

CA2295 St Joseph's Catholic College East Gosford

CA2295 – Mercy Catholic College, Chatswood

[Home](#) [Itinerary](#) [Packing List](#) [Flights](#) [Blog](#) [Participant Declaration](#)

Blog

1. Day One

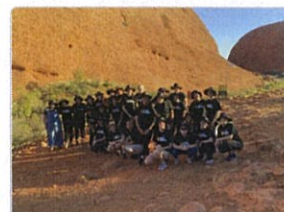
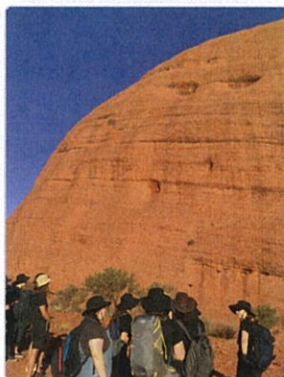
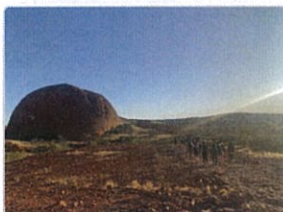
Today our Red Earth adventure began. Nerves, excitement, and new experiences endured within all of the girls this morning as we entered the airport for a successful flight this time!

Three and a half hours in the air to finally be welcomed by the red earth (they weren't exaggerating, it was scarily close to a mars landing!) Immediately we hit the road, headed towards Kata-Tjuta and experienced our first close up drive by of Uluru. Upon entering the Kata-Tjuta National Park, we were introduced to our first sense of spirituality on country. Through an insightful walk accompanied by a number of short reflections and mindfulness prompts we were equipped with everything we needed to fully immerse ourselves in the true spirituality of the area.

Words couldn't capture the beauty we saw as a group, everyone was simply in awe. The enormity of the rocks themselves, the stillness of the landscape and the utter serenity of the atmosphere. We left knowing that what we had just seen was a sight that a camera just couldn't capture, but privileged at the fact we were able to live it.

We watched from a lookout not far from our camp as the sky was painted all shades of purples and reds. After a number of group photos, birthday treats for Anabel and camel-paddy tasting experiences, we have already begun to spark friendships among all the girls.

As we conclude our last day after burgers and fire-side chats, we get ready for a night in our swags under an incomprehensibly clear sky of a million stars.



2. Day Two

A new dawn and an early morning rise was the fresh begging to our second day on the Red Earth Immersion, after what was revealed to us as having been the coldest night of the year so far! Hot chocolates were our saving grace in keeping our hands warm while the group (the majority of us with very pink noses) walked up to the Ewing Point Lookout where we watched the bright sun rise over the horizon of Kata Tjuta, with Uluru directly behind us. The sunrise was warmly welcomed after the chilly night, and the clear skies and fresh sunshine provided just enough warmth as we allowed our minds and bodies to slow down in some early morning yoga.

Soon after a swift pack up of camp we were off to Uluru, where we were guided on a Mala tour by John, an Anangu man. We listened in fascination as John told us not only of the history of Uluru and its past and continuing significance to Aboriginal culture, but also of his own heritage and experiences as an Aboriginal man in his own society and in Western society. The tour lasted roughly 2 hours, where we were guided along the base of the iconic natural Australian landmark, each of us entirely in awe of its magnificence. The level of respect upheld for the sacred stories and lessons of Indigenous culture was truly eye opening, where John explained multiple instances in which sacred knowledge can only be disclosed to certain genders, groups and individuals.

After a 1.5 hour drive, Curtin Springs was our brief stop for lunch, by which many of us were excited by the delicious avocados! 2 hours later we arrived at Kurku, on the property of John and Lorraine, where we listened and participated in a Welcome to Country through the ceremonial burning of Eremophila. The significance of the plant was of cleansing, traditionally burnt at the birth of a new baby and when travelling across the great Australian landscape to clear both good and bad spirits of past travels, proving you with a fresh start.

