

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION -- IUCN SUMMARY

447: ULURU (AYERS ROCK-MOUNT OLGA) NATIONAL PARK (AUSTRALIA)

Summary prepared by IUCN (April 1987) based on the original nomination submitted by Australia. This original and all documents presented in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the Committee.

1. LOCATION:

Situated in central Australia in south-west Northern Territory. Alice Springs is 335km to the north-east. 25°05'-25°25'S, 130°40'-131°22'E.

2. JURIDICAL DATA:

In 1958 the Ayers Rock-Mount Olga area was excised from the South West Aborigine Reserve and declared as reserve number 1012, under section 103 of the Northern Territory Crown Lands Ordinance. Gazetted on 24 May 1977 as Uluru (Ayers Rock-Mount Olga) National Park under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975. In 1977 the park was declared a Biosphere Reserve. Under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Amendment Act 1985 and the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Amendment Act 1985 inalienable freehold title to the land in the park was passed to the Aboriginal Uluru-Katatjuta Land Trust in September 1985. The land was subsequently leased to the Director of National Parks and Wildlife for a period of 99 years. Area is 132,566ha.

3. IDENTIFICATION:

The park comprises extensive sand plains, dunes and alluvial desert, punctuated by the Ayers Rock monolith and the Olga group, some 32km to the west. Ayers Rock is composed of steeply dipping, feldspar rich sandstone arkose and has been exposed as a result of folding, faulting, the erosion of surrounding rock and infill. The monolith rises 340m above the plain and has a base circumference of 9.4 km, smooth sloping sides of up to 80° gradient and a relatively flat top. The Olga group, covering about 3500ha, comprises 36 steep-sided rock domes of gently dipping conglomerate rising 546m above the surrounding area. The vegetation, modified by substrate stability, climate, fire and Aboriginal food and fuelwood gathering, can be grouped into five major categories, arranged concentrically around the monolith formations. Twenty two native mammals are found including dingo, red kangaroo, wallaroo, marsupial mole, spinifex hopping mouse, and several bat species. Introduced red fox, cat, house mouse and European rabbit, in addition to feral dogs and camels, compete with indigenous species. More than 150 bird species have been recorded, of which 66 are considered resident. All five Australian reptile families are represented and species include monitor lizard, thorny devil lizard, king brown snake, and Ramsay's python.

Ayers Rock is one of several important and interconnected centres of local and religious significance scattered throughout the extensive area of western Australia occupied by Aborigines. Cave paintings on Ayers Rock up to 10,000 years old indicate the length of time Aborigines have been present in the area.

4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION:

Management is the responsibility of a Board of Management, with an Aboriginal majority, in conjunction with the Director of National Parks and Wildlife. Prohibited activities include, for example, overnight camping and mining, and the Director has the authority to restrict access to areas in the park to protect traditional Aboriginal land use. The park is valued principally for its cultural and religious heritage, landscape, geology, arid desert ecosystems and for recreation. The current management plan, jointly prepared by the Uluru Kata Tjuta Board of Management and the National Parks and Wildlife Service is operative until 1991 and has the overriding objective of preserving Aboriginal culture. Other objectives include: allowing a substantive Aboriginal involvement in management; maintaining the Aboriginal significance of the land; conserving both natural and cultural processes; provision of interpretive material; restoration of damaged areas; promotion of cross-cultural understanding; and to provide for appropriate visitor use.

Several Aboriginal groups with traditional rights live in the park. Exact numbers are unknown due to the itinerant nature of the people but are thought to total about 80. Traditional occupations are hunting and gathering and controlled burning has long been used to enhance grazing for game animals and these continue inside the park. The annual number of visitors has been rising steadily since 1958 to between 110,000 and 193,000 in 1984/85. The most popular activities are sightseeing, walking, climbing Ayers Rock, scenic flights, sunset and sunrise viewing, driving, picnicing and photography.

Management problems are climatic hazards for visitors, especially in the hottest months; soil erosion, visual intrusion and disturbance to Aborigines due to inappropriate vehicle use and road and walking track location; provision of an adequate supply of potable water; control of exotic flora and fauna, feral animals, fire, commercial activities and aircraft noise; provision of housing, health and education facilities for local Aborigines; and control of alcohol abuse amongst local people.

