

# Discover Downunder

Australian Geography For Kids



## A Note To Parents & Teachers:

My husband and I are geographers. We both enjoyed studying geography at University and our curiosity in places, near and far, continues.

Geographers explore places, learning about the physical geography and how people live. This book explores places in Australia. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed creating it. We wrote this book to give you an opportunity to learn about some of the different and unique parts of Australia. We hope to excite your interest in geography!

Maps and globes help geographers explore places. Homeschooling Downunder has the Australian Traveller's Map Journal which is a beautiful map of Australia. You could pin this map onto your wall to find the different places we describe in this book.

Another resource is the Downunder Geography Discovery Pages eBook. This will help you to discover and record many interesting things during your Australian exploration. It has notebooking pages for each of the major topics in this book and includes hands on activities.

You can find both of these resources at:

<http://www.homeschoolingdownunder.com>

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Published by Homeschooling Downunder  
27 Russell Street, Cardiff, NSW 2285. Australia  
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National Library of Australia

Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

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# Australian Geography

My Grandma lived near Melbourne and we lived in Sydney. She had an English accent and told stories of England and for much of my childhood I thought Melbourne was in England. In my teenage years I was surprised to find out that Melbourne was actually in Australia and part of Victoria! Part of the reason I never worked out where Melbourne was had something to do with the fact I wasn't taught much about geography at school and maps didn't interest me.

Now I know so much more about the geography of Australia. It's the smallest continent but the sixth biggest country; the mainland is the world's biggest Island. There are 8,222 islands within its maritime borders. It lies in the Southern Hemisphere and it's surrounded by three oceans, therefore it shares no land borders with the neighbouring countries of Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, South Pacific Islands and New Zealand.

It is the world's driest inhabited place with ten deserts. Six different time zones operate in the country: Australian Eastern time, Australian Central time, Australian Western time, Norfolk Island time, Lord Howe time and Christmas Island time. There are even more if you include daylight savings. There are six states, two mainland territories and nine external territories. Our longest river is the Murray River. Our highest mountain is Mount Kosciuszko. The capital of Australia is Canberra and Australia's population is over twenty two million people.

So, you can see how very great and big Australia is. There is the Great Barrier Reef, Great Artesian Basin, Great Dividing Range, Great Australian Bight, Great Victorian Desert, Great Sandy Desert, and the Great Ocean Road. Our mainland has the *big rock*—Uluru, the biggest salt lake, the biggest coal port, the biggest fence, and the biggest group of feral camels. We have even made our own big tourist attractions like the Big Banana in NSW, Big Pineapple in Queensland, and Big Lobster in South Australia—just to name a few. And one of the very great big things about Australia is how diverse the geography is. Tropical rainforests, hot sandy deserts, alpine snow fields, temperate coastal cities, an underground town, and wildflower wonderlands are all found in this one country, Australia.



Although many of the recorded explorations, naming, and mapping were done by early English explorers less than two hundred and fifty years ago, many things had already been named and discovered by the indigenous aboriginal people that had lived here long before the English convict settlements began. The aborigines worked out: the seasons, where to go for water, what to eat in different places, and how to track animals. Their tradition of moving from place to place meant that they didn't really need towns or villages as we now have but they did have special meeting places and special celebrations and names for these places. Today we are returning to some of these aboriginal names and recognising the significance that these places have to particular indigenous peoples. That is why some places have two names, an aboriginal one and the commonly known name.

Australia's geography is unique and this book will explain some of its distinctive features in more detail. Not all of these chapters were written by me. Most were written by Jo, a geographer. We also have some special contributions from other authors who have a special interest in the topic they wrote about. If you want to know who wrote a particular chapter check the copyright at the bottom of that page.

The illustrations are by Tim and Sarah my kids who learnt about Australia's geography while we prepared this book. The map illustrations are artistic impressions and are not drawn to scale (I did those).

I hope you enjoy *Discovering Downunder*.

Michelle

## Great Dividing Range and Other Mountain Ranges

Compared to many countries, Australia is fairly flat with an average elevation of 330 metres above sea level. A map of Australia reveals plains that extend through to the inland deserts. It is a land of open plains!

Yet one of Australia's most important geographical features is our highest mountains, which form the Great Dividing Range. This mountain range runs parallel to the east coast of Australia and is the main source for our longest rivers. It also divides the east coast from the more arid inland, has a major influence on our climate and has impacted where people live and work.

While it is called The Great Dividing Range, it is actually a number of different mountain ranges which extend through a number of states. In Queensland it includes the tropical rainforests in the north as well as the Atherton Tablelands and Darling Downs. In New South Wales it takes in the Snowy Mountains and Blue Mountains, and in Victoria includes the Victorian Alps and the Dandenongs.

The sharp rise of the Great Dividing Range from the coastal plain affects the climate on the eastern seaboard by producing "orographic" rain. This is when the coastal side of the mountain gets more rainfall. This rain originates from warm, moist winds blowing inland from the Pacific Ocean. These winds are forced up and over the mountains, but as they rise, the air gets cooler and the moisture in the air falls as **precipitation**. This results in the inland areas on the other side of the mountains not getting as much rainfall. These inland areas are in what is called a *rain shadow* created by the Great Dividing Range.

