

MACMILLAN CULTURAL READERS

UPPER LEVEL

JENNIFER GASCOIGNE

# Australia



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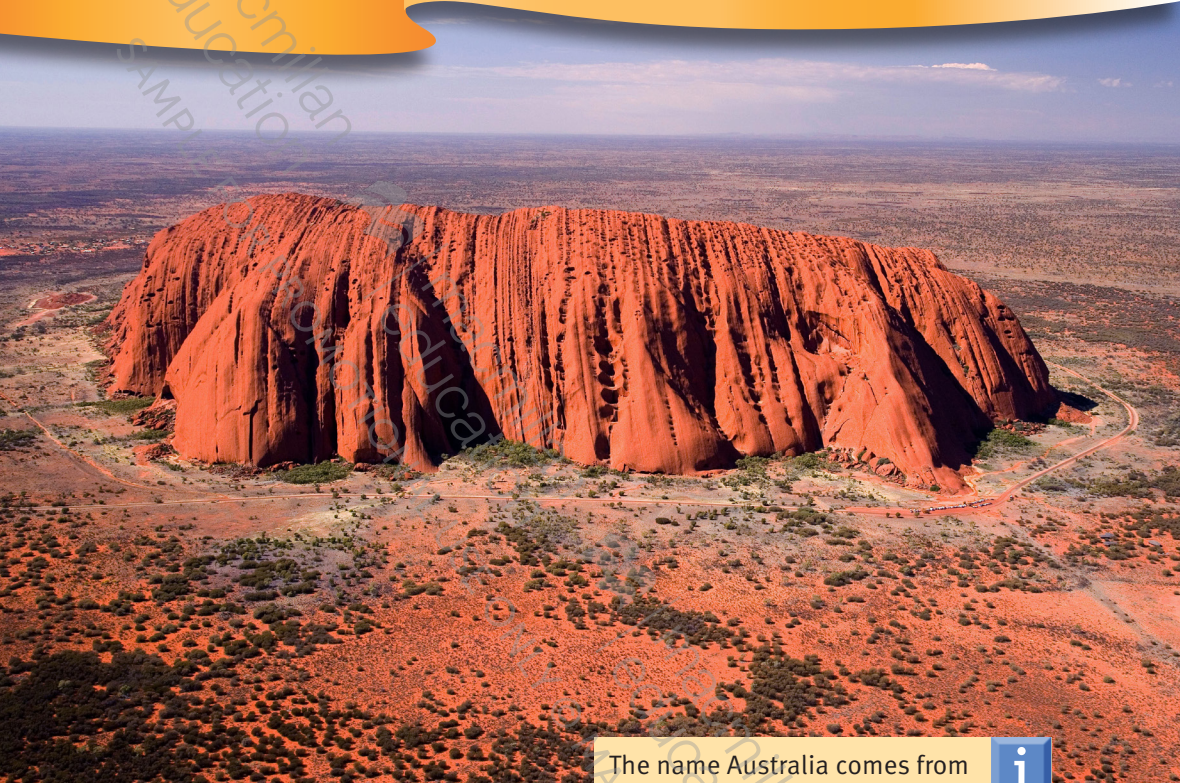
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# 1 Climate, Landscape and People



## Uluru, the largest rock in the world

The island continent of Australia lies between the Indian and Pacific Oceans in the region of Oceania<sup>11</sup> in the southern hemisphere. It is often described as the Earth's largest island but smallest continent (the other continents are Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Antarctica and Europe, in order of size from largest to smallest). It is also the lowest, the flattest and, apart from Antarctica, the driest continent. The country is unique<sup>12</sup> and varied in every way – in climate, landscape, people, history, culture and animal and plant life.

The name Australia comes from the Latin phrase *Terra Australis* meaning 'land of the south'. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this was the name given to the unknown continent believed to exist south of the equator. A common name you may hear for Australia is 'down under'.



