

World Heritage Sites

Protected Areas and World Heritage



ULURU – KATA TJUTA NATIONAL PARK NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

This park's spectacular red monoliths dominate a vast sandy plain of central Australia, surrounded by four major desert ecosystems. Uluru, an immense rock, and Kata Tjuta, a group of 36 rock domes located west of it, form part of the traditional belief system of their owners, one of the oldest human societies in the world, the Anangu or Aboriginal people.

COUNTRY Australia - Northern Territory

NAME Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

MIXED NATURAL & CULTURAL WORLD HERITAGE SITE

1987: Inscribed on the World Heritage List under Natural Criteria vii and ix.

1994: Inscribed on the World Heritage List under Cultural Criteria v and vi.

INTERNATIONAL DESIGNATION

1977: Designated a Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man & Biosphere Programme (132,550 ha).

IUCN MANAGEMENT CATEGORY

II (National Park)

BIOGEOGRAPHICAL PROVINCE

Central Desert (6.9.7)

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

In the centre of Australia in southwest Northern Territory, 300 km directly southwest of Alice Springs. The Kata Tjuta mountains are 24 km directly west of Uluru (Ayer's Rock). Located at 25° 05'S to 25° 25'S by 130° 40'E to 131° 22'E.

DATES AND HISTORY OF ESTABLISHMENT

1920: The South-Western Reserve declared an Aboriginal Reserve by the Commonwealth Government under the Aboriginals Ordinance (NT);

1958: The Ayers Rock-Mount Olga area excised from the South-Western Aboriginal Reserve and declared the Ayers Rock-Mount Olga National Park under section 103 of the Northern Territory Crown Lands Ordinance 1931-57. Administered by the Northern Territory Reserves Board;

1977: Gazetted as Uluru (Ayers Rock-Mount Olga) National Park under sub-section 7(2) of the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975, pre-empting the Katiti Aboriginal land claim; Designated a UNESCO MAB Biosphere Reserve;

1984: A 10,400 ha reservation beyond the Park's northern boundary, approved for the development of a tourist facility and an associated airport, called Yulara, now also known as the Ayers Rock Resort;

1985: The Park proclamation amended to incorporate seven small enclaves previously excluded;

1993: The Park's name changed to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, in acknowledgement of the area's Aboriginal heritage and cultural landscape values (Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA) pers. comm., 1995);

1995: Awarded a UNESCO Picasso Gold Medal, with Parks Australia, for excellence in site management and cultural preservation.

LAND TENURE

The Aboriginal Uluru-Kata Tjuta Land Trust has legally owned the land since 1985. The land was simultaneously leased for a period of 99 years to the Director of National Parks, formerly the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (ANPWS). Managed by a Board of Management with a majority of the Aboriginal owners, jointly with Parks Australia under the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

AREA

132,566 ha.

ALTITUDE

Uluru rises 340m above the desert (862.5m above sea level).

Kata Tjuta (Mount Olga) rises 546m above the desert (1,069m above sea level).

PHYSICAL FEATURES

The Park covers extensive sand plains, sand dunes and alluvial desert, surrounding the vast rounded red inselbergs of Uluru and Kata Tjuta. The gently sloping plains of red earth sands, sandy loams and red earths are separated from dunes of red siliceous sand by a zone of mainly very coarse siliceous sand. The dunes are stable, up to 30m high, with mobile crests, vegetated flanks and swales rilled and gullied by water. With the sand plains they occupy the bulk of the Park.

The Park is situated on the southern margin of the Amadeus sedimentary basin. The massive rocks are derived from thick Palaeozoic marine sediments: sands in Uluru, conglomerate in Kata Tjuta, which were tilted, Uluru vertically and Kata Tjuta slightly, during a period of past folding and fracturing. Both are only the tips of vast blocks of rock extending 6,000m deep. Uluru is composed of steeply dipping, feldspar-rich arkosic sandstone ribbed by differential erosion of the vertically tipped strata. It has a base circumference of 9.4 km, smooth sloping sides with a gradient of up to 80° and a relatively flat top. The surface of the rock shows sheet erosion of exfoliating layers 1-3m thick, deep parallel fissures and, at its base, a number of caves, inlets and overhangs eroded by sand and chemical decomposition. The arkose is grey but colored red by oxidation of iron in the rock. Kata Tjuta, 32 km west, comprises 36 steep-sided rock domes covering about 3,500 ha. They consist of gently dipping Mount Currie conglomerate with phenocrysts of fine-grained acid and basic rocks, granite and gneiss in an epidote-rich matrix. Kata Tjuta has hemispherical summits, near vertical sides and steep-sided intervening valleys. Lithosols, gravelly red earths, red earthy sands and calcareous red earth soils are derived from weathered Mount Currie conglomerate, and found as isolated pockets on scree slopes and alluvial fans. Surface water is only found in seasonal pools fed by short shallow watercourses from the monoliths. Defined watercourses do not exist in the dunes although swales are moister and ponding may occasionally occur. Two aquifers of fossil water have been located which could supply approximately 870,000 cubic metres of water per annum. One is the flow from Uluru which feeds the only water source, the Mutitjulu waterhole; the other is an aquifer 60 m deep (ANPWS, 1982; 1986a). However, excessive tourist demand is lowering this.

