

By Steve Bunk

THE ROCK OF AGES

Legends live on in Australia's dead centre



ROBIN SMITH (THE STOCK HOUSE)

Ayers Rock, the world's largest monolith, possesses a relentless magnetism which drew more than 100,000 visitors in 1983. Paying a respectful call on the sacred heart of the Dreamtime can now include the more worldly pleasures as well, with a stay at Yulara, the "Oasis of the Desert."

IMPROBABLE AS A BLISTER ON THE belly of the Red Centre, Ayers Rock didn't assault so much as insinuate itself into my senses at first encounter. No natural formation, I thought, could dominate the awful power of central Australia's desert. Its vast stretches are so unyielding that cattle stations can sometimes support no more than four head per square mile. The stations themselves range up to 5,180 square kilometres in area.

When Ayers Rock appeared above the flatness of claypan and sand dunes, it seemed to me more out of place than imposing. However, that impression would soon reverse itself.

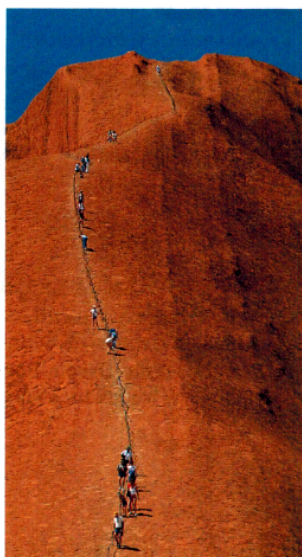
On closer inspection, the Rock does look every bit the monolith, and one with an ancient history at that. Its smooth-faced symmetry is a trick of both distance and the Rock's feminine tendency to blush and fade in changing light. Close up, though, its feldspar-rich sandstone is scarred by rain and wind, full of ravines and caves, a startling and somehow stern

ROBIN SMITH (THE STOCK HOUSE)

example of nature at work eroding herself. It's easy to understand why Uluru, as the Aborigines call it, is a sacred spot.

The story of the Rock, like that of central Australia, comes in two versions. From the book of European settlers comes the geological fact that Ayers Rock is about 500 million years old. It and the nearby Olgas (translation "many heads" because of the numerous peaks) were formed during upheavals that created a mountain range which subsequently eroded around these remnants of unfractured stone.

