

DEMOGRAPHIA



Alice Springs, Ayers Rock and the Olgas

BASIC INFORMATION¹

Urban Area Population: 2001	25,000
Urban Land Area: Square Miles: 2005	10
Urban Land Area: Square Kilometers: 2005	27
Population per Square Mile	2,400
Population per Square Kilometer	950

15 April 2007

Central Australia is a surprise. This is not a barren wasteland like the last two hour drive on the Mojave Desert from Los Angeles to Las Vegas. There is a surprising amount of vegetation here, including a plethora of small trees. There is no doubt that this is an arid, desert landscape, but Timbuktu it is not.

This rental car tour started, like many, at the airport rental car counter. The flight in from Adelaide had revealed a landscape as foreboding as any in the world, with dry lakes and the kind of barrenness that I expected would surround Alice Springs.

Unlike virtually all of the other rental car tours, this one is largely not urban. It starts in the closest thing to urbanization in central Australia, Alice Springs, with most of the time being spent at Australia's premier tourist attraction, Ayres Rock and its close by cousin, the Olgas.

Alice Springs

Alice Springs (Plates 3-15) is by far the largest settlement in central Australia. The urban agglomeration has a population of 25,000, in a comparatively compact geography of 10 square

miles. The city itself is nestled in the MacDonalld Ranges and separated from its airport by a narrow gorge between the hills.

Alice Springs is located approximately half-way between Adelaide, the million person metropolis of South Australia and Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory, located on the Timor Sea.

Alice Springs is a transportation hub. The Stuart Highway, which cuts across central Australia from south to north, passes through Alice Springs. "Road trains," trucks with up to three trailers and a total length exceeding 150 feet (50 meters). This was the only form of surface freight transport between Darwin and Adelaide until 2004, when completion of the railroad from Alice Springs to Darwin made the journey possible freight trains.

One of the world's most famous passenger trains, the Ghan, operates from Adelaide to Alice Springs. With the completion of the railway, the Ghan now operates to Darwin.

There is a hill within the city that permits good views of the urbanization and the surrounding MacDonalld Ranges.

Ayres Rock (Uluru)

Ayres Rock (Plates 22-35), is called the world's largest monolith. It is located 280 miles (450 kilometers) southwest of Alice Springs and is reached by paved roads, starting with the Stuart Highway to the south and then heading west on the Lasseter Highway.

Ayres Rock is a sandstone block that rises approximately 1,150 feet (350 meters) from the surrounding country. Ayres Rock is famous for changing colors as it responds to the light from the sun at different times of the day.

There is a large tourist compound of hotels and services to the north of the rock and on the way to the airport.

Ayres Rock can be climbed, but it is discouraged by the native peoples. I would have climbed it, but high winds had closed the steep, one mile (1.6 kilometer) long trail. Ayres Rock sits among a number of similar rock formations in the area, including the Olgas, Mount Conner and others (Plates 21, 60 & 61).

The Olgas

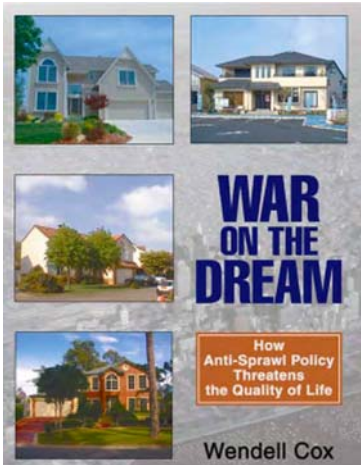
The Olgas (Plates 36-55) are rock formations that jut from the ground like Ayers Rock. Their appearance however is unlike Ayres Rock, more resembling a conventional mountain range.

There are a number of the formations, instead of the single monolith at Ayers Rock. The Olgas are located approximately 20 miles (30 kilometers) to the west of Ayers Rock. There are virtually no services beyond Ayres Rock and signs warn that the next services are very far away --- beyond the border with Western Australia. This is a longer distance than can be traversed by a car with a normal gasoline tank.

There is a viewing station a little more than midway between Ayres Rock and the Olgas, which permits a vista of the rock formations.

From the Olgas, there is a strikingly clear view of Mount Conner (Plate 59), which is 55 miles (90 kilometers) away. Mount Conner resembles an American mesa. Mount Conner is approximately 1,000 feet (300 meters) above the surrounding landscape. Mount Conner has a peak elevation slightly less than Ayres rock.

ⁱ For definitions of urban terms see <http://www.demographia.com/db-define.pdf>.



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Urban Tours by Rental Car: About the Series

Urban Tours by Rental Car offers perspectives on urban development obtained by automobile tours through urban areas. Rental cars are not the favored method for visiting cities, especially those outside one's own country. Instead, tourists and urban planners favor packaged tours or local public transport systems. Both are splendid ways for seeing the city as it used to be --- the very reason for most tourist visits. The historical core areas contain monuments, prime government and religious edifices and quaint neighborhoods that are often centuries old. This is particularly important to tourists from the newer urban areas of the American, Canadian or Australian West, where history extends not far before World War II. It is further understandable that few tourists travel thousands of miles to see the newer suburban areas that look very much like home. But most tourists do not profess to be students of the urban area.

For the urban planner interested in understanding the whole urban area, it is not enough to study the core alone, regardless of its architectural attractiveness, romanticism, history or affirmation of an individually preferred life style. No one, regardless of the depth of their education can develop reliable conceptions from an unrepresentative sample, and urban cores are the very essence of unrepresentative samples. Both public transport and packaged tours miss the larger part --- the expanse of sprawling residential and business development that rings virtually all major urban areas. They may be of little interest to many urban planners, but they should be.

