Uluru and other big rocks

Uluru and Kata Tjuta were both created at the same time, over 500 million years ago. They are the remains of a mountain range that had very little vegetation to protect it from winds and rain that broke it down, carrying the soil and rock away. These mountains ranges eventually eroded away almost completely. Uluru and Kata Tjuta are all that is left. They were tight folds when the mountains originally crinkled up, and that may be why the rock itself is so hard, resistant and uniform in colour.

Test it out

Discover how erosion can transform a landscape


Did you know?
The red colour comes from iron in the rock. It turns red like rust when exposed to air and water. Originally Uluru and Kata Tjuta would both have been grey.

Wave rock

Found inland in the south-eastern corner of Western Australia, Wave Rock is part of a large granite formation known as Hyden Rock. The ‘wave’ is about 14m tall and 110m long.

Bottoms up

The rocks of the Bungle Bungle formed in a similar way to Uluru. They have banded stripes of colour because it used to sit at the bottom of a river bed. Over the years, layers of different sediment settled on the bottom of a river. These layers eventually compressed into sandstone and lifted up to form a mountain range.

FROM AYERS ROCK TO ULURU

The area around Uluru was first settled about 10,000 years ago, and is sacred to the Anangu people of Central Australia. In Anangu culture, Uluru marks the site of significant events from The Dreaming, when creator beings formed the landscape, and is also the home of their ancestors. On 15 December 1993, Uluru became the first icon in Australia to be given back its Aboriginal name, giving birth to a wave of dual-named sites and landmarks across Australia.

British surveyor William Gosse was the first European to ‘discover’ the formation in 1872, and named it Ayers Rock after the former chief secretary of South Australia, Sir Henry Ayers.

“Dual naming leads to better cross-cultural communication as it is one of the windows people can use to understand more of another culture’s heritage,” says Bill Watt, chair of the Committee for Geographic Names Australia.

There are multiple Dreaming stories about Uluru that account for the shape and markings on the rock. One such story is that of Tati, a red lizard who was hunting around Uluru and threw his kail, a curved throwing stick, embedding it in the surface of the rock. He tried to scoop it out, leaving a series of hollows behind.