Currently we are sitting and sharing stories with John by a warm fire, soon to participate in an activity to work through and let go of our fears and worries for the up coming days. All settled in for three nights camp at Kurku, we are successfully bundled up, awaiting chicken curry for dinner and are particularly excited at the prospect of warm showers tomorrow!

Madi, Steph and Molly



3. Day Three

The third day of our immersion started off bright and early after a long night of keeping warm and admiring the clear, starry sky, we were welcomed into the icy morning with a beautiful sunrise and delicious avocado toast! Today initiated our first glimpse into the land and culture as we set the intention of 'newness' and began to gain deep personal understandings of the earth, life, land and people we will be staying with. We also had our first chance to fully immerse ourselves in this amazing culture which is so rich and learn about the extensive knowledge the traditional owners have of the land.

We learnt dog's name is actually brownie but Paul said that he only uses that name when he's in trouble. Paul is the original owner of Dog... the backstory of this dog is incredible. I think everyone is attached to this Dog as well as Cat. I think the Dog is the 'unnamed mascot' of this particular red earth experience! The cat also decided to bring a guest to our gathering around the campfire... you guessed it THE MOUSE! Definitely a surprise to us all!

Speaking to John, Mario and Gracie, the traditional owners of this area known as Kurku, was very enlightening as it is thoroughly enhanced our knowledge of the Indigenous culture and practices and was so special to be able to experience outback Australia with traditional owners on their homelands. Our first activity was learning how to hunt Maku-ku, more commonly known as witchetty grubs! Gracie taught the group the traditional ways of Maku hunting that has been passed down from her sisters, mothers, aunts, grandmothers and the generations of women before her. The groups found many Maku and enjoyed, both raw and cooked, the delicacy that we had the amazing opportunity to experience. Upon eating this delicacy, we were also enlightened by the traditional owners of the respect and significance that Maku, and other foods, are given in this culture and how each meal is celebrated in its cycle of life.

After the bush walk and Maku hunting, we arrived back at the campsite for lunch and our second activity that dived deep into the local dialect, Pitjantjatjara, and how much of the language has been intertwined with the English language due to colonisation. The destruction of language is linked back to when Australia was originally stolen by colonisers and because no-one wanted to settle in central Australia because the landscape is so harsh and hard to grow food. John stated, "We are in debt to our brothers and sisters who took the first wave for us." Therefore, the harsh conditions of central Australia saved them from colonisation until about 120 years ago that this area started being settled in.

They were lucky enough to be able to protect their culture and language more than indigenous communities back home. They spoke about the connection between some words in Pitjantjatjara and English, We were even lucky enough to be taught some words in Pitjantjatjara such as Payla meaning good, whatever and ok, and munga munga wiru meaning good morning as well as learning about some of the recipes and methods passed down from generations of women in hunting and gathering and traditional bush medicine from Gracie. Unfortunately a lot of indigenous languages and culture isn't as strong as they are in Central Australia and it's amazing that we got this opportunity to learn some of it.

We ended the day with a classic spag bol and chats around the fire, reflecting on the day of new knowledge, culture, friendships, experiences and learning. Today's adventures were an unexpected world wind of excitement that you would never ever get to experience normally! That is why this immersion is a great way to have 'new' experiences! The depth of knowledge they have about the land. We would have walked past those trees and not even thought that there could be witchetty grubs.

Lucy, Sophia and Emma



4. Day Four

Our last day at Kurku began slowly with a startling surprise of frozen dew on our swags and backpacks. We gathered near the fire as we anticipated a delicious breakfast with steamy oatmeal, cereal and toast cooked over the fire! The daily leaders informed us of the intention of the day: perspective. Activities such as making traditional clap sticks, and wallpainting a mural helped us to put ourselves in the shoes of Indigenous culture.

We went on an exploration guided by John who told us about the boundaries of his land and enlightened us with a glimpse into his childhood where he had come across a dinosaur footprint which indicated just how old the land was. During his talk we also learned briefly about the twenty year long process of land rights the traditional owners in central Australia had to go through to claim legal right of their land.