Explorer William Gosse climbed the

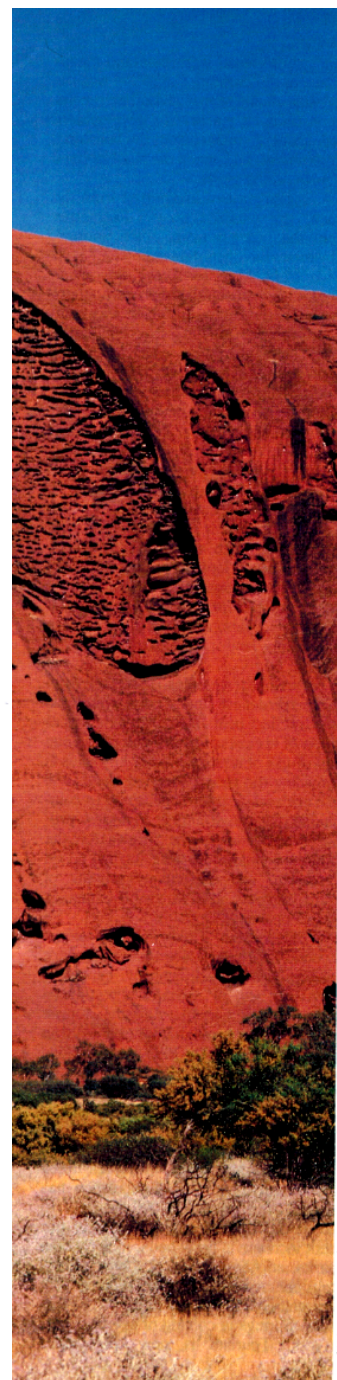
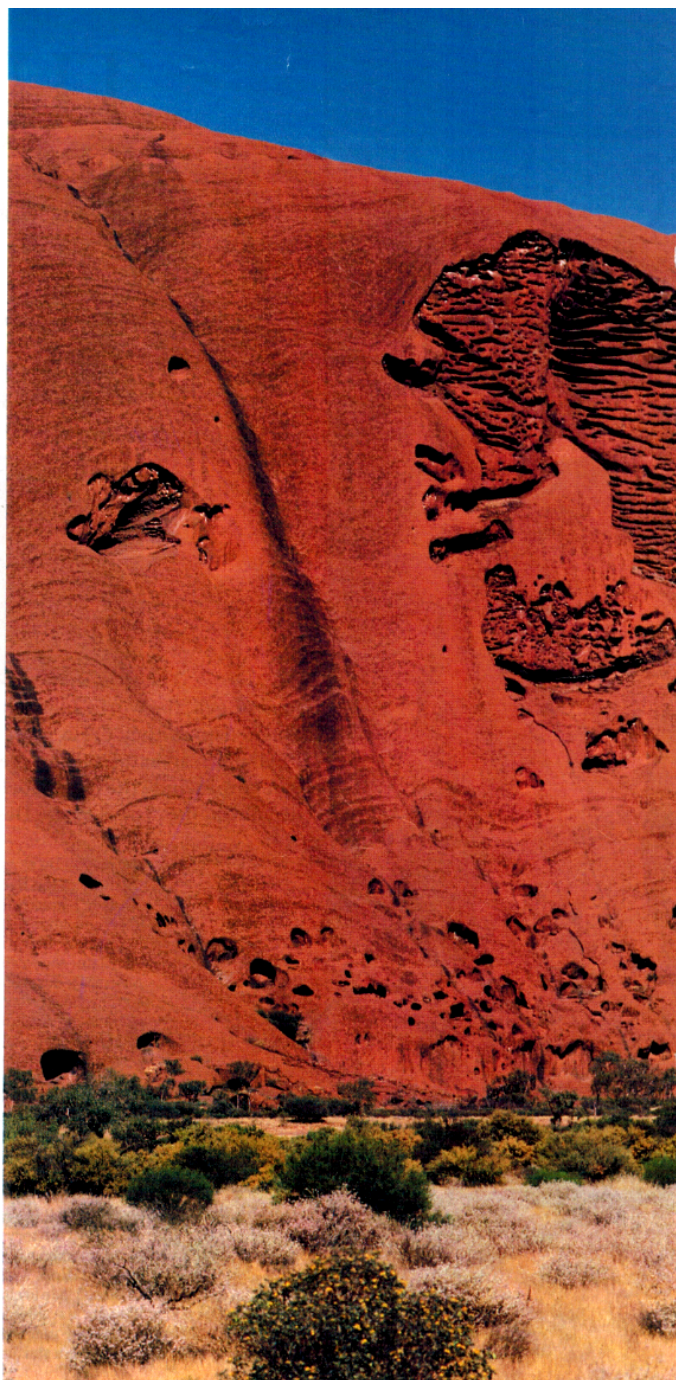


"The Rock face is seen as a picture hanging on the sky's wall. Height equals distance and the Rock should be viewed in perspective."

Rock in 1873 and named it after Henry Ayers, who was then Governor of South Australia. At 348 metres tall and almost nine kilometres around its base, Ayers Rock is the world's largest monolith.

The second story of the Rock is so poorly documented that even the exact meaning of Uluru is uncertain. One theory is that it's derived from the word "Ugulu," which means sacred and permanent. Another possible translation is "sacred dreaming place."

What is certain is that Uluru figures in the Dreamtime, when the "totemic" or



heroic ancestors of today's Aborigines emerged from the subterranean world. Taking both human and nonhuman forms, they created landscapes out of the perpetual darkness and established basic patterns of life. Eventually, the exhausted ancestors sank back into the earth, but their spirits remain alive — for the Dreaming is as perpetual to Aborigines as is the concept of the Creator to Christians.

