



## Research into Resort Development from the Viewpoint of Ecotourism

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## Research into Resort Development from the Viewpoint of Ecotourism

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### Abstract

This study began with two goals: firstly, to seek the ideal approach to resort development from the viewpoint of ecotourism as based on the Australian Ayers Rock Resort case study; and secondly, to clarify the conceptual framework of ecotourism through its description in documentation. We considered the following five views of ecotourism:

1) 'tourism in tune with nature' 2) 'tourism that can be continuously managed' 3) 'tourism that can vitalize local communities' 4) 'small-scale tourism' and 5) 'tourism that educates tourists about the natural environment'. As a result, two issues emerged which will affect the future development of resorts adapted to the local environment: firstly, which of the five definitions above of ecotourism to emphasize and which to downplay, and secondly, whether the merging of ecotourism with other types of tourism (such as mass tourism) is in the best interests of the local community.

### Study Goal

In recent years the globalization of tourism has been accompanied by numerous cases where tourist development has been responsible for the destruction of the natural environment, local communities and cultures. Given the seriousness of these issues the concept of ecotourism, which can promote the vitalization of local communities and minimize negative impacts on the natural environment, local communities and cultures, has gained worldwide attention. This study had two goals: firstly, to seek the ideal approach to resort development from the viewpoint of ecotourism as based on the Australian Ayers Rock Resort case study; and secondly, to clarify the conceptual framework of ecotourism through its description in documentation.

### Study Methods

The study sought to clarify the conceptual framework of ecotourism as defined by documentation in the fields of landscape architecture and cultural anthropology, and then to test the definitions produced. The Ayers Rock Resort was used as the subject for the case study. This is a world-class resort developed by local residents in the face of such issues as aborigine land ownership claims and conservation of the natural environment. Using the 1991 National Census, tourist pamphlets, government magazines and other documents to give an idea of tourism resources and trends in tourism, and through a survey conducted at Ayers Rock, the resort was analyzed from the perspective of ecotourism.

## Results of Analysis and Discussion

### 1). Definition of Ecotourism

Table 1 shows a summary of the conceptual framework of ecotourism utilized in this study as taken from two texts in the field of landscape architecture and four texts in the field of cultural anthropology. In two of the texts, "Nature Tourism and Rural Development in Tortuguero" and "Ecotourism and Minimum Impact Policy," ecotourism is described in the following four fashions: (1) as tourism which can educate the tourist, (2) small-scale tourism, (3) tourism for the vitalization of local communities, and (4) tourism that can be continuously managed. In particular, the former text states that for ecotourism, the following three aspects are critical: the continuous management of tourism, the responsibility for the vitalization of local communities, and maintaining a small scale of operation. The latter text emphasizes the education of tourists, the vitalization of local communities, and the continuous management of tourism.

'A Framework for Ecotourism', 'An Ecotourism Assessment of Tortuguero, Costa Rica' and 'Landscape Australia' discuss the education of tourists, the vitalization of local communities, continuous management, and development in tune with nature. In 'A Framework for Ecotourism', two of these aspects are emphasized. 'Landscape Architecture' stresses that each of the five aspects are important, particularly the following three: the education of tourists, vitalization of local communities, and development in tune with nature.

Ecotourism was defined in the study as a balance between the following five views: (1) tourism in tune with nature, (2) tourism that can be continuously managed, (3) tourism that can vitalize local communities, (4) small-scale tourism, the opposite to mass tourism and (5) tourism that educates tourists about the natural environment.

Table 1 A summary of the conceptual framework of ecotourism

	1	2	3	4	5
NATURE TOURISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN TORTUGUERO	○	◎	◎	◎	—
ECOTOURISM AND MINIMUM IMPACT POLICY	◎	○	◎	◎	—
A FRAMEWORK FOR ECOTOURISM	○	—	○	◎	◎
AN ECOTOURISM ASSESSMENT OF TORTUGUERO, COSTA RICA	◎	—	◎	◎	◎
LANDSCAPE AUSTRALIA	◎	—	◎	◎	◎
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	◎	○	◎	○	◎

emphasis		
◎	○	—

1. tourism that educates tourist about the nature environment
2. small-scale tourism
3. tourism that can vitalize local communities
4. tourism that can be continuously managed
5. tourism in tune with nature

## 2). Analysis Results of the Case Study

### (1) History of the Ayers Rock Resort

Fig. 1 shows the location of the Ayers Rock Resort, the target area of the survey. The resort is located in Uluru National Park in the southwest corner of the Northern Territory, Australia. The park covers an area of 1,325 square kilometers and includes Ayers Rock and Mount Olga.