CLIMATE

The area is semi-arid with two main seasons. July winter temperatures have mean daily minima and maxima of 4.7°C and 20.2°C. Frosts are not unusual between June and August. Summer temperatures from November to March have mean daily minima and maxima of 22.3°C and 37.8°C (in January). Absolute temperatures range between -5°C and 45.5°C in the shade. The annual rainfall is highly variable but averages 308mm, falling at any season. There is a mean peak humidity of about 67% in June-July. Prevailing winds blow from the south-east in summer and from the north-east in winter (ANPWS, 1982).

VEGETATION

The Park has six distinct habitats: rocky areas, gorges and stony slopes with shallow, barren soils; creek-lines and run off plains, normally dry but where waterholes can remain for months; spinifex plains and low interdunes, the commonest habitat in the Park, with many trees and shrubs; open woodland which occurs where the ground is hard and sometimes stony and freshwater claypans form after good rains; sand dunes which are very fragile; and burnt or regenerating areas which provide many food plants, such as seed grasses and succulents (PA, 2007). Despite the dryness of the area there are 416

plant species, many with xerophytic adaptations to the dry conditions. The vegetation, modified by substrate stability, climate and fire can be zoned into five categories growing concentrically around the monoliths. Uluru itself supports hardy perennial grasses *Cymbopogon* and *Tripogon* species in soil pockets, and sedge *Cyperus* spp. with *Fimbristylis* spp. in very shallow soil. Patches of Uluru mulga *Acacia ayersiana*, spinifex *Triodia* spp., isolated Australian fig *Ficus platypoda* and bloodwood *Eucalyptus terminalis* are also found. On Kata Tjuta, spinifex grass *Triodia irritans* forms almost pure stands with, on the less steep slopes, species of *Acacia*, *Cassia* and *Hakea*. Scree slopes support low eucalyptus and acacia trees and many shrub species. Dense patches of the perennial grass *Eriachne scleranthoides* dominate the areas immediately around the base of the rock outcrops while grasses and sedge are dominant on the fringing shallow soils.

The second zone, the Kata Tjuta foothills, support annual grasses, principally mulga grass *Aristida contorta* and oat grass *Enneapogon polyphyllus*, some low mulga trees *Acacia aneura*, desert poplar *Codonocarpus cotinifolius*, the shrubs *Cassia*, lambs'tails *Ptilotus* and *Eucalyptus* species, found with perennial grasses, in drainage courses. Third, the fans and outwash alluviums around the monoliths support a complex of open grassland, low trees and shrubs. Species include another bloodwood *Corymbia opaca*, tea-tree *Melaleuca* sp., river red gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, acacias, lambs'tails, and grasses *Themeda avenacea*, *Enneapogon cylindricus* and woollybutt *Eragrostis eriopoda*. During rainy periods this vegetation can be luxuriant. Fourth, the nearby plains support dense groves of mulga, acacia, crimson turkey bush *Eremophila latrobei* with understorey of perennial grass *Eragrostis eriopoda*, the intergrove areas being sparsely vegetated. Fifth, the sand dunes, rises and surrounding plains are dominated by spinifex grass *Triodia pungens*, open scrub of mallee *Eucalyptus gamophylla*, umbrella bush *Acacia ligulata*, witchetty bush *A. kempeana*, sandhill wattle *A. dictyophleba*, broom bush *Templetonia hookeri* with occasional ironwood *Acacia estrophiolata*, corkwood *Hakea suberea*, bloodwood, yellow flame and honey grevilleas *Grevillea eriostachya* and *G. juncifolia* with desert oaks *Allocasuarina decaisneana* in moister locations. Species in danger of being lost from the Park include *Wurmbea centralis*, *Juncus continuus*, *Gossypium sturtianum*, *Rulingia magniflora*, *Hibbertia glaberrima*, *Baeckea polystemona* and *Plectranthus intraterraneus*. Exotic species such as ruby dock *Rumex vesicarius* and buffel grass *Cenchrus ciliaris* have become tenacious weeds (ANPWS, 1982; 1986a).

