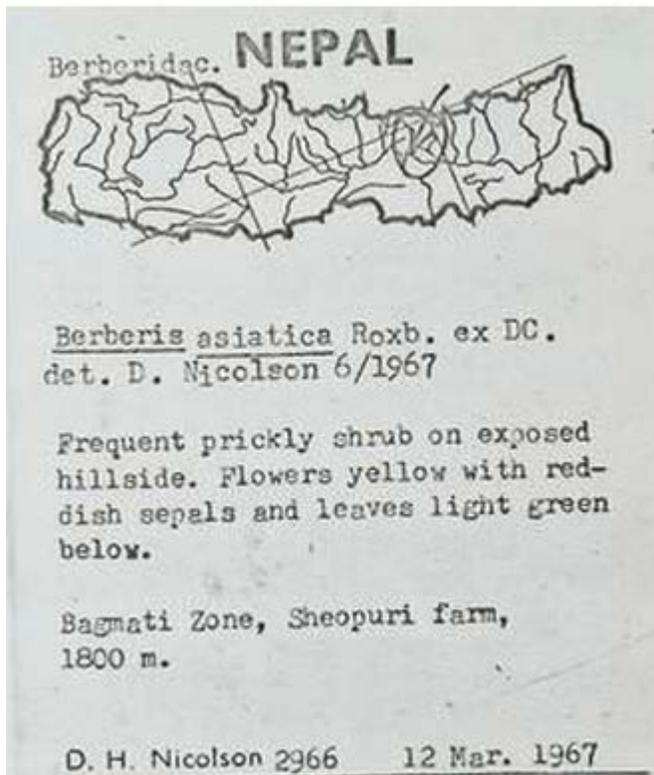# Finding and Recording Geographic Place Names

By far, the most difficult and time-consuming part of recording collection data from a specimen is finding the correct locality information. For botanical specimens, getting the information correct is important because researchers often use the information to create plant checklists or species ranges using this information. Taking the time to research an unknown place name is important for each specimen record.

How do we find the correct information for a collection locality?

First, always record the *current* country and, if available, the state/territory (or second level of geographic division) name. The "locality" information can be recorded as written on the label.

Take a label such as :

Clearly it is from Nepal, but the other parts are unclear. What exactly is *Bagmati Zone*?

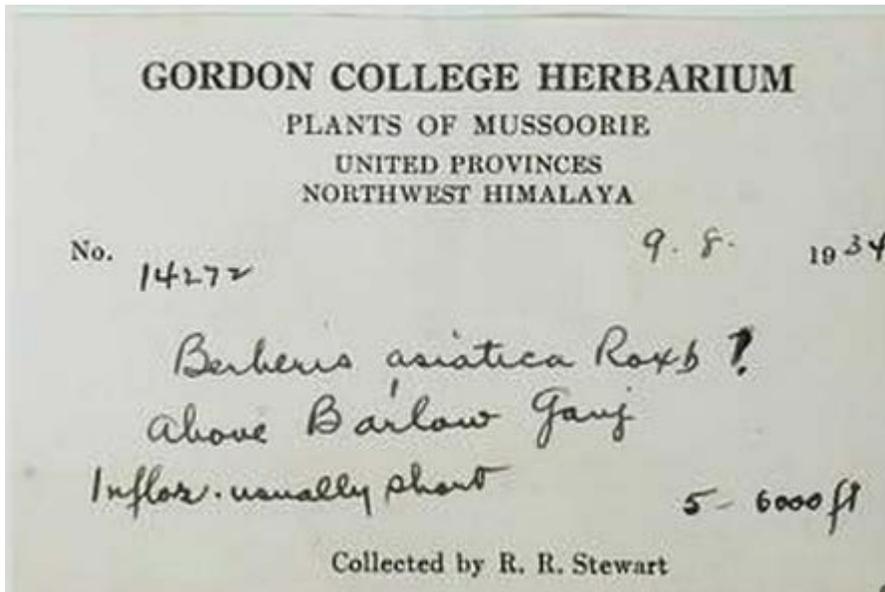An online resource we use at the US Herbarium is:

http://www.geonames.org/

Search *Bagmati Zone* in Country = Nepal. We find that the Bagmati Zone is the "second-order administrative division" (like state or province) for Nepal. Therefore we can put this in the field

"State/Territory". The rest of the locality information (Sheopuri Farm) can be put in the Verbatim Locality field.

[Please note that the "State/Territory" field is optional; please make an effort to fill it in if not too difficult, but do not spend too much time researching this.]

For the Pacific Islands, we prefer that the island be listed in the Verbatim Locality field, instead of designating the State/Territory.

Another example is:

Here we do not have a country. We can look up "Mussoorie" in GeoNames where Country = "All Countries". We are returned with "India, Uttarakhand". In this case, the country = India, and the secondary level of geographic division (state/territory) = Uttarakhand.

Using Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/), we find that "United Provinces" is an archaic name for Uttar Pradesh, an Indian state. Why would this not be used for state/territory? Further investigation in Wikipedia shows that only recently has Uttarakhand become an Indian state, carved out of Uttar Pradesh. However, all information from the label that is not Country or State/Territory can go into Verbatim Locality ("United Provinces, Northwest Himalaya, Mussoorie. Above Barlow Ganj")

Another way to find out the country and state/territory of a label locality is simply to google the information. Botanists and data entry specialists do it all the time.

Latitude and Longitude

On rare and fortunate occasions, the latitude and longitude of a collection will be provided on the specimen label. Most of the time, we need to find the geographic coordinates through our online sources. **Geonames** will give the coordinates in the record output.

You can also find geographic coordinates using Google maps (http://maps.google.com), although it takes a few clicks. When you find your point on a Google map, right click on the tear drop point. Click on "What's Here" and a green arrow will appear. Click the green arrow and the coordinates will appear.

Note: enter geographic locations only for locations that you feel fairly certain are correct and somewhat precise. You would not want to put coordinates for a country or second level geographic division, or for a location for which you are uncertain.

Lastly...

Obviously, some locality information on the specimen labels is harder to decipher than others, but please make an effort to fill in the information, as it is invaluable to botanists, researchers and all that use this information.

Thanks for all of your help!

The US Herbarium Digitization Team