## Climate, Landscape and People

Australia's way of life has traditionally been influenced by European culture, but today Australian society is multicultural: in 2011, about 21% of the population had been born in the UK, 9% in New Zealand, 6% in China, just over 5% in India and 3.5% in Italy. More than 85% of Australians live near or on the coast, and 89% of the population live in urban areas (towns or cities), which makes Australia one of the most urbanized countries in the world.

### Climate

About 70% of the country is very dry and nearly 40% of the country is desert. Most of the desert areas are in the centre and in the west. Parts of northern Australia are tropical and have heavy rainfall in the summer, but are dry in the winter. In the south-east and the south-west corners the climate is temperate<sup>13</sup>. As a result, most of the biggest cities are found there. Snow in Australia is rare, but there are places for skiing in the Snowy Mountains region of south-eastern New South Wales and north-eastern Victoria, a few hours from Melbourne and Sydney. The most popular time to ski is late August. Because of the large differences in climate and natural environment, as well as its size and position, Australia is a land of droughts (times when there is no water), floods, fires and tropical storms. Large fires occur somewhere in Australia every month of the year. The frequency of these fires is not just a result of the hot, dry climate but also of the changes in the climate. Wet periods allow plants to grow quickly. In dry times the leaves die and become fuel for fires.

### Some features<sup>14</sup> of the Australian landscape

#### The desert outback

The outback covers most of the centre of the country. Few people live there because life is very difficult. However, one of Australia's most amazing and famous sights is in the outback – Uluru (better known outside Australia as Ayers Rock), the largest rock in the world! It rises like an enormous whale's<sup>15</sup> back from the flat red-soil desert that the Australians call the Red Centre, and is sacred<sup>16</sup> to the Aboriginals.

Uluru is about 335 m tall, 3.6 km long, 1.9 km wide and 9.4 km around the bottom. Most of it is underground!



## The bush

When city people want to talk about the non-urban areas nearer the coast they use the word bush. It is a word that is now closely linked with Australia and is used to describe not only the landscape but also a part of the national identity.

Life in the bush is very hard, so the people who lived and worked there in the past had to be strong and able to deal with living in an isolated place. The bush made them practical<sup>18</sup> and independent. They said what they thought and were good to their 'mates' (friends). Until the 1960s these qualities were seen as being an important part of the Australian national identity.

This has changed in recent years because most Australians do not have much experience of life in the bush. They live in large cities or near the coast where the way of life does not require knowledge of survival skills. However, it is clear from much popular music and stories, painting, films and food that the bush has an important place in Australian culture.

## The Great Dividing Range

Around the eastern and south-eastern edge of Australia is the Great Dividing Range, a 3,700-kilometre range<sup>19</sup> of mountains. It is in fact made up of<sup>p</sup> several ranges including the Snowy Mountains, where Mount Kosciuszko, Australia's highest mountain is, the Blue Mountains and the Australian Alps. These mountains send water down into Australia's most important rivers, the Murray and the Darling.

The folk song *Waltzing Matilda* is Australia's best-known bush ballad (a song that tells a story). The title means travelling on foot (waltzing) with a bag (matilda) on your back that contains your possessions. The words were written in 1895 by Banjo Paterson (1864–1941), an Australian bush poet<sup>17</sup> and writer.

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Lake Eyre



## Climate, Landscape and People

The Murray–Darling Basin (the area around the two rivers) is the most important area in the country for farming. One hundred per cent of the rice, 95% of the oranges and 54% of the apples grown in Australia are produced there. And 28% of the nation's cows, 45% of the sheep and 62% of the pigs can be found there too.



### Kati Thanda–Lake Eyre

The lowest point on the continent is in South Australia, about 700 kilometres north of Adelaide. It is Kati Thanda–Lake Eyre, which is 15 metres below sea level. Although it is the largest lake in Australia at 9,500 square kilometres, it is rarely full of water – it fills only once every eight years or so when the rivers flowing into it flood the land. Then fish and waterbirds arrive in large numbers to eat the food it produces – it is a wonderful sight! When the lake starts to empty, however, the water becomes very salty and the fish die and the birds leave. Eventually<sup>20</sup> only salt is left on the ground, and Lake Eyre remains like that until the rivers flood again.