Virtually every significant feature of the Rock symbolizes an event in the mythology of local Aborigines, who have inhabited the area for at least 40,000 years. These legends are divided into two types. The sunny side of the Rock inspired tribal rituals which gave warnings and lessons. The shaded southern aspects were the sites for stories about battles between ancestral tribes. All around Uluru, the caves, boulders and other formations represent the bodies of warriors, homes of totemic creatures, footprints, spear marks and other details of the legends.

This made it easier to memorize not only the stories but the Rock itself, which was, at one time, important to the success of hunters. Although Uluru has been dormant for several decades now as a religious site, it remains of great cultural significance to Aboriginal people. In fact, the entire mountain is a symbol and a chronicle, almost a sculpture of Aboriginal mythology.

The Rock face is seen as a picture hanging on the sky's wall. Height equals distance, and the Rock should be viewed like a picture, in perspective. A cave 60 metres up, for instance, might be interpreted as being a couple of kilometres away. The important people are represented by features high up on the Rock and lesser ancestors are closer to the base.

Although early white settlers were generally unappreciative of Uluru's religious significance to Aborigines, that situation has since improved. In 1958, Ayers Rock and the Olgas were excised from an Aboriginal Reserve and placed under the control of the Northern Territory government. However, that act was revoked in 1977, when the area was declared a National Park. Negotiations are now underway to return the region to its original Aboriginal owners.

Despite strident complaints from the Northern Territory government that it was not consulted prior to this decision, Prime Minister Bob Hawke's government remains committed to complete the transfer of ownership in 1984. The territorial government's alarm is not difficult to understand, with Ayers Rock as the star attraction in a tourism boom

that has not come without a drain on territory coffers.

Yulara, for example, is an ultra-modern, self-contained resort village on the outskirts of the Ayers Rock-Mount Olga National Park. Although it is operational now, it will be at peak capacity in October when the resort will be capable of catering to 5,000 guests per day. The complex cost A\$150 million to create.

Alice Springs, the territory's tourism capital and the departure point for many trips to Ayers Rock, also has a heavy stake in the monolith's health as a roadside wonder. Some people in the tourism industry there have doubts about the return of Uluru ownership to the Aborigines. "What they're sort of worried about," says local newspaper editor Bob Watt, "is that the Aboriginal people might decide they want to have a ceremony and close off Ayers Rock. That could affect tours which had been booked months ahead of time."

However, the understanding between the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the traditional owners is that the latter will receive title only if they agree to lease back the area for national park purposes. A similar plan has been put into effect elsewhere in the territory with no restrictions resulting on public access to that park.

As Aboriginal Development Commission Chairman, Charles Perkins, put it: "The return of the Rock was something that should have happened and will happen — it doesn't take anything away from the nation."

Martin Vassalli, General Manager of the lynchpin to the Yulara development, the Sheraton Ayers Rock Hotel, said his company's decision to enter the project was based in part on the understanding that the Rock would be returned to Aboriginal ownership. He said Sheraton also decided to operate at Yulara because the Northern Territory government was avidly promoting tourism and had agreed to shut down all other guest accommodation in the area. These consist of a few ramshackle motels near the Rock's base which were bought by the government in 1975-76 and leased back to the former owners.

Concern about the environmental effects of having these buildings close to the Rock was one of the reasons for the birth of Yulara. A federal government study made the recommendation in 1969 that the airstrip and tourist facilities be moved outside the National Park boundaries to help protect the twenty-two species of mammals, the 151 bird types and almost 400 species of plants which are native to the region.

Yulara — which was named after a

My name is **Edouard Jacques de Romont**
I am a «créateur-styliste». My motto is: High class products for high class people.

As I strictly hold myself to the classic, the long lasting and the utmost perfection, I address the elite, the aristocracy. All my products are a synthesis between beauty and quality.