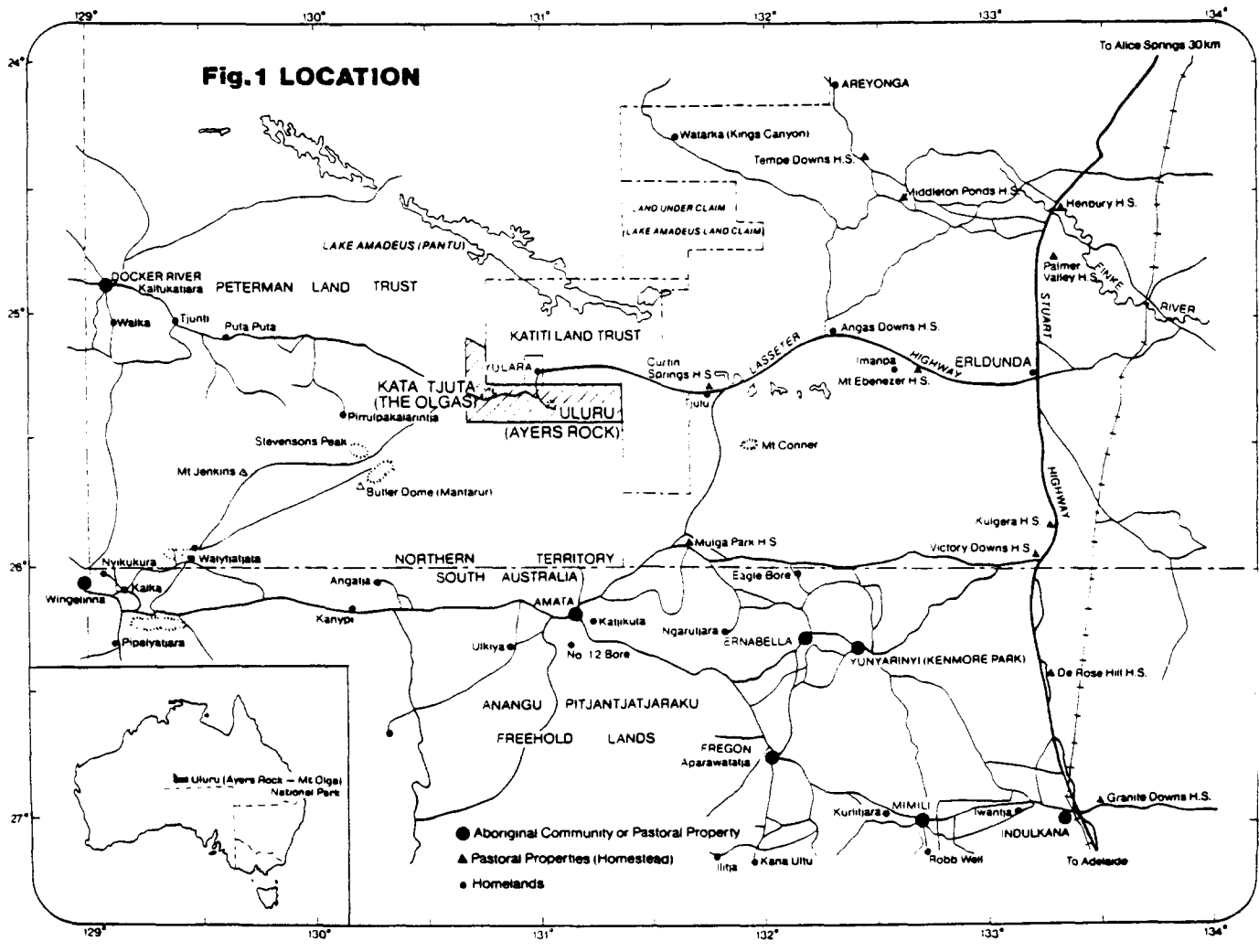
5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST:

The Uluru National Park nomination, as presented by the Government of Australia provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage property:

a) Natural property

- (ii) On-going geological processes. The monoliths of Uluru and Kata Tjuta are exceptional examples of tectonic, geochemical and geomorphic processes.
- (iii) Exceptional Natural Beauty. The huge monoliths in the park, one of the largest in the world, are striking landform features set in a contrasting sand plain environ. The immense size of Uluru rising abruptly from the plain and the collection of the polished domes at Olga result in a landscape of scenic grandeur.
- (iv) Habitat of Rare and Endangered Species. The arid ecosystem of the park provides habitat for a variety of plant and animal species some of which are of rare and of scientific interest.

b) Cultural values of the area are being reviewed by ICOMOS.