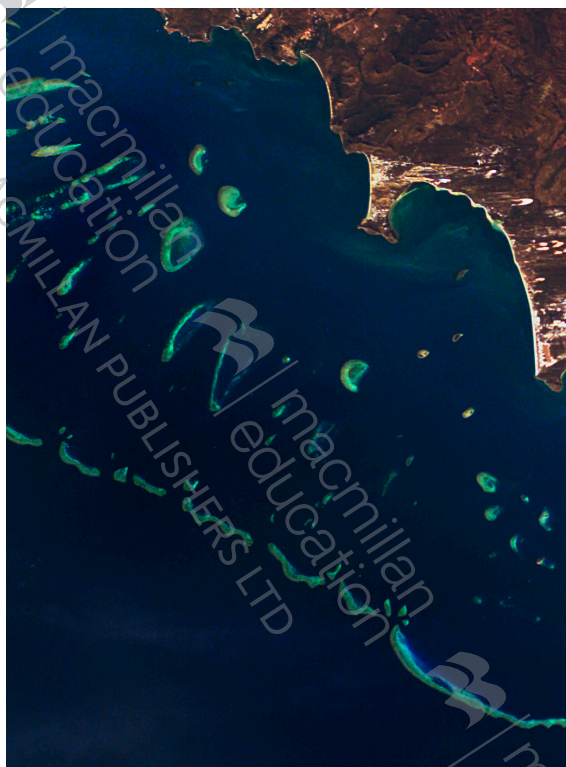
## The Daintree Rainforest

This rainforest on the north-east coast of Queensland is part of the Wet Tropics UNESCO Heritage Site<sup>21</sup>. It is 135 million years old and about 1,200 square kilometres, and is home to<sup>p</sup> a wide variety of plants and animals. The rainforest was created when the super-continent of Pangaea broke into two huge pieces about 200 million years ago: Laurasia in the north and Gondwana in the south. The land mass of Gondwana included\* South America, Africa, Arabia, India, Australia and Antarctica, and was covered in trees and ancient plants. The two large continents continued to break up and by 40 million years ago Australia was already a separate island continent. Over time the rainforest became smaller and what we see today is only a part of the history of the continent. Unfortunately human activity such as cutting down trees, farming and building is putting the future of the forest in danger. As a result the plants and animals that live there are in danger too. Many of the animals are very ancient and are similar to the creatures found 150 million years ago. This makes the Daintree Rainforest a real-life *Jurassic Park*!

## The Great Barrier Reef

Another of Australia's natural treasures and also a UNESCO World Heritage Site is the Great Barrier Reef along the coast of Queensland. More than 2,000 kilometres long, it is the world's largest reef system (344,400 square kilometres). It is so large, in fact, that it can be seen from space. The Reef actually consists of about 2,900 individual reefs, which took millions of years to form. They are made of extremely small sea creatures called corals, and their skeletons<sup>22</sup>. Today the Reef is one of Australia's main tourist attractions, but scientists are worried about its health. Its survival<sup>23</sup> is threatened<sup>24</sup> not only by human

## The Great Barrier Reef



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activity – fishing methods, tourism and pollution – but also by predators<sup>25</sup> and changes in the environment. Scientists reported that the amount of coral covering the Reef fell by nearly 50% between 1985 and 2012 as a result of damage caused by the crown-of-thorns starfish (a predator that feeds on corals), tropical storms and global warming<sup>26</sup>. Global warming causes sea water to stay warmer for longer, and this in turn, causes corals to lose their colour and die.

There are two types of coral – stony (hard) and soft. The stony corals form the skeleton or the structure of the coral reef. The less common soft corals look like colourful plants.