My creations are built on simple, beautiful forms and have, as a mark of distinction, a genuine diamond on the dial. Highest quality cases with mineral crystal, manufactured by the best craftsmen on most modern equipment with great care to detail, protect high precision, shockprotected Quartz movements produced by the electronic specialists of Nivada watch factories of Switzerland. All movements are fitted with longlife batteries. Split second accuracy is assured and the international Nivada guarantee honoured in over 100 countries.

Edouard Jacques de Romont
créateur-styliste



Nivada
EJR

nearby Aboriginal waterhole and means "Place of the Howling Dingo" — was the eventual result of that and other recommendations. It's a private development with financial support from the territorial government, and one of the most isolated resorts on the globe.

Just seventeen kilometres from the Rock, the complex is 455 kilometres from the nearest town, Alice Springs. However, the once-demanding four-hour drive from Alice to Ayers was made pleasant by substantial improvements to the Lasseter Highway, which was completely sealed in 1983. Six kilometres from Yulara, an airstrip, which can handle small jets and light aircraft, was opened in 1981. Flights from Alice Springs are available, as are air tours of the Rock.

Once ensconced at Yulara, the guest isn't likely to have cause for complaint. Accommodation ranges from camp grounds to the 230-room Sheraton, with gradations in between these two extremes. There's a comprehensive Visitor's Centre with a theatre, outdoor auditorium and lookout area, a shopping square with everything from a bank to a beer garden, restaurants, sport and medical facilities, arts and crafts, plenty of parking and petrol, even a police station.

Part of the complex is shielded from the fierce desert sun by huge white sails which reflect heat and improve the circulation of breezes. Passive use of the sun and re-use of waste heat play key roles in providing the resort's energy needs. All of Yulara was carefully designed to complement the environment. The low profile of the buildings, which draws from the traditional bungalow with its bull-nosed verandah, and the colour scheme of ochre and pink, are two visible examples of this planning.

Billed as an "Oasis in the Desert," Yulara is certain to lure thousands more visitors to the Rock annually, especially with the help of Sheraton's worldwide reservations system. Already, tourist numbers have risen dramatically from an estimated 100,000 in 1983 to projections of perhaps double that figure in 1984. All this is a far cry from 1958, the year the area was excised from the Aborigines, when less than 3,000 people visited.

Alice Springs is also enjoying the effects of this surge in Ayers Rock patronage. That town's population has soared from about 16,000 in 1979 to about 21,000 now. A recent forty per cent increase in hotel beds, new caravan parks, an Alice Sheraton, a host of new tour operators and an international standard golf course are among the signs that Alice Springs is coming of age alongside Ayers. Tourism is now the town's

biggest industry.

David King-Jones, one of the architectural planners of the golf course, summed up the boom: "The international drawing card is the Rock and everyone has their eye on Yulara — but it's got to succeed, because the government has put a lot of money into it." It will also succeed because Uluru has a presence which doesn't disappoint. The "eight-kilometre walk" around the Rock's base, which takes about half a day, left me with the odd impression that this monolith is magnetic. It seemed to exert a pull, and its roughly pentagonal shape sometimes gave me the feeling that my walking was taking me nowhere.

At daybreak and sunset, when the normally grey sandstone reveals the red glow of oxidation, it's as if the bloodstains of Aboriginal initiates are pouring out from the earth-bound recesses of the Dreamtime. Uluru is like an ancient, creaky house, with the advantage that you can climb all over it.