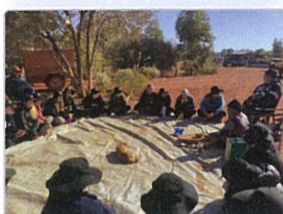
Then we were led on a short bush walk to the where there was an abundance of mulga trees. As we arrived John explained our next activity how to pick a suitable branch to create a traditional clap stick. After the arduous process of sawing the thick branches needed for the clap stick we were rewarded with homegrown, juicy mandarins from John's tree.

Back at the campsite, we started peeling the bark off the sticks we had collected and then enjoyed a lunch of hotdogs. John demonstrated how to shape the clap sticks using axes, metal tools and sandpaper to create the final product. Everyone displayed immense determination and effort to create their own clap-sticks as a keepsake to take home.

We were given a space on John's wall to create a mural to commemorate our time spent here. A few girls came up with the idea to design the painting depicting John's welcome to country where he said "These girls are our friends" which was written on the mural along with the stars signifying our sleeping underneath the stars, and the fireplace made up of all of our handprints which is symbolic of our community coming together by the fire.

The day ended with a nice dinner consisting of sausages and potatoes cooked on the fire as well as trying some kangaroo tail. After dinner we sat around the fire and listened to John's life story where he told us about his childhood and how Kurku had been his mothers land before his and that when he left school he came back to live here. We learnt about his jobs and the health inequities for Aboriginal people and how he is working in an Aboriginal men's health centre in Alice Springs, as well as revealing the shocking incarceration rates and injustices to Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

We have really enjoyed our time at Kurku and are so grateful for the unique experiences we have been lucky enough to have. We are thankful to John and Paul for extending the homes and hearts out towards us and letting us stay on their land. We have loved our time here.



5. Day Five

The group had an early start to our final morning at Kurku, where we packed all our equipment ready to embark on a journey to the next homeland of Apmwerre (also known as Black Tank). We were extremely lucky to have John's wife Lorraine sell us her amazing hand crafted jewellery made from native seeds and gum nuts. High emotions ran through all the girls as we said our final 'see you later's' to John and Paul as well as thanking them for allowing us the privilege to stay on their land and teach us the traditions and practices of their Indigenous people, making us truly feel like we are their friends.

Looking back on the past three days, ourselves and definitely the others, feel we have achieved a goal of gaining a deeper and personal understanding about the rich culture of Australia's First Nations peoples. Our past groups intentions of new experiences and perspective were greatly fulfilled as we reflected back on tasting witchetty grubs to kangaroo tails and feeling adventurous creating our very own clap sticks from scratch. Gaining a perspective was achieved through sitting around the fire having deep discussions on controversial topics and engaging with John's and Paul's life story and comparing it to our own upbringing. Our stay at Kurku really made us question our own knowledge and education that we received upon the traditions and practices of Indigenous people.

The lengthy bus trip began, the girls where encouraged to rest up and have some time to be with ourselves. Our daily intention was the have a clean slate coming into the new homeland, meaning no expectations and pre conceived notions. Alice Springs Telegraph Station was our destination to stretch our legs, eat some food and have a yarn. Us girls darted towards the cafe eager to buy some hot beverages and souvenirs. After digging into some wraps we began to wander down to the dried out Todd River of the Telegraph Station, our amazing bus driver informed us that the river floods seasonally and that Alice Springs locals can only be locals if they have seen the river flood five times.

We resumed the bus trip towards the homeland of Apmwerre as us girls returned to our deep sleeps and content reading. Two hours went by and finally we made our arrival to Black Tank meeting grandmothers Pamela and Veronica, mother Anne, cousin Kaden and little Jay Jay. Upon arrival us girls, teachers and leaders were invited by their welcome to country which was a surreal and spiritual experience. Everyone in our group where given a skin name specific to our duties, Mpetyane and Perrurle are workers, Peltherre are the land owners and finally Kngwarraye looked over provisions. Once we received our skin names we all chipped in setting up camp and then settled around the fire.

