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Ayers Rock

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Journals from Deakin University, Australia

2009-11-04 Ayer's Rock

Ayer's Rock is a giant rock monolith in the middle of the Australian Outback, which makes up the majority of the middle of the continent. But it's also one of the must-see features of the country, so I had to go see it. So I signed up for a three-day "safari" of the Outback.

First thing we did, immediately off to Ayer's Rock, which is called Uluru by its Aboriginal name. We did a 9-kilometer base walk, taking pics and enjoying the scenery and the monolith. IT IS GIGANTIC. You drive up to it and you think it's big, but you have no idea. It's HUGE! Our tour guide was really knowledgeable and told us a bunch of Aboriginal history and sacred religious significance of the rock and surrounding area. It was really cool. So around dusk we drove off to this viewing area to watch the sun set on the rock. It was beautiful. Really cool how the rock changes colors and the sky was gorgeous. They say that the rock will change colors 5 times in a day, 7 total in stormy weather. Back to camp for dinner and I built up the fire. I was pretty proud of my building job. We had camel sausages (that's right CAMEL), beef steak and kangaroo steak for dinner. IT WAS SOOOO GOOD! I ate so much, I couldn't stop. Then we just all hung by the fire, but we had to get up at 4 am the next day, so off to bed pretty early. I slept in a swag under the stars. I'm pretty sure a pack of dingos passed through our camp during the night. I found paw prints.

Up at 4 am for the Uluru sunrise and that was gorgeous too. A little early for me, but it was worth the lack of sleep. Again, the colors on the rock were great and even the sky behind was brilliant. Then we drove to Kjata Juta, this canyon and another aboriginal sacred site. We couldn't go too far because of aboriginal law, but it was a fun hike and the canyon was really big. We had chicken burgers for lunch, but before that I did something I had really wanted to do. I got to ride a camel! It was really weird! Kind of like being on a walking boat, it rocked back and forth. Very cool. We had a long drive to King's Canyon, but stopped off at a couple of little places along the way to see a salt water lake in the middle of the country, another mountain and then our camp, right as sunset so I got some great pictures. We had spaghetti for dinner, but with a surprise addition on the side: kangaroo tail! Yes, the tail of a kangaroo. We cooked it in the bonfire and I got to help prepare it. It was a bit fatty and greasy, but really good. Then our tour guide gave us a talk on the stars and constellations with a laser that was so powerful, you could see the beam and feel the heat on your hand if you put your hand in it. Nuts! Saw Jupiter and Scorpio. Then swags again for sleeping.

Not as early rising as the previous morning, but 5 am was still a little rough. But we had our best hike of the trip coming up. King's Canyon is a huge canyon that has a ton of wildlife and rocks and secret areas. We did a rim walk, so we hiked to the top and walked all along the edge. Pretty hard climb up and a long walk around, but it was beautiful. Then we went down into the canyon into an area they call the Garden of Eden. No real religious significance. Little pool and some trees, quite nice. Took a break while our tour guide gave another talk on the aboriginal history. It was amazing how knowledgeable he was. Then back up to the top and he pointed out some of the plants around the rim and what they could be used for, such as medicine or spicing food. Just a really amazing place and really fun hike. Good way to spend a lot of energy before a 5-hour drive back to Alice Springs.

Ayer's Rock is one of the iconic sites of Australia, right up there with the Great Barrier Reef and the Sydney Opera House. I'm glad I took the time to go see it and learn about its history, especially its religious significance to the Aboriginal peoples of the area.

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