FAUNA

22 native mammals are found in the Park including bilby *Macrotis lagotis* (VU), marsupial mole *Notoryctes typhlops* (EN), common wallaroo *M. robustus*, black-footed rock-wallaby *Petrogale lateralis*, red kangaroo *Macropus rufus*, spinifex hopping mouse *Notomys alexis*, hairy-footed and sandhill dunnarts *Sminthopsis hirtipes* and *S. psammophila* (EN), mulgara *Dasycercus cristicauda* (VU) and dingo *Canis familiaris dingo*, also seven bat species including Australian false vampire *Marcoderma gigas* (VU), and occasional smaller marsupials and rodents. Rufous hare-wallaby *Lagorchestes hirsutus* (VU), burrowing bettong *Bettongia lesueur* (VU) and common brushtail possum *Trichosurus vulpecula* were eradicated during the past century but have been reintroduced. Introduced red fox *Vulpes vulpes*, cat *Felis catus*, house mouse *Mus musculus* and European rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, plus feral dogs and camels, compete with indigenous species.

178 bird species have been recorded in the Park, of which 66 are considered resident with many species either nomadic or migratory. These include emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae*, peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Australian kestrel *F. cenchroides*, Australian bustard *Ardeotis australis*, pink cockatoo *Cacatua leadbeateri*, scarlet-chested parrot *Neophema splendida*, Port Lincoln ringneck parrot *Barnardius zonarius*, budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus*, red backed kingfisher *Todirhamphus pyrrhopygia*, striated grasswren *Amytornis striatus* and grey honeyeater *Conopophila whitei*; also crested pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes*, spiny-cheeked honey eater *Acanthagenys rufogularis*, dusty grasswren *Amytornis purnelli*, splendid and variegated fairy-wrens, *Malurus splendens* and *M. lamberti*, zebra finch *Taeniopygia guttata*, crimson chat *Epthianura tricolor* and chiming wedgebill *Psophodes occidentalis*.

Among the 73 reptile species, all five Australian reptile families are represented. These include the perentie, a monitor lizard *Varanus giganteus*, thorny devil lizard *Moloch horridus*, western brown snake *Pseudonaja nuchalis*, Ramsay's python *Aspidites ramsayi* (EN) and 27 species of skink including giant desert skink *Egernia kintorei* (VU) and the local totem, the centralian blue tongue skink *Tiliqua multifasciata*. There are four species of frog, two, the estivating water-holding frogs *Cyclorana cultripes* and *C. platycephalus*. Invertebrates are poorly known but include fairy shrimp *Imnadopsis* sp. and shield shrimp *Triops australiensis*, which inhabit seasonal rock pools (ANPWS 1982; 1986a).

CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Aboriginal, *Anangu*, culture is known to have preserved the ecology of the area for at least 20,000 years, and, after a disastrous interlude in the mid 20th century, is once again perceived as part of the world's heritage. Their traditional religious philosophy and law, *Tjukurpa* or 'creation time', links the people spiritually, historically and socially with their landscape, flora and fauna, through the journeys and activities of ancestral beings. It imbues the land with meaning, and acts as a law imposing the responsibility to care for the environment. It is transmitted by stories, songs, dances and art. Cave paintings on Uluru indicate that Aborigines may have long been present in the area. The Park, and the Uluru monolith in particular, is one of several important interconnected centres of local religious significance scattered throughout western central Australia. The Park is criss-crossed by tracks marking mythical journeys connecting such nodes. A number of these are regarded by the *Anangu* as secret, requiring respectful management. The area was first 'found' in 1870, claimed by the state in the 1900s which sanctioned the eviction of the local people in the 1930s though Ayers Rock became a symbol of national identity for all Australians. But it reverted to them in 1985 following a successful land rights claim under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act of 1976. At this time traditional methods of conservation also finally returned (ANPWS, 1986a).