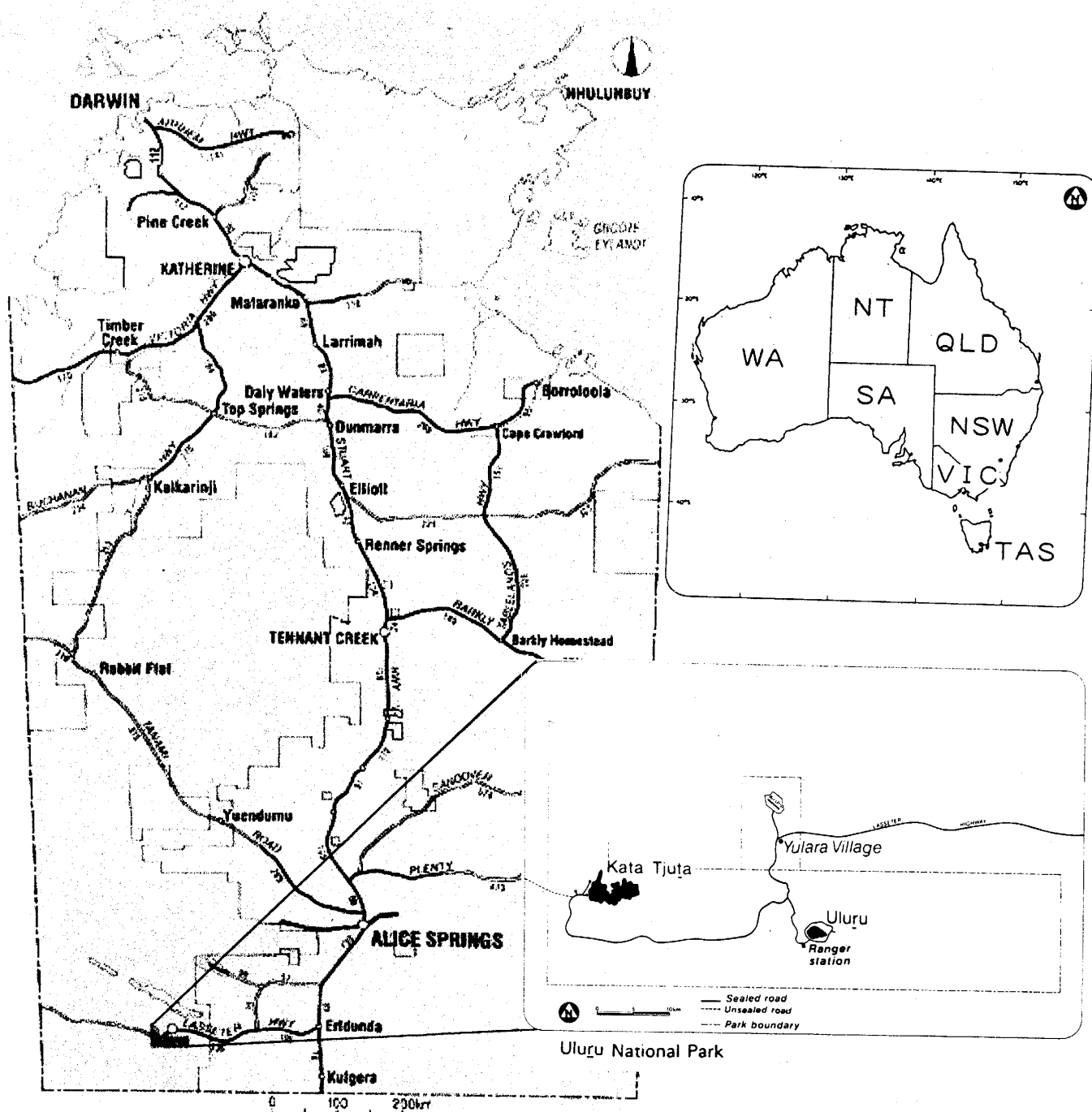


Fig 1 The location of the Ayers Rock

Table 2 traces the historical changes behind the Ayers Rock Resort. Mount Olga was discovered by Ernest Giles in 1872. The following year in 1873 William Christie Gosse made the first recorded ascent of Ayers Rock. These events marked the beginning of a long series of conflicts between local aborigines and settlers. In the 1950's tourism began in the area around Ayers Rock and in 1958 the area was officially designated as Uluru National Park. In the meantime, as tourism grew, so did the rate of destruction of local aboriginal culture, the natural environment and natural scenery. In 1974 in response to the continuing degradation, the federal government commissioned a survey to determine ways to conserve Ayers Rock and to give a new direction to the tourism industry. In the meantime, in 1976, local aborigines began to mount a series of protests in an attempt to protect sacred lands. Following this, in 1984, a new resort designed by Philip Cox to match the surrounding environment was completed. In 1985 the land was returned to the aborigines.

Table 2 Historical Change Behind The Ayers Rock

YEAR	EVENT
1872	• Mount Olga was first sighted by Ernest by Giles, South Australian explorer
1873	• William Christie Gosse made the first recorded ascent of Ayers Rock.
1930	• The aeroplane at landed the base of Ayers Rock.
1930's	• Unsealed road connected Erldunda to Ayers Rock.
1940's	• Settlers began to impact against local Aborigines environment and life by large scale grazing.
1948	• The first graded road linked Ayers Rock and Alice Springs. (Visitors couldn't have an uneventful trip during the rain).
1950's	• Tourism began in the area around Ayers rock
1958	• The area including Ayers Rock and Mt.Olga, 1325km <sup>2</sup> , was excised from the South West Reserve, and officially designed as Uluru National Park. • Visitors number were first officially recorded (2296 person per year) • The Park was managed by the Northern Reserves Board.
1959	• Tour facilities were constructed around Ayers Rock.
1960's	• The Alice Springs-Ayers Rock road was improved.
1968	• Numbers of visitors increased were than 23,000.
1974	• The federal government commissioned a survey to determine ways to conserve Ayers Rock and to give a new direction to the tourism industry, in response to the continuing degradation.
1976	• Local aborigines began to mount a series of protests in an attempt lands.
