



Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park Note

Non-Aboriginal history

Anangu have always been on this land now known as Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park. *Anangu* history is the stories and travels of the ancestral beings in the Tjukurpa (creation period).

Non-Aboriginal history

Much of the early European exploration of Central Australia occurred as a result of expeditions staged for other reasons and the impacts of non-Aboriginal history on *Anangu* life are both significant and diverse.

In 1862 John McDouall Stuart completed the first return south-north crossing of Australia. He assessed the possible pastoral value of the land and paved the way for the construction of the Adelaide to Darwin Overland Telegraph Line between 1871 and 1872.

William Earnest Giles first saw Kata-Tjuta in 1872 while exploring near Waṯarrka (Kings Canyon). He named the largest dome at Kata-Tjuta ‘Mount Olga’ and the surrounding range after George Gill, although he was unable to reach it due to an inability to cross Pantu (Lake Amadeus). In 1873 on his second expedition, Giles finally reached Mount Olga but with anguish as he discovered William Gosse had been there first.

In 1873, William Christie Gosse became the first visitor to reach this area, naming Uluru ‘Ayers Rock’ after the then Chief Secretary of South Australia, Sir Henry Ayers. The next major expedition to visit the region was not an exploration party but a scientific team.

The Horn Expedition of 1894, financed by WA Horn, a wealthy South Australian pastoralist and businessman, was specifically designed to examine the geology, mineral resources, plants, animals and Aboriginal culture of Central Australia. The expedition provided extraordinarily valuable knowledge of the natural history of the region however the land proved too harsh for the pastoral industry.

Instead Uluru and Kata-Tjuta were included in the South West Reserve declared in 1920 as part of a larger system of reserves set aside as sanctuaries for Aboriginal people. The result was that few non-Aboriginal people visited this area until the 1940s apart from a few prospectors, missionaries and Native Welfare patrol officers.

In 1928, the missionary EE Kramer, guided by ‘Tiger’ Tjalkalyiri, gave a Christian service south of Uluru. He was the first non-Aboriginal person to record Uluru as a sacred place: ‘the most sacred spot in all the country around where natives come for their ceremonies’.

Tourism and mining

In the 1930s, gold prospector HB Lasseter claimed to have found a ‘reef of gold of untold wealth’, thus sparking the excited interest of many prospecting parties to come to the area in pursuit of mineral wealth. The magic and wonder as described by explorers such as Gosse and Giles ensured the inevitable development of tourism in the area. The Walter Giles’ camel visit in 1931 could be considered as the first tourist visit to the area.

In 1940, the size of the Aboriginal reserves in Central Australia was reduced to facilitate mineral exploration and between 1947 and 1950 miners and tourists made tracks to Uluru, Kata-Tjuta and beyond, allowing the development of major tourist operations.

After a tour in 1950 with a party from Sydney’s Knox Grammar School, Len Tuit recognised the tourism potential of Uluru and began to offer regular tours in 1955.

The earliest trips from Alice Springs to Uluru could carry 20 passengers and were rough with accommodation being a tent camp and the dining and store room was an ex-army marquee.

By 1958, Tuit had constructed a galvanised shed but the supply of water remained the main concern for the venture. Tuit started by carting water from Curtin Springs then arranged for a drilling rig to be bought in, and using his bush knowledge, he struck good fresh water at a depth of 26 metres with a flow of 84 gallons (380 litres) per hour.

The Cotterill family were responsible for establishing the first track into Kings Canyon providing access to the area and allowed them to operate the newly establish Kings Canyon Tours company.



Left to right - Connellan Airport when transport to the airstrip was by camel, the first lodge at Uluru developed by Alice Springs Tours in 1958, and Len Tuit's tourist camp site circa 1950

Jack Cotterill then turned his attention to Uluru and was the founder of the first fly in, fly out tours in partnership with Connellan Airways. The first lodge was built at Uluru in 1958 by Alice Springs Tours Ltd, and was a corrugated iron building with a dining room, six bedrooms, two bathrooms and a human thermometer-operated hot water service.

Land rights

The *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976* and the formation of the interim Central Land Council in 1974 gave *Anangu* a powerful voice to protect sacred sites and an opportunity to regain control of the land. As a result of the 1979 Katiti Land Claim, Commissioner Justice Toohey accepted that 104 traditional owners had been formally identified for Uluru and 57 for Kata Tjuta. *Anangu* were given title to the Katiti Land Trust north and east of the park. However, they were unable to claim Uluru and Kata Tjuta, as it was crown land alienated as a national park.

In 1977, Uluru (Ayers Rock - Mt Olga) National Park was declared under the *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975* and an agreement was made between the Commonwealth and the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory to manage the park.

Finally in 1983, Prime Minister Hawke promised the return of the land to the traditional owners under the *Land Rights Act*. On 26 October 1985, Governor-General Sir Ninian Stephens presented *Anangu* with the title deeds to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. In return, *Anangu* leased the lands to the then Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (now Parks Australia) for a period of 99 years.

TIMELINE

1872 - Ernest Giles sighted Mt Olga from near Kings Canyon.

1873 - Gosse is the first European to visit Uluru.

1920 - The Peterman Ranges, Ayers Rock and the Olgas are gazetted as Aboriginal Reserve.

1930s - *Anangu* become involved in dingo scalping and are introduced to European food.

1940 - Loss of full traditional pattern of land use but *Anangu* continue to have strong ties with the land.

Mid 1940s - Tourists start to arrive.

1958 - Uluru and Kata Tjuta are taken out of the Aboriginal Reserve and declared as a tourist and wildlife reserve.

1971 - Federal and South Australian Government officers meet with traditional owners at Ernabella.

1973 - Federal House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment visits Uluru.

1974 - Ayers Rock Advisory Committee first meets.

1976 - Northern Territory Land Rights Act passed.

1979 - Katiti Land Claim presented.

1983 - Aboriginal title to Uluru acknowledged.

1984 - Yulara Tourist Village, now Ayers Rock Resort opens.

1985 - Title deeds handed over to traditional owners.

1987 - Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park World Heritage listed as a natural property.

1994 - Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park World Heritage listed as a cultural landscape.

1995 - Cultural Centre opened.



Australian Government
Director of National Parks