Stripping away regional architectural facades, one might as well be in the suburbs of Phoenix, Portland, Perth or Paris. Here, the automobile is king, because no public transport system has been developed that can effectively serve destinations outside the core (at least at a price any society can afford). While public transport market shares are higher in European suburban areas than in the New World, much of the difference is attributable to lower incomes and less automobile access. Indeed, public transport's principal weakness, lack of automobile competitiveness, is itself a contributing factor to the rising motorization occurring from the suburbs of Copenhagen and Nagoya to the suburbs of Lagos and Mumbai. To oversimplify this phenomenon as being a "love affair with the automobile" is the equivalent of saying that Singaporeans or Brazilians have a love affair with air conditioning. Human beings prefer comfort to discomfort and they prefer free time to time over which they have no control.

It is no wonder that tourists return to the United States thinking that all Paris looks like the second arrondissement (less than one percent does) and that urban planners think all of Milan looks like the architectural treasures that surround the Cathedral. In fact, the sprawling suburbs of Europe, Japan, Canada and Connecticut resemble one another in many ways. For any seeking to study the urban area in its entirety --- not just the favored haunts of core-dwelling elites --- there is no alternative to "getting behind the wheel." Thus, *Urban Tours by Rental Car*



Between Adelaide and Alice Springs (South Australia)

1



Landing at Alice Springs

2



Road from the Airport to Alice Springs

3



Road from the Airport to Alice Springs

4



Alice Springs

5



Downtown Alice Springs

6



Downtown Alice Springs

7



Alice Springs

8



Alice Springs

9



Alice Springs: "The Ghan" in the Middle

10



Alice Springs

11



Alice Springs

12



Alice Springs

13



Leaving Alice Springs

14



Leaving Alice Springs

15



Stuart Highway

16



Stuart Highway

17



Stuart Highway

18



Road House: Stuart Highway & Lasseter Highway

19



Lasseter Highway

20



Along the Lasseter Highway

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Ayres Rock in the Distance

22



Ayres Rock: Late Afternoon

23



Ayres Rock: Just before Sunset

24



Ayres Rock: Just before Sunset

25



Ayres Rock: As the Sun Sets

26



Ayres Rock: As the Sun Sets

27



Ayres Rock: After Sunset

28



Ayres Rock in the Morning

29



Ayres Rock from the Olgas

30



Ayres Rock

31



Ayres Rock

32



Ayres Rock

33



Trail to the Top of Ayres Rock

34



Ayres Rock

35



Toward the Olgas

36



The Olgas Panorama: West to East

37



The Olgas Panorama: West to East

38



The Olgas Panorama: West to East

39



The Olgas Panorama: West to East

40



The Olgas Panorama: West to East

41



The Olgas Panorama: West to East

42



The Olgas Panorama: West to East

43



The Olgas Panorama: West to East

44



The Olgas

45



The Olgas

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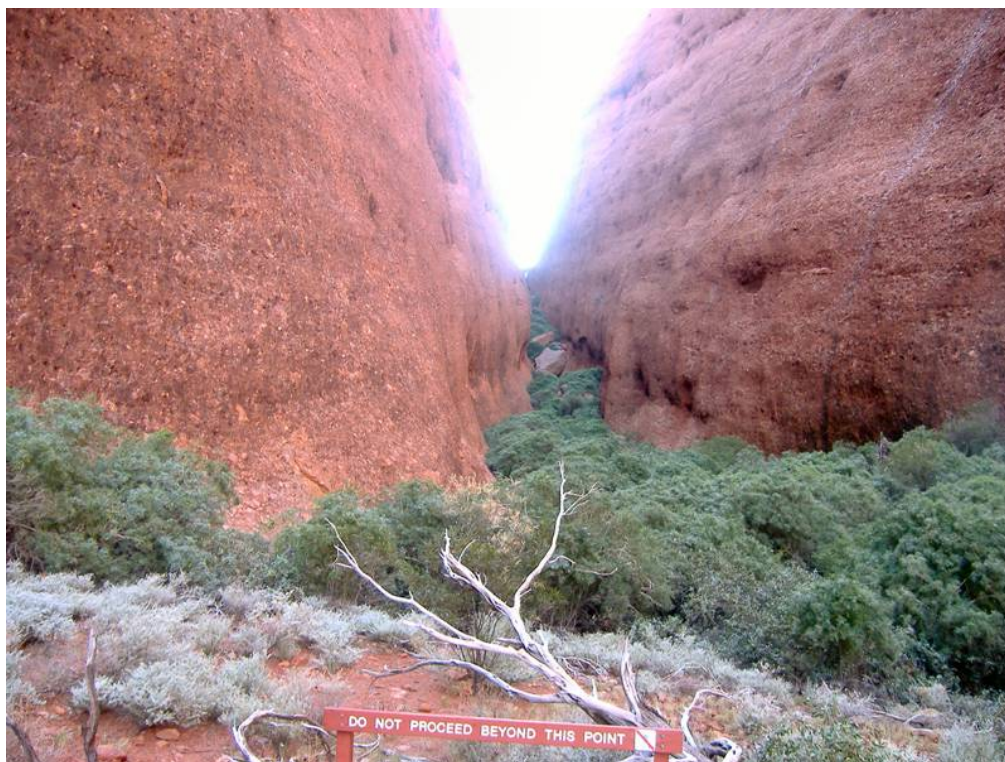
The Olgas

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The Olgas

48



The Olgas

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View from the Olgas to the West

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Sun Rising Over the Olgas

51



The Olgas

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The Olgas

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The Olgas

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The Olgas

55



Near the Olgas

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Near the Olgas

57



Lasseter Highway Between The Olgas and Ayres Rock

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Mount Conner from the Olgas

59



Similar Formations in the Distance from the Olgas

60



Similar Formation in the Distance from the Olgas

61



From Ayres Rock to Darwin via Cairns (Northern Territory)

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