

International Year of Deserts and Desertification

The Desert People of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

The semi-arid environment of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park has been home to the Anangu people for thousands of years. The name 'Anangu' translates from Yankunytjatjara & Pitjantjatjara, two dialects of the Western Desert languages, to mean "we, the people".

Traditionally Anangu people would walk the country, hunting and gathering in harmony with the land and season, and following the footsteps of ancestors. In this Anangu were guided by Tjukurpa, or law, which still exists today.

Tjukurpa is the foundation of Anangu life and society, and it has many complex but complementary meanings. Tjukurpa refers to the creation period when ancestral beings created the world as we know it. Tjukurpa is law, ceremonies, plants, animals and the land and how it should be looked after and respected. Tjukurpa is the religious heritage that explains existence and guides daily life. Anangu people still live by Tjukurpa.

The Desert Environment of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is located near the middle of the arid centre of Australia with actual deserts close by on three

of its sides. At Uluru the long-term average annual rainfall is about 291mm, however seasonal and annual rainfalls are extremely variable and rain may fall at any time of the year. As a result of this low and variable rainfall the flora and fauna show special adaptations to be able to survive.

Hunting and Gathering

Since the time of Tjukurpa Anangu have hunted, gathered and survived in their land. As directed and taught through Tjukurpa, women perform certain tasks and men perform others. Anangu women were responsible for the gathering of fruits, berries, grains, insects and small animals. Hunting was done only by the men, with favoured meat including kangaroo, emu and bush turkey. Bush foods are highly nutritious and the act of gathering and hunting for them is a healthy activity. Unfortunately the introduction of feral animals has reduced the abundance of some bush foods.



Mangata (desert quondong—*Santalum acuminatum*)

Photo: Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park



Iji (bush fig—*Ficus platypoda*)

Photo: Stanley Breeden

Finding Water in the Desert

Water is the most valuable resource for Anangu people and all other living things. After substantial rain Anangu people would disperse to the least reliable, short lived water which was far out in the plains. As these water supplies





disappeared Anangu would retreat back to the more permanent water supplies, which were usually located near the ranges and rocky outcrops. The semi-permanent waterholes utilised by Anangu were well looked after and considered sacred places.

Water could also be found in the root system of bloodwood trees (*Eucalyptus opaca*) and in dry creek beds by digging in the sand. The presence of wildlife, including birds such as the zebra finch, is a great indicator of water. Finding water is an ancient knowledge and skill.

Joint Management

Anangu are taught land management practices mostly by their grandparents. Today Anangu jointly manage Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park with Parks Australia.



Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park—A World Heritage Living Cultural Landscape

Joint management arrangements allow Anangu to continue to meet traditional land management obligations and to keep their culture strong.

World Heritage

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is one of the few World Heritage properties listed for both its natural and cultural values. This emphasizes the park is home to a living culture as well as a unique ecosystem, both of which are of outstanding universal value. This international recognition confirms the validity of Tjukurpa and Anangu culture in all aspects of the park's management.

Further Information

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park,
Website: www.deh.gov.au/parks/uluru



Wakalpuka (dead finish—*Acacia tetragonophylla*)

Photo: Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park



Arnguli (bush plum—*Santalum lanceolatum*)

Photo: Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park



Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park—
A Living Cultural Landscape

Photo: Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

Photo: Andrew Longmire



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Further Information visit: www.deh.gov.au/events/iydd/index.html and www.iydd.org