STATE NAME OVERLAPS

DARRYL FRANCIS
Thursby, Cumbria, England
darrylfrancis@yahoo.co.uk

In previous issues of Word Ways, attention has been drawn to US towns with names reflecting their position on the border between two states. Ed Wolpow’s article “Names on the Border” in May 1984 provides a definitive list, including examples such as Florala (border of Florida and Alabama) and Calneva (border of California and Nevada).

Another way of looking at the borders of states is to consider the 50 state names. Take them in alphabetical order and string them together to form a 412-character string. What words are formed across state boundaries? (Obviously a very different problem to that addressed by Ed Wolpow!)

Below is a list of all the words that can be spelled out from the end of one state name and into the following state name. For the sake of completeness I have added Alabama after Wyoming to ensure that there is a full circle of state names.

Most words are from Official Scrabble Words (International), and a few others have been taken from familiar sources: Webster’s Third, Webster’s Second, the Oxford English Dictionary, the Random House Dictionary, and Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (8th edition).

Alabama Alaska maa, maal (OED), aa, aal
Arizona Alaska aa
Alaska Arkansas aa
Arkansas California scal (OED)
California Colorado Acol (OED)
Colorado Connecticut doc
Connecticut Delaware Florida aref (OED), ref
Delaware Florida dag, age
Florida Georgia ah, aha
Georgia Hawaii hoi, hoil (OED), oil
Hawaii Idaho sin, sind
Idaho Illinois ai
Illinois Indiana waka, Akan (Web3), Akans (Web3)
Indiana Iowa ask, asken (OED)
Iowa Kansas yl (OED)
Kansas Kentucky nam, Nama (OED), am, ama, amain
Kentucky Louisiana nema, em
Louisiana Maine landmass
Maine Maryland tam, tamis, am, ami, amis, amiss
Maryland Massachusetts
Massachusetts Michigan
Michigan Minnesota
Minnesota Mississippi
Mississippi Missouri

For ten longest the eight
ISLANDS
New H is one bor
For ten of the 50 statename borders it is not possible to spell out an overlapping word. The longest word stretching across a statename border is the nine-letter CAROLINAS, followed by the eight-letter LANDMASS and MONTANAN, and then the seven-letter NEVADAN and ISLANDS. The border with the most words and names stretching across it appears to be that of New Hampshire New Jersey with seven words. The familiar word AA occurs three times. No word is spellable across three state names (e.g., AIOWAK, TAOHIOO, SUTAHV). There is only one border where the same letter is repeated three times: Hawaii Idaho.