1981	• A new resort designed by Philip Cox to match the surrounding environment was first released.
1983	• The last of the in famous red road between Ayers Rock and Alice Springs was released with an all-weather sealed highway.
1984	• Yulara Tourist (now Ayers Rock Resort) was completed. • Previous Resort was closed down.
1985	• The Federal Government transferred ownership of Ayers Rock back to the tradetional Aborig-inal owners.
1987	• Uluru National Park was inscribed on the World Heritage List established by the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and National Heritage.
1988 89	• As visitors increased and facilities enriched, the stuff accommodation were converted to visitor accommodation, and stuff relocated to a new residential area.
1990	• Stuart Highway was completely sealed.

Photo. 1 shows a view of the New Ayers Rock Resort complex, which has been designed to a standard enabling it to function as a tourist site in its own right. The resort site, at one part of a sand dune 17 km from Ayers Rock, was selected because of its good view of the Rock, its access to the airport, and because the site could be developed without drastic topographical alterations. The resort is situated in a valley in the sand dunes where it does not encroach upon aboriginal sacred land. Since the resort is in the middle of the desert, the facility must use energy efficiently, and a good example of this are the sunshade masts, which incidentally have become a trademark of the resort.

## (2) Ayers Rock Resort Tourism Resources

Considering the resort's tourism resources in historical, cultural and natural terms, the following becomes apparent. Firstly, the historical and cultural resources are concentrated in aboriginal culture. Aboriginal culture is in a narrative form called the Tjukurpa, which is passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. The Tjukurpa contains the tribal laws, describes the creation of the world, and states that Ayers Rock is a sacred place of worship (Photo. 2). The local aborigine name for Ayers Rock is Uluru; for Mount Olga it is Kata Tjuta. The Tjukurpa and the culture of totemism, i.e., the belief that the plants, animals and the land in a certain area are linked to one's own existence, has been passed down through history. In the area around Ayers Rock and Mount Olga, there are a large number of aboriginal ancestral remains which are recorded in the aboriginal language.

