

02. Australia

The Raphaëla Le Gouvello education packet - Windsurfing solo across the Indian Ocean

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The crossing



Uluru National Park in Australia's Northern Territory is famous for this site: Ayers Rock.



The red kangaroo is the most common species. It lives in central Australia, in arid or semi-arid regions, and can grow to 1.4 meters in height (4.6 feet) and weigh as much as 70 kilograms (154 lbs.). Its powerful back paws move it along at speeds of up to 65 km/hour (40 mph) and it can leap up to 9 meters (29 feet) in a single bound.

In 1770, a three-mast sailing vessel arrived off the mountainous coast of an unknown land. It was the Endeavour, piloted by Captain Cook. The southeastern tip of the new continent came into view on April 19, 1770. Its existence had been suspected by the Ancients, who had referred to it as Terra australis incognita: Unknown Southern Land.

Australia

Of all the planet's islands, Australia is the largest: 4,000 kilometers from east to west and 3,200 north to south. Fifteen times the size of France (7,700,000 km²), it is the world's sixth largest country after Russia, the United States, Canada, China, and Brazil. Climate-wise, it is on the dry side: only Antarctica receives less rainfall. Dry and desert regions cover most of the continent. The Great Sandy desert, for example, covers 1,200 kilometers. At 2 inhabitants per km², population density is very low (as a comparison, France has 108 inhabitants per km²). Forty percent of Australia's population live in the cities of Sydney and Melbourne.

Paradise for divers...

The Great Barrier Reef extends 2,000 kilometers along the eastern coast, from northern Queensland to the Gulf of Papua. Like most coral reefs, however, pollution and global warming are threatening it with extinction.

... and adventurers.

The Daintree tropical forest in the state of Queensland is the oldest on the planet. Classified as one of humanity's World Heritage sites by UNESCO, the Daintree has been here for 100 million years, 40 million years longer than the Amazon rain forest. It is believed that tropical forests are home to at least 75% of the Earth's living plant and animal species. In Australia, the flora and fauna are exceptionally diverse. There are nearly 230 species of mammals, 300 species of lizards, 140 species of snakes and 2 species of crocodiles.

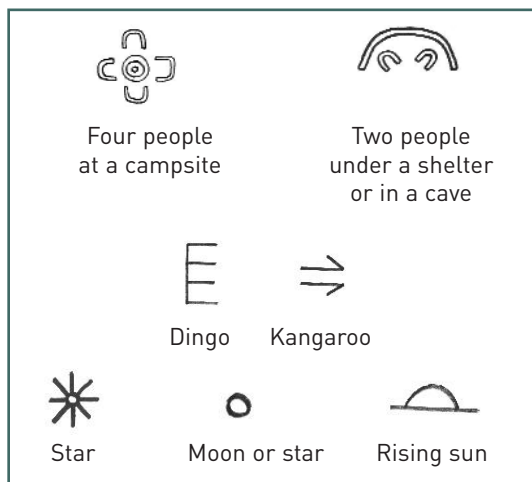
On the trail of the Aborigines

Australia's first human inhabitants, the Aborigines, came from southeast Asia 40,000 years ago. Their population is believed to have been between 300,000 and one million at the time of the arrival of the first colonists at the end of the 18th century. Hunted, driven out, massacred, and finally subjected to forced assimilation, only 70,000 remained by 1921. They are sometimes considered "second-class citizens" by the white population even today. In 2006, their numbers are estimated at 470,000.

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Aboriginal art

Much of Aboriginal art is inspired by myths concerning the creation of Australia, called Dream Time, when the ancestral spirits rose up out of the ground to fashion the continent. In Aboriginal culture, canvases are never signed, because the story they describe belongs not to the individual but to the group. Commercial considerations seem to have won out over tradition, however: art collectors throughout the world now require the names of the Aboriginal artist.

A Brief Iconography

Traditional Aboriginal painting used specific signs to represent human beings, animals, and nature. But artists sometimes attributed different meanings to these signs depending on the story they were telling.

- ▶ Human figures are traditionally depicted by a kind of U shape representing a seated person as seen from above.
- ▶ Animals are often depicted by signs imitating the tracks they leave on the ground. On the temporal plane, these signs correspond to tracks left by the animals that inhabit the desert; on the sacred plane, they are the tracks of mythic beings.
- ▶ Among the celestial bodies frequently encountered in Aboriginal mythology, we find the sun, the moon, the Milky Way, and planets such as Mars.

Activity

Test your knowledge with this crossword puzzle... Feel free to use your encyclopedia to help you find the answers.

Horizontal :

- 1- It's both an island and a continent.
- 2- Adjective describing the climate in central Australia.
- 3- The capital of Australia.
- 4- British explorer who landed on the Australian coast in the 18th century.
- 5- They belong to the family of macropods (big feet), are vegetarians and are often red.
- 6- The official language of Australia.
- 7- Family of trees with bluish leaves known for their positive effect on the respiratory system; used to treat coughs and colds.

Vertical :

- 8- Ocean to the west of Australia.
- 9- A marsupial whose diet consists of eucalyptus leaves.
- 10- I am a reptile who likes the mangrove swamps of Queensland.
- 11- City in northwestern Australia. Starting point for Raphaëla's crossing.
- 12- Name given to Australia's first inhabitants.
- 13- Family of mammals who spend their early development in a pouch on their mother's stomach.
- 14- Cardinal point.