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1. DOCUMENTATION:

- (i) IUCN Data sheet
- (ii) Consultations: Australian Government Officials, Canberra, Alice Springs, Park staff: M. Chilcott, J. Mosley, M. Kennedy, L. Beens, P. Toyne
- (iii) Site visit, January 1987

2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

Uluru is within the Central Desert Biogeographical Province of Australia which has 12 other sites on the UN List. These are 2 other sites larger than Uluru: Ruddal River and the Gibson Desert National Parks. Neither of these have the unique geological monolithic structures of Uluru but do have more significant desert habitat. There was at one time a very large (3.75 million ha.) Tanami Desert Wildlife Sanctuary north of Uluru but this no longer exists. There are many other protected areas in the central desert of Australia but none have the distinctive features of Uluru.

Regarding the sandstone monoliths in Uluru there are no other sites outside of Australia except in the Sahara that compare to Uluru. Within Australia, however, a National Park in the Bungle Bungle region in Western Australia has recently been proposed. The Bungle Bungles are a separate 450 sq km massif of eroded sandstone towers that have also been suggested for World Heritage nomination. Information on the Bungle Bungle is sketchy and the area is still being studied. Preliminary finds suggest, however, that there is a greater diversity of land systems, habitats and species than exist in Uluru. The area also has important Aboriginal values. The area is similar to the Olga portion of Uluru being a network of dissected hills but does not contain a large monolith similar to Ayers Rock.

3. INTEGRITY

Uluru faces a range of management issues including erosion of aboriginal culture, feral animals, fire control, and visitor management. These are well-addressed in the management plan and actions are being implemented by a trained staff and provision of a substantial operation budget. Much of the landscape affected by inappropriate tourism development is now being rehabilitated and facilities located outside the park. Delimitation of aboriginal sacred sites and cave paintings has been done but there is still some visitor trespass. The education programme is well developed and is being extended to encourage in visitors a greater awareness of the desert landscape. It is obvious, however, that the rectangular boundaries of the park are artificial and that other natural features of interest lie outside the area.

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Although the geological features of Ayers Rock and the Olgas are the most evident features of Uluru, it is recognized that the cultural values of the site are significant. These relate to the religious and mythic beliefs of the native aboriginal population, some 150 of whom permanently reside in the park. Their involvement in the management of the park is a precedent-setting example for similar parks elsewhere. Uluru also has significance for all Australians as a symbol of national identity. It should be noted the park was made a biosphere reserve in 1977.

5. EVALUATION

Uluru National Park meets two criteria for natural sites under the World Heritage Convention:

- (ii) On-going geological processes: the monoliths of Uluru and Kati Tjuta are exceptional examples of tectonic and geomorphic processes.
- (iii) Exceptional natural beauty and exceptional combination of natural and cultural elements. The immense size of the Uluru monolith and the collection of polished domes at Mt. Olga result in a landscape of scenic grandeur. The overlay of the aboriginal occupation adds a fascinating cultural aspect to the site.

The Park also was considered under criteria (iv): Habitats for rare and endangered species. The spinifex grasslands of the park are a vegetative form unique to Australia and provide habitat for a remarkable range of marsupials. They are also a centre for radiation of the diverse arid Australian lizard fauna. However, these values are secondary to the physical landscape features and are better displayed in other larger desert parks of central and western Australia.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Uluru National Park should be added to the World Heritage List. The Committee may wish to: (1) commend the Australian government for the innovative approach which blends the natural and cultural elements of park management; (2) suggest that future additions to the area of the site to more completely portray the arid landscape would be welcomed; and (3) encourage plans for re-introduction of previously occurring native species.