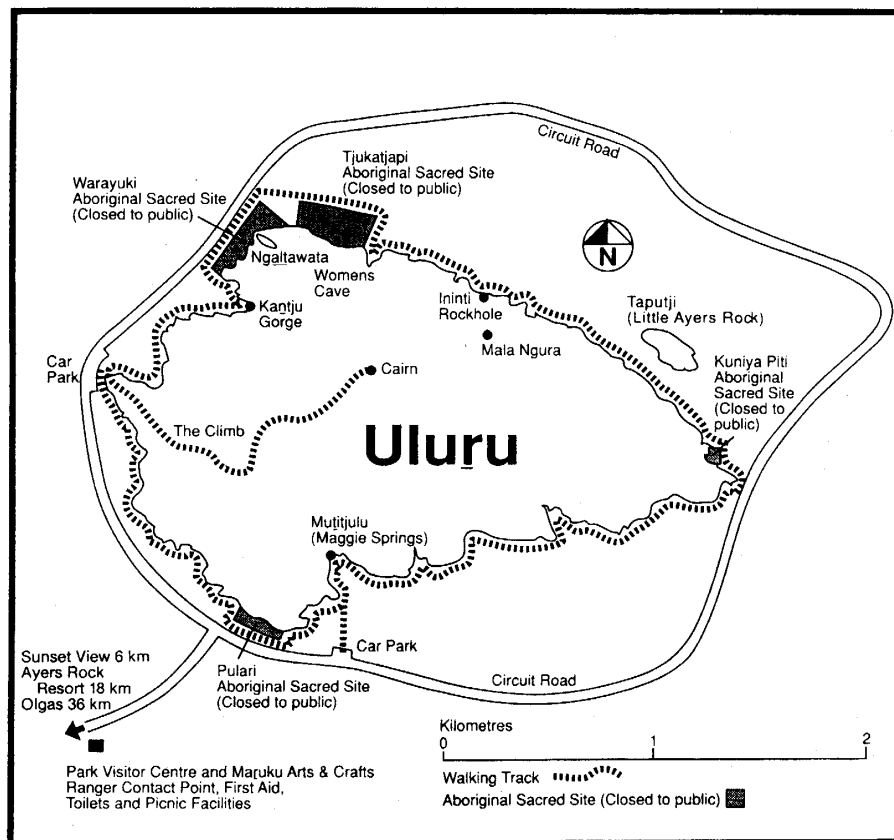


Fig 2 A map of Ayers Rock

Fig. 2 is a map of Ayers Rock and the 9.4 km of surrounding trails. Tourists can walk along these trails and see examples of aborigine culture and history. Mutitjulu (Maggie Springs) is the most dependable source of water in the area. Local wildlife depends on these springs. Purari, which means 'big woman', is the name of a site which is sacred to aboriginal women. Warayuki, on the other hand, is sacred to aboriginal men. In addition to Purari and Warayuki there are other sacred sites: Tjukatjapi and Kuniya Piti. All of these sacred sites are closed to the public. Moreover, aborigines never climb Ayers Rock.

The aboriginal wall murals which are found in caves and other depressions on the flanks of Ayers Rock are one way in which the aborigines pass on the Tjukurpa from one generation to the next. Through these paintings, the aborigines create kinship links that improve the quality of their daily life. Photo. 3 shows wall murals which are on display near Mutitjulu. The pigments responsible for the vivid coloring come from clay containing iron, and other minerals. The reds and yellows come from yellow soils; blacks from wood charcoal; and whites from ashes. These traditional techniques continue to this day in bark paintings.

Photo. 4 shows boomerangs utilized by the aborigines for hunting. The aboriginal designs on the boomerangs serve to pass on both a sense of culture and spirit. The elements which appear in drawings on walls and other objects are their original forms. An aboriginal wind instrument is called the didjeridoo, which is made of deadwood hollowed out by ants. Traditional art objects, like the boomerang and the didjeridoo, are an integral part of aboriginal life. In recent years other aborigine art forms, such as sand painting and dot painting, have become famous throughout the world, and are an important source of income for the aborigines.