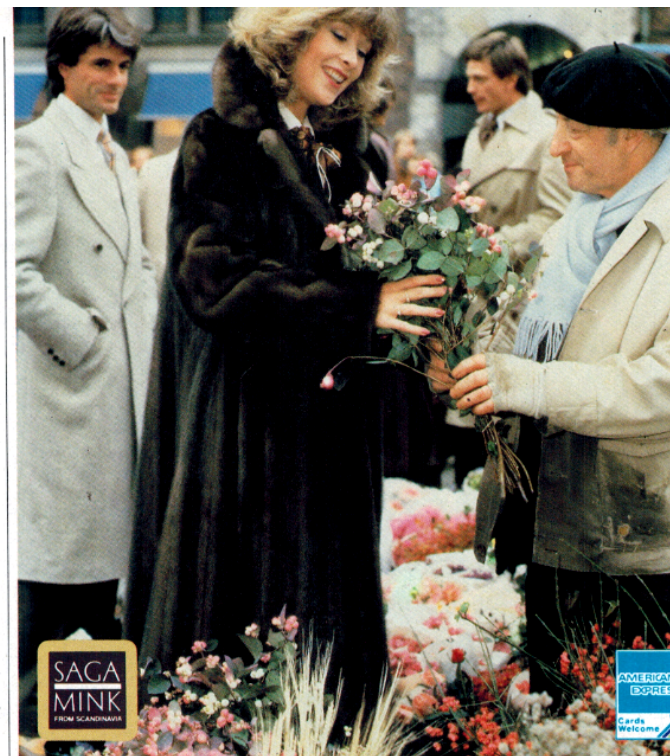
The actual "climb" begins on a south-west aspect, at a spot called the Web (tail) of the kangaroo-rat men, who are said to crouch over the mountain crest at this place. It's a rope-and-rail affair up a ravine, taking about forty minutes. Sensible shoes and a cool drink are essential. The views, of course, are superb.

Some visitors may not be much impressed with the rock paintings, many of which are faded and even less accomplished than other examples of the normally uncomplicated Aboriginal art. However, park rangers who give guided tours with explanations of the rock art and mythology are invaluable aids to increased appreciation.

Only the secret ritual areas for men and women are inaccessible to tourists, and these are plainly marked with signs and small fences. Aside from birds (such as the beautiful black-shouldered kite) and reptiles (like the extremely ugly but quite harmless thorny devil), wildlife may be thin on the ground for all but the fortunate visitor.

To be sure, Uluru is an eerie place. Just last year, a truck driver rammed his rig into one of the small motels at the foot of the Rock and later claimed he couldn't remember doing it. But from the comfort of Yulara, for the respite of a day or two from the press of city events, Uluru quickly reteaches us the paradox of nature, which lies in being very old and silent, yet with countless stories to tell.

Steve Bunk is a former features editor for Australian Playboy. Resident in Sydney, he now writes on a freelance basis for various local and international publications.



Seoul's Finest Place to Shop

*JINDO fur factory offers you excellent value and choice.
Take advantage of this unique opportunity.
Paris, London, New York, Tokyo, Seoul fashions at the one stop shop.*

JINDO'S FUR MENU AND COMPARISON

	*Mink corduroy jacket	*Mink jacket	*Mink coat	*Fox jacket	*Fox coat	*Fur lined Rain coat	*Many others
•Jindo Prices	US\$ 520-780	950-1600	1300-2650	150-630	550-1690	250-350	50-1200
•New York, Paris & London Prices	US\$ 900-1800	1550-3200	2550-6000	300-1250	1100-3400	450-950	100-2400
•Tokyo Prices	US\$ 1600-2400	2400-4900	3900-9500	500-2000	1900-4800	750-1500	200-4400

Length: Long coat 46/48" Jancet 24/28" Size: Standard tags in US, French, German and Japanese sizing system.

Over US\$2 Million worth goods always available at Jindo stores.
Honor major credit cards. Open 365 days 10 am - 7 pm.

jindo IBP
SEOUL • PARIS • LONDON • NEW YORK • TOKYO



THE ONLY GOVERNMENT AUTHORIZED FUR GOODS DEPARTMENT STORE IN KOREA

371-62, Garibong-Dong, Guro-Ku, Seoul, Korea C.P.O. Box 242 Seoul, Korea.
Locations: ①Jilaeon Shop: Phone (02) 797-5601/3 ② Factory Shop: Phone (02) 862-0051/2