Just as this sharp rise of the Great Dividing Range impacts on our climate, it also affected European settlement. Starting from 1788, when Australia was first being settled by Europeans, the Range was a huge obstacle to further exploration and settlement from Sydney. It was in 1813 that explorers Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth led an expedition and found a route west from Sydney across the Blue Mountains. Gradually, with more and more exploration, agriculture in inland New South Wales became established. This development of farming land continued into the Riverina region of New South Wales, the Victorian Gippsland and the Darling Downs in Queensland. Roads and railways were built, linking towns and settlements.

The highest point in Australia is Mount Kosciuszko which is part of the Great Dividing Range in New South Wales. It is 2,228 metres above sea level and gets a good cover of snow in the winter. Kosciuszko National Park is Australia's most extensive alpine region.

With the Great Dividing Range being such a dominant geographical feature of Australia it can be easy to forget that there are other mountain ranges. The MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs stretch for hundreds of kilometres in the desert region of Australia. In Western Australia the Hamersley Range is in the Pilbara region, in the north western part of the state. This Range is rich in minerals, especially iron ore, and the twenty highest peaks in Western Australia are all located in the Hamersley Range. The Darling Range is the other mountain range in Western Australia. It can be found in the southeast.

In South Australia the largest mountain range is the Flinders Ranges, and in Tasmania, mountainous areas are in the western half of the state. This includes the World Heritage area in the south west and the Central Highlands. Cradle Mountain is a well known Tasmanian mountain and tourist attraction but Mount Ossa is actually the state's highest peak. There are many beautiful mountains in Tasmania.



# Northern Territory

Recently I flew from Darwin to Sydney. As we gained altitude, I could see the land stretching out beneath me. I was fascinated by the lush greenness, and the rivers twisting their way to the coast like the writhing of a snake in an Aboriginal Dreamtime legend.

Soon I could see the sandstone ridges and cliffs of the Kakadu National Park stretching away in the distance. As the aeroplane flew south east, the land soon changed. The dark green of the well-watered coastal plains gave way to the tree-studded brown of the more arid regions. This was cattle country. Soon the only features I could see were the patterns made by the long straight dirt tracks between the bores which provide cattle with water.

If we had gone even further south, we could have seen the rippling waves of the red brown sandhills of the Simpson Desert. This vast, arid area is about the size of Europe. Along with the Tanami Desert to the west, these deserts gives rise to the name of “the Red Centre” of Australia.

This is the Northern Territory, the northern central part of Australia. It is bordered by Western Australia, South Australia, and Queensland. The northern coast is washed by the Timor and Arafura Seas. There are a number of islands along the ragged coast, the largest of which are Bathurst Island, Melville Island, and Groote Eylandt.

The ‘Top End’, which extends from the coast south to the town of Katherine, has a tropical climate. Most people think there are two main seasons: ‘The Wet’, which has heavy rain and sometimes cyclones, from December to March; and ‘The Dry’, with its hot, dry weather and cooler nights, from May to October. However, the local Aboriginals divide the year into five or six seasons, reflecting their more intimate understanding of the subtleties of the weather, the corresponding flowering and fruiting of plants, and the activities of wildlife. These seasonal variations can be experienced in the Kakadu National Park, with its floodplains, and wetlands, stretching away to the sandstone escarpment of the plateaus, where waterfalls cascade. This national park is famous for its



wildlife and for the many ancient Aboriginal rock paintings. Also famous is the neighbouring Nitmiluk National Park (Katherine Gorge), a series of colourful sandstone canyons carved by the Katherine/Daly River, the longest river in the Northern Territory. Arnhem Land, extending east from Kakadu to the Gulf of Carpentaria, is an Aboriginal reserve.

The southern parts of the Territory, the arid Central Australia, experience four seasons, more like the southern states of Australia, but with little rainfall. There are few creeks and rivers. This is home to some of Australia’s best known natural features. Uluru, (Ayer’s Rock) is the world’s largest exposed rock, a vibrant, red sandstone monolith that rises above the desert plains. Kata Tjuta (or The Olgas) is another famous landmark—a group of domed rock formations to the west of Uluru. This area is World Heritage Listed.

Alice Springs, the town in the middle of Australia is surrounded by the stunning MacDonnell Ranges to its east and west. Further north, near the town of Tennant Creek, are found the ‘Devil’s Marbles’, or Karlu Karlu. These are gigantic, rounded granite boulders, some of which are spectacularly balanced.

These many natural features, together with the varied wildlife, attract many tourists to this part of Australia.

The Northern Territory is the least populated of Australia’s states and territories. There are smaller settlements scattered across the Territory. The larger population centres are located along the Stuart Highway (colloquially called ‘the Track’) which travels up the middle of the Territory, culminating in the city of Darwin, which is the capital, and the place where this journey began.