Despite the harsh desert conditions, the flora and fauna, topography and soils exist in complex interrelationships which create a rich ecosystem. Marram grass (Photo. 5) makes an important contribution to the maintenance of the sand dune ecosystem. Honey grabelia (Photo. 6) grows in clusters in the outskirts of Yulara. Its petals are food for wattlebirds, and the nectar and flowers are food sources for the aborigines. The beautiful color of the honey grabelia in bloom is an important scenic resource. The Stuart Desert Rose (Photo. 7) symbolizes the Northern Territories and appears on the state flag. The thorny devil, a lizard whose head and back are covered with sharp-looking thorny spines, (Photo. 8) is a symbol of the outback. But in actual fact, the spines are soft and despite its name, the thorny devil is a gentle creature. The rich variety of animal and plant life is one of the greatest attractions of this region. Nature, including the awe-inspiring spectacle of Ayers Rock standing alone in the desert, and the magnificence of the surrounding wilderness, has a mysterious power which fascinates tourists.

### (3) Ayers Rock Resort Tourism Trends

Fig. 3 shows trends in the number of tourists in recent years. In the roughly 10 years after 1959, when the first tourist facilities were built at Ayers Rock, the number of visitors continued to steadily grow. In 1973, the annual number of tourists passed the 50,000 mark. Since neither the tourist facilities nor environmental conservation measures were sufficient to cope with the increase, the federal government decided to undertake studies in nature conservation and new tourism development, although during the interim the rate of increase in the number of tourists was not significant. In 1984 however, following the completion of the new resort, tourists numbers increased sharply. By 1994, more than 300,000 people were visiting Ayers Rock annually.