### **'Aussies' – the people of Australia**

Most Australians have their origins<sup>27</sup> in other countries. The only native people of Australia are the Aboriginals, who now make up about 3% of the total population. There are also about 40,000 Torres Strait Islanders in Australia, living mostly in the north of Queensland. They are the first people of the islands in the Torres Strait and they have the same origins as the people of Papua New Guinea.



## Multicultural Australia



It is not known exactly how many native people there were before Europeans arrived in 1788, but experts think there were between 300,000 and 700,000, or maybe more. However, colonization had a very bad effect on the size of the Aboriginal population and by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it had fallen to fewer than 90,000. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, the colonists brought diseases with them that were previously unknown in Australia and the Aboriginals often died when they caught them. Secondly, there were many fights about land during which large numbers of both Aboriginals and Europeans were killed.

### Australian words



**a barbie:** a barbecue (BBQ)

**a clobber:** a friend

**dinkum:** honest

**lollies:** sweets

**oldies:** parents

**a sheila:** a girl or girlfriend



## Climate, Landscape and People



Since the arrival of the British in 1788, there has been a continual flow of immigration<sup>28</sup> into Australia. Until the 1970s, most of the immigrants came from Europe. These days, Australia receives many more people from Asia, and since 1996 the number from Africa and the Middle East has almost doubled. Now, about 180,000 people move to Australia every year. If this continues, there will be about 35 or 40 million Australians by the middle of the century.

Why do so many people want to move to Australia? Is it because Australia has some of the warmest and driest weather in the world, beautiful scenery and a clean environment? Or because they like the idea of living in a really multicultural country? Perhaps they have read or heard that life in Australia is less stressful than in many other countries? Or maybe they think it will be easier to find a job there than in their own countries? At 6%, the Australian unemployment rate is lower than in most English-speaking countries (UK 7.1%; United States of America (USA) 6.7%; Canada 7.2%; South Africa 25.5%).

Because the first nation to colonize the country was Britain, the official language of Australia is English, which everyone is expected to speak. However, many other languages are also spoken – more than 200, including native Australian languages. The most common after English are Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic, Vietnamese and Mandarin.



‘G’day mate!’ (Many Australians say this when they meet a friend.)

**KEVIN, A STUDENT**



Australian English is a little different from other types of English in its vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and spelling, so it is quite easy to recognize an Aussie from the way he or she speaks. However, not everyone finds it easy to recognize the difference between an Australian and a New Zealander!

## **New Zealand**

New Zealand is probably Australia's closest cultural neighbour. Around 1,600 kilometres away in the south-western Pacific Ocean, it is made up of a group of mountainous islands. The two main ones, the North Island and the South Island, are separated by the Cook Strait. The capital city Wellington is at the southern end of the North Island.

The islands were created just 23 million years ago when land was pushed out of the ocean by volcanic eruptions<sup>29</sup>. Today, there are more than fifty volcanoes in New Zealand, many of which are still active and could erupt in the future. White Island volcano is the largest active volcano and has been active since at least 1769 when it was first seen and named by the British explorer Captain James Cook. Volcanoes are not the only natural danger in New Zealand, however! Earthquakes<sup>30</sup> are also very common because the country is on the edge of two tectonic plates, which are very large flat pieces of rock that cover the earth. The plates are called the Australian Plate and the Pacific Plate. In February 2011 parts of the second largest city Christchurch on the South Island were seriously damaged and 185 people died in a huge earthquake.

The native people of New Zealand are called Māoris. They first arrived on the islands by boat in AD 1000 from islands in Polynesia near Tahiti. They named the country Aotearoa, which means 'The Land of the Long White Cloud'. In the 1600s, it was visited by the Dutch, who named it Nieuw Zeeland after a region in the Netherlands. Later the British arrived there. In 1907, it became part of the British Empire and in 1947 it was given its independence.

Today, just over four million people live in New Zealand. In the past, most New Zealanders, or 'Kiwis' as they are called, were farmers, but today 86% of them live in cities. The most popular sport is rugby<sup>31</sup> and nearly everyone supports the national team the All Blacks.