LOCAL HUMAN POPULATION

After the area's return to the *Anangu* in 1985, the Director of National Parks and Wildlife was granted the right to supervise the property but the current resident Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara population of around 150 have traditional rights of occupation and live in the Mutitjulu community area close to the rock. They receive an annual rent and a share of Park revenues under the terms of their lease to the Commonwealth which permits them hunting and foraging rights, and they have long used controlled burning for environmental management. The claimed land to the north east of the Park is now Aboriginal Land held by the Katiti Aboriginal Land Trust (Gabriel, 2007). The population varies greatly from time to time due to the itinerant nature of the people and increases when special ceremonies are held. Aborigines have tended to emigrate to seek employment though in recent times this has been a little reversed and *Anangu* commercial activity in the Park is encouraged. Some twenty are also employed as park staff (ANPWS, 1982; 1991a).

VISITORS AND VISITOR FACILITIES

The annual number of visitors has risen steadily from about 105,970 in 1983 to around 500,000 in 2005, mostly made during the cooler months between May and September. Tracks, paths and some sealed roads provide access to the rocks and other sites in the Park. The most popular activities are sightseeing, guided walks, picnicking and photography, sunset and sunrise viewing, climbing Uluru, touring by 4WD, motorcycle or camel, and scenic flights (ANPWS, 1986a). Interpretation programs about the Park and the *Anangu* lifestyle are given at the Park headquarters and the Cultural Centre, opened in 1995, and include an account of *Tjukurpa*, official guided tours and other services. Rock paintings are protected by raised walkways. A major interpretative message is that 'the *Anangu* don't climb' as a way of discouraging tourists from treating Uluru without respect (Australian Nature Conservation Agency, pers. comm., 1995). Aboriginal enterprises include the Ininti store, the Maruku Arts and Craft Centre, the Mulgara gallery and the Walkatjara Art Centre, outlets for locally produced art and artefacts. Accommodation is available at the Yulara/Ayers Rock Resort, 4 km north of the Park boundary and 19 km from Uluru. This is developed with five hotels, lodges and campsites. Conellan airport is 6 km distant.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND FACILITIES

The first scientific expedition reached Uluru in 1894 and several anthropological studies were made in the 1930s. More recent studies on climate, geology, hydrology, flora, fauna as well as in anthropology and other fields are listed by ANPWS (1986a). A major fauna survey was followed up by surveys in 1994 and 1995 (ANCA, pers. comm., 1995). The vast *Anangu* oral knowledge of their environment and tracking techniques are being incorporated into protocols for best practice in monitoring and managing fauna and flora, water resources, fire, bio-prospecting and cultural resources (Gabriel, 2007).

CONSERVATION VALUE

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park preserves a natural heritage and a traditional hunter-gatherer culture, both of great value, which show a landscape resulting from millennia of traditional methods of management governed by and embodying the *Tjukurpa* philosophy and law of the Aboriginal people. The Park also protects four desert ecosystems of the region within its boundaries. It lies within a WWF Global 200 Eco-region, a WWF/IUCN Centre of Plant Diversity, and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

The Park is valued for its cultural and religious heritage, landscape, geology, arid desert ecosystems and for recreation. It is protected under a number of statutes including the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act and the Australian Heritage Commission Act both of 1975 and the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Amendment Act of 1985. Although the land belongs traditionally to the local *Anangu* and the Aboriginal Uluru-Kata Tjuta Land Trust has inalienable freehold title to the land since 1985, it is leased to Parks Australia until 2085. Management is the responsibility of a Board of Management on which the traditional Aboriginal owners have a majority which acts jointly with the Parks Australia, the former Australian National Park Wildlife Service. This acts under sections of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act of 1999 and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations of 2000. The Central Land Council (CLC) represents the Traditional Owners in land negotiations and consultations regarding their lands. Traditional Owners of Uluru-Kata Tjuta live in many communities in Central Australia of which Mutitjulu is one inside the Park. Mutitjulu Community Incorporated employs a Park liaison officer to represent their interests in the joint management partnership on a day-to-day basis.