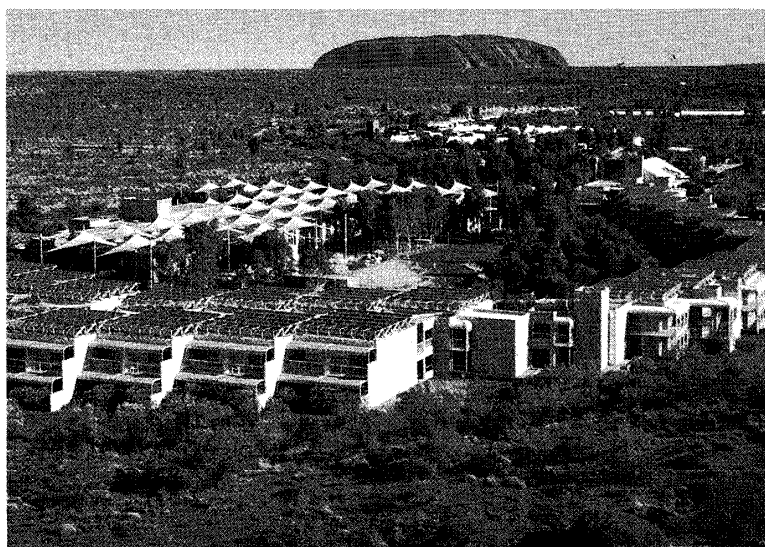


Photo-1 A view of Ayers Rock  
Resort complex

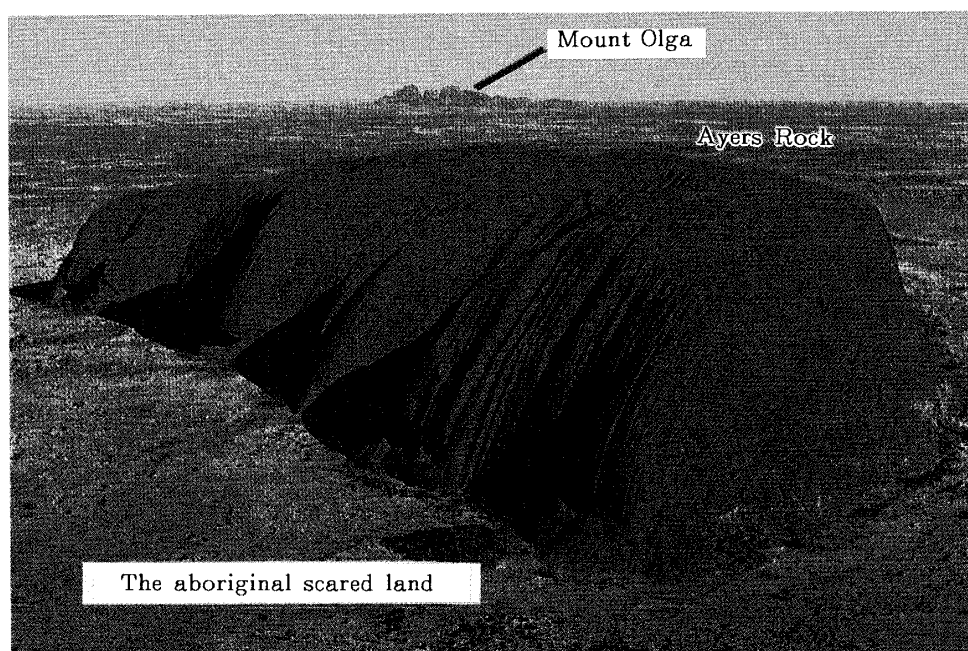


Photo-2  
The aboriginal  
scared land

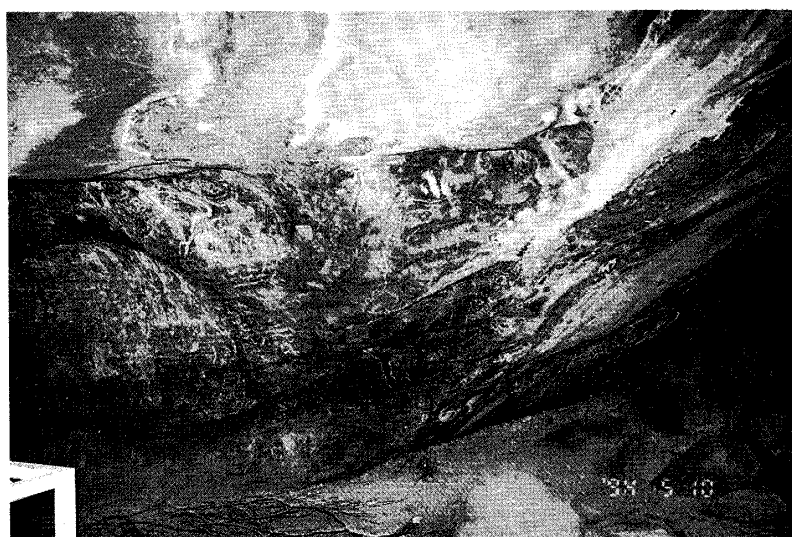


Photo-3 Wall mural





Photo-4 Traditional art object



Photo-7



Photo-5

The flora and fauna

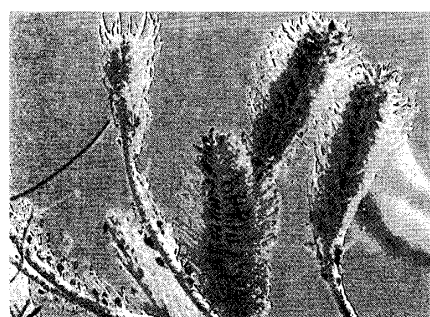


Photo-6

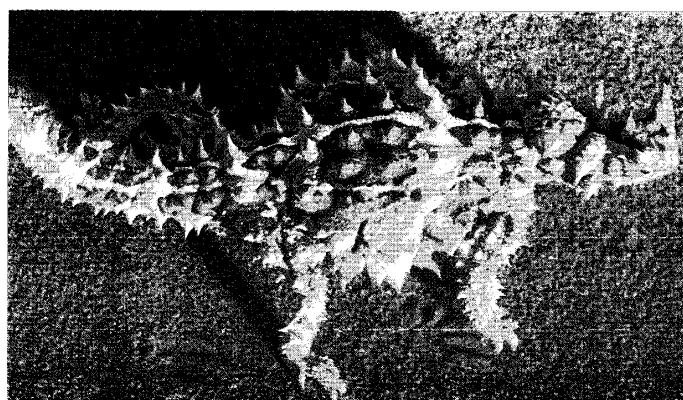


