company founder Roger Smith said he was struck by the black humour of some of the names they found.

"Something disastrous must have happened to the people who gave these places their names."

Places like Calamity Hole, Broken Leg Gully or the Bowels of the Earth.

"There's really a big concentration of them in south Westland, where there was an explorer called Charles Douglas, and I think he can probably take responsibility for many of them."

Geographx has already produced a book called *Landforms: The Shaping of New Zealand*, a layman's guide to



**Land lovers:** Founder Roger Smith browses through a new, 264-map atlas of New Zealand, created by the Geographx team. The project unearthed a series of unusual place names, which the company has turned into a poster. Picture: ROBERT KITCHIN

New Zealand's geomorphology and why land is the shape it is.

Mr Smith trained as a geologist, then became a rural valuer, commercial pilot, sheep and cattle farmer, forest manager, and tourism resource analyst.

He established Geographx in 1998, after deciding he wanted to run his own business and rediscovering his love of maps.

Geographx's bread and butter income comes from its specialism in creating maps for brochures, books,

websites, reports, presentations and wall displays.

The company uses Geographic Information Systems — virtual reality and graphic design application software for geographic information — to make its map products.

Geographx also created the map used in TV3's weather, which is overlaid with graphics from MetService's commercial arm, Metra.

The company has also co-produced New Zealand scenery for a version of Microsoft's flight simulator game.

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It is so realistic that it is now used by professional training courses to train pilots.

"Even the air force is using it, so that's quite cool."

For the last four years, Geographx has also designed a three-dimensional map for the Southern Traverse, which allows competitors to "fly the course" before beginning the competition.

The company is based in New Zealand, but is looking to Australia, Antarctica, the Pacific Islands and the Asia-Pacific rim for projects.

Though it started as a "one-man band", it now has three "mapsmiths" the others being:

■ Mike Gresham, who has a background in computer mapping.

■ Craig MacAlpine, who previously worked with the New Zealand Defence Force on mapping projects, software and technology support, and the deployment of GIS services to military personnel.

Future projects include making more three-dimensional projects for planning, consultation and Resource Management Act applications.

Geographx has also brought out a poster of all those quirky, weird and wonderful places hidden away in the South Island.