The Director has the authority to restrict access to some areas to protect traditional Aboriginal land uses and a number of sacred sites at the base of Uluru have been closed to the general public. Other prohibited activities include overnight camping and mining. The current Plan of Management was jointly prepared by the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Board of Management and Parks Australia in 2000. It is bilingual and bi-cultural. Management objectives include the protection of Aboriginal culture; the presentation and interpretation of the landscape, especially its combination of cultural and natural elements; the conservation of representative ecosystems; and allocation of appropriate activities to specific areas through zoning. Visitor use is concentrated around the monoliths. Three management zones are defined: Intensive, which includes the climb and sunrise and sunset viewing areas, Intermediate - the Olga gorge, and Minimum - the trails. Key elements of interpretation programs emphasise the religious significance of Uluru to the *Anangu*, their role in and contribution to joint management and their perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate visitor activities. Aboriginal nomenclature is used. Both ranger-guided and self-guided activities have been developed and there is training and accreditation for tour operators (ANCA, pers.comm., 1995).

Three specific management systems have been set up: the Cultural Site Management System, the Fire Management System and the *Mala* (rufous hare-wallaby) reintroduction program. The Cultural Heritage Program has been developed largely by *Anangu* to support the inventorying and archiving of cultural records; the National Mala Recovery Plan to reintroduce the hare-wallaby, locally extinct since the 1900s, is seen as the return of an animal once a familiar and guardian spirit of the area; and the Fire Management System to control fire-setting in the traditional manner which preserves the ecology of the land where the legitimacy of Aboriginal practices has been recognised. The two main types of vegetation require differing fire regimes. Spinifex grass is burnt in patches which preserves a mosaic of micro-habitats and accompanying wildlife. Mulga trees and scrub need protection against fire. Neglect of these practices during the proscription of the Aboriginals created a huge accumulation of dead undergrowth which led to disastrous fires, one in 1976, when 76% of the Park was destroyed and several mammals made locally extinct, and in 2002 when much of the Park was burnt (PA, 2007). Collaborative advisory committees exist for tourism, scientific work, employment, education & training and the Cultural Centre. Monitoring is carried out for weed infestations, burning, water use, introduced animals and fire risk.

MANAGEMENT CONSTRAINTS

The historic erosion of Aboriginal culture has been resisted by granting freehold title to the land and a major managerial and planning role for local people. However, sacred sites, cave paintings and traditional activities such as ceremonies may still be threatened by visitors. These disturb local people by visual intrusion, clambering over Uluru which the natives never do, and inappropriate vehicle use of roads and trails. Other problems are climatic stress on visitors, especially during the summer, providing adequate potable water, depleted by high tourist numbers, tourist crowding, off-road driving, soil erosion, wildfires, overgrazing of the desert by camels and rabbits, competition from introduced and feral animals, exotic weeds, commercial activities and aircraft noise. Also the provision of housing, health, education and communication facilities for local Aborigines and the control of alcohol abuse amongst them. Potential threats include fire, disturbance to aquifer recharge, overcrowding and off-road driving, introduction of domestic livestock and weeds, and erosion (ANPWS, 1986a).

STAFF

In 2003 this comprised a Park Director and Manager, with Resource, Training, Operations, Tourism and Administrative Managers. Of a staff of some 52, local people constituted at least 30%. The staff conduct patrols, maintenance and operations, interpretation and education programs, administration and staff training. Anangu are also employed as consultants, day laborers (from Mutitjulu) and through the CLC joint management officer and the Mutitjulu Community liaison officer (ANCA,2007). There are Aboriginal ranger trainees in addition to temporary and part-time staff. Specialists in research, planning, interpretation and capital works are drafted in as required (ANPWS 1986b).

BUDGET

In 1994-95 total expenditure at Uluru on salaries (for a staff of 15), operations and capital works was approximately AUS\$8,677,734. Additional project funds were provided for research and other park activities (ANCA, pers. comm.,1995). Entry fees are charged which support Park maintenance and the local community. In 2001-2 approximately AUA\$8.080,000 (US\$4.8 million) was allocated for operations and capital works from a part of the tourist revenue received (Parks Australia, 2002).

ADDRESSES

The Chairman, Uluru-Kata Tjuta Board of Management, PO Box 3546, Alice Springs, NT 0871.

The Manager, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Parks Australia, PO Box 119, Yulara, NT 0872

Australian Nature Conservation Agency, GPO Box 636, Belconnen, ACT 2601.

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, GPO Box 787, Canberra, ACT 2601.

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DATE May 1987. Updated 8-1995, December 2007.