Photo-8

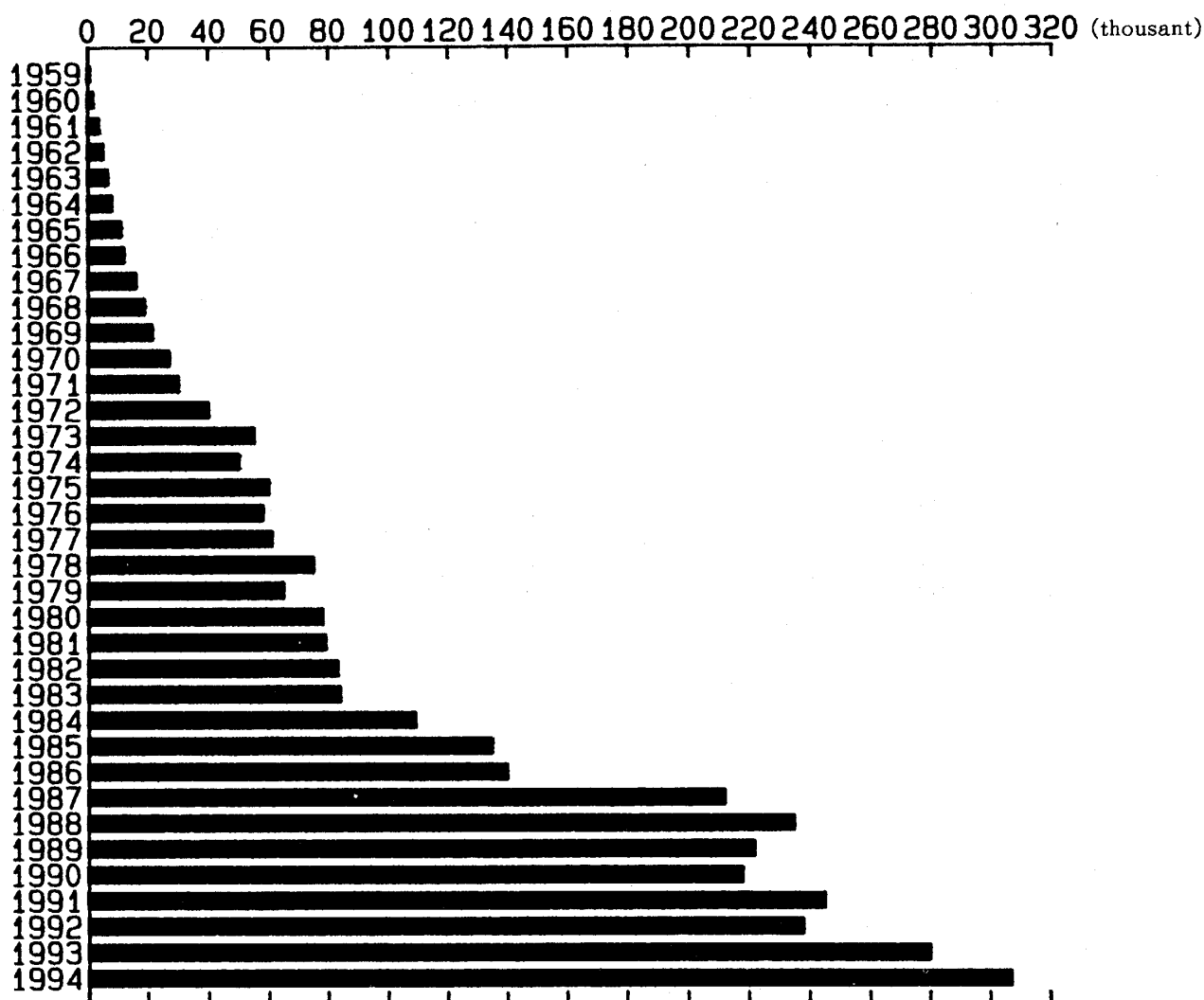


Fig 3 Trends in the number of tourists in recent years

A 1991 population structure survey of the Ayers Rock community by industry sector (Fig. 4) shows that 74.2% of workers were involved in tertiary industries, with 44.5% of these employed in service-related industries. This indicates a local economy dependent on tourism.

