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# Uluru

By Judith R Tanner

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On July 19, 1873, William Gosse, a European explorer, discovered a huge monolithic rock in the center of the Australian desert in the Northern Territory. He named it Ayers Rock after the then premier of South Australia, Henry Ayers. Ernest Giles, a more seasoned explorer in that region, had already found and named an important lake and mountain range nearby. But he reached Ayers Rock, which he described as "this remarkable pebble," some months after William Gosse had reached and named his discovery.

What neither explorer realized was that aboriginal people had lived in the area for around ten thousand years, long before white man came. Evidence of their early habitation was to be found in the rock paintings located at the base of Uluru and in nearby caves. For the next one hundred years, the rock retained the European name that Gosse gave to it.

In the twentieth century, as the center of Australia became more accessible to travellers, Ayers Rock became a famous tourist destination visited by many thousands of people from all around the world. In 1985, the rock and the surrounding Kata Juta national park were deeded back to the aboriginal people by the then Prime Minister Robert Hawke. The aboriginal nation renamed it Uluru and continue to own and administer the rock and the park today.

Uluru is the world's largest monolith. It was formed from sediment created by an ancient inland sea some six hundred million years ago. Made of arcose, a coarse and grainy form of sandstone, the rock is considered to be an important center for aboriginal beliefs. It was created, according to tradition, by spirit ancestors during the dreamtime. In certain lights, thanks to the high levels of the mineral feldspar, the rock takes on a glowing quality. Its colour changes from rich ochre red to violet or gray, depending on weather conditions. A large rock pool filled with water can be found on its summit, but climbing the rock is frowned upon by its aboriginal custodians because of its significance to their beliefs. High winds also make it a dangerous place to climb.

Uluru stands 348 meters (1100 feet) above the surrounding countryside. It has a circumference of 9.4 kilometers (5.6 miles) and an area of 3.33 square kilometers. Uluru is located 1,395 kilometers south of Darwin and 465 kilometers southwest of Alice Springs.

In 1987, Uluru and Kata Juta National Park received World Heritage listing. The region surrounding Uluru is home to rare indigenous mammals such as the hairy-footed dunnart, some one hundred and fifty different species of birds, and to rare reptiles such as the skink and Australia's largest lizard, the perentie. Situated in sandy desert land dotted with spinifex grasses and mulga scrub, Uluru is considered by many to be one of the great wonders of the world.

Uluru

## Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Aborigines first inhabited Uluru and Kata Juta national Park:
  - A. 10,000 years ago
  - B. 600 million years ago
  - C. in 1873
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. A monolith is:
  - A. a large rock formation
  - B. a remarkable pebble
  - C. a national park
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Uluru was formed from:
  - A. volcanic activity
  - B. sediment from an ancient inland sea
  - C. violent sandstorms over many millions of years
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Uluru is located in:
  - A. the Northern Territory
  - B. Queensland
  - C. South Australia
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Uluru was first discovered by the European explorer:
  - A. William Grosse
  - B. Robert Hawke
  - C. Ernest Giles

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Uluru was handed back to traditional aboriginal owners by:
- A. Henry Ayers
  - B. the premier of South Australia
  - C. then Prime Minister Robert Hawke
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. A perentie is:
- A. a rare mammal
  - B. a large lizard
  - C. a bird
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The land surrounding Uluru is:
- A. desert scrub, sand, and spinifex grasses
  - B. sand and sea
  - C. tropical rain forest