A breakdown of the reasons given by tourists for coming to Ayers Rock (Fig. 5) revealed

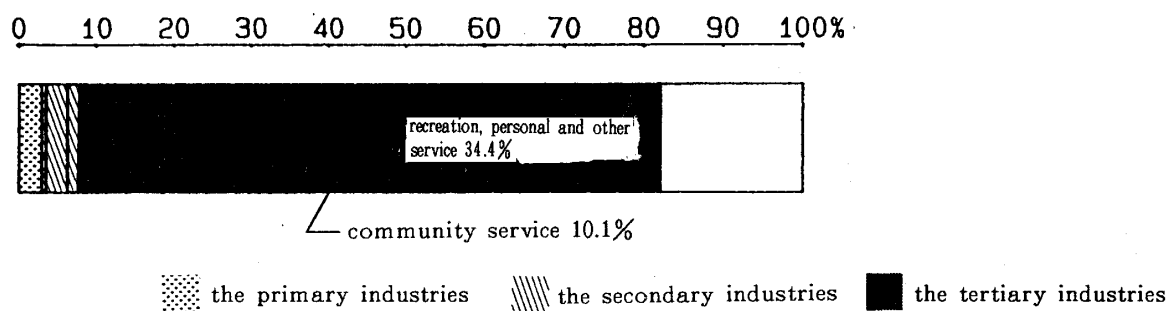


Fig 4 A 1991 population structure survey of Ayers Rock community by industry sector

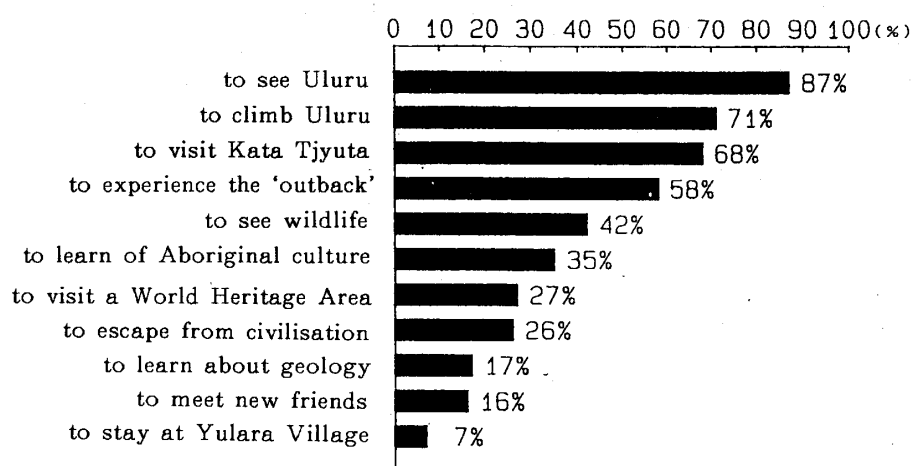


Fig 5 A Breakdown of the Reasons given by Tourists for Coming to Ayers Rock

that 87% came to see the Rock itself, and 35% came to experience aboriginal culture, showing that most tourists come to experience the unique local way of life.

Although mass package tours still form the mainstay of tourism to this region, tourism is diversifying, from world-class hotels like Sails In The Desert to camp sites. The local aborigine community has recently begun sponsoring small-scale tours.

#### (4) Case Study Conclusions

Considering that at the Ayers Rock Resort the local community benefits from tourism resources, that tourists are able to come and experience the local environment, and that the administration and operation of the resort site is carried out jointly between the aborigines and the government, the Ayers Rock Resort can be said to be a success in terms of ecotourism. On the other hand, rapid development has had an impact on nature and aboriginal culture which has exceeded a moderate level, and there is the danger that the current progress being enjoyed may turn out to be an illusion. The sponsoring of mass tourism as well as ecotourism by the Ayers Rock region has brought an economic vitality and an improvement in the welfare of local residents. It has also brought a deeper understanding of tourism; on the other hand, some issues still remain, such as to what extent aborigine culture destroyed in the past should be restored, and the lack of resolution of issues pertaining to the aborigines.

### Conclusions

A number of publications have discussed the role of ecotourism, an ideal in terms of education, operation and management. However, in reality it is very difficult to achieve a balance between the following five definitions of ecotourism: 1) tourism in tune with nature, 2) tourism that can be continuously managed, 3) tourism that can vitalize local communities, 4) small-scale tourism, and 5) tourism that educates tourists about the natural environment. This means that two issues will emerge to affect the future development of resorts adapted to the local environment: firstly, which of the five definitions above of ecotourism to emphasize and which to downplay, and secondly, whether or not the merging of ecotourism with other types of tourism

(such as mass tourism) is in the best interests of the local community.

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