Around the fire we all introduced ourselves to our welcoming hosts and mentioned why we decided to come on this immersion, and something we all had in common was to gain a deeper understanding of the Indigenous culture. Pamela and Veronica then began to talk upon a few issues that themselves and others experience when trying to gain their land back and standing proud beside their culture.

After an abundance of travelling our day once again ended with everyone warming up by the fire, looking forward to a good nights sleep (4 degrees warmer than last night!) and waking up bright and early tomorrow for another exciting day.

Sienna, Charlotte, Lynsey



6. Day Six

We were glad to wake up to much less ice on our gear for our first morning at Apmwerre, surrounded by the vast landscape of shrubs and the sun making its way over the trees. Warming ourselves with hot chocolate, we were ready to discover what this beautiful homeland had to offer.

Today's adventure began with a bus ride to two significant sites on the homeland. We arrived to the first site, and to show our respects to the spirits, we were lucky enough to lay our hands on the rocks at the site, us greeting them and them greeting us. We experienced a rocky bus ride to the next site of significance, where we greeted the spirits of this site as we did the last one. At this site, however, we were given a notable and fulfilling task: to clear the land surrounding the significant rocks at the site. With rakes and shovels in our hands, we began to scrape away the weeds and shrubs, creating a clearer space for this beautiful site. We all felt a deep connection to the land as the sun warmed our faces and allowed us to remove our jackets for the first time this trip. As we finished up after our hard work, Pam, Veronica and Anne thanked us for the time we put into the significant site. They told us about the grandfather spirits that come in the form of a whirlwind, and we were lucky enough to witness one pass through the site before we left. This was a surreal experience that will stay with us long after we leave.

After a return to camp and meatball subs for lunch, Pam and Veronica payed us another visit to impart their extensive knowledge. We spent the afternoon listening to what they had to say, from their perspective on the stolen generation to their language and customs. We were privileged enough to hear Pam, Veronica and Anne open up about the stolen generation, their link to it and how it is still

impacting them today. They also taught us about the language of their land - Arrernte. We discovered that this was a lot more difficult than the language of Pitjantjatjara. Additionally, we were introduced into the complex world of the skin names and the structure of the Aboriginal society on this homeland. We all felt incredibly blessed to be learning about the culture in such depth from people who live it every day.

We concluded the day feeling fulfilled and grateful for the experiences of our first full day at Apmwerre. As we watched the sunset, burgers in hands, we enjoyed the atmosphere and conversations with friends, reflecting on the day past and looking forward to new discoveries tomorrow.

Caitlin, Scarlett and Elizah



7. Day Seven

Today we arose on the last day of Ampwerre (Black Tank). The sadness was really in the air but the gratitude and excitement for this day was really evident. We all grouped together around the fire with toast and cereal to hear the briefing of the day, the suspense obvious. The leader group set the new intention for today - consolidation, making sure to tie any loose ends.

Our Red Earth family got ready for the big day ahead of bush medicine and saying our "see you later's", to Pamela and Veronica. We all waited in anticipation for our day to begin at 9:00 but sadly there was a delay. Tragically one of the traditional owners close friends had passed away a week ago, and the funeral had moved further up. We all gave our condolences in a traditional Aboriginal way known as sorry business. They had sacrificed their time to spend it with us and teach us their interesting culture.

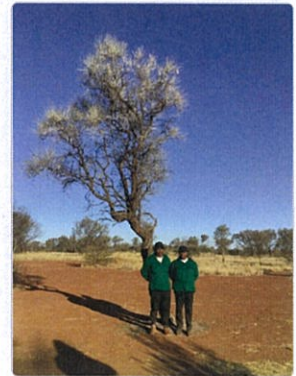
The day progressed with bush medicine being collected and the plant is known as corkwood plant known as Ngwarle Untyeye. Veronica and Pamela taught as their ways of grinding the leaves to make an oil that solidifies into a paste. It is used for muscle aches and pains. Everyone for this process got into their skin kin. Everyone was laughing and having a great time immersing themselves into the culture. The end product everyone got to have a jar of this amazing paste.

Everyone started to get ready as the activity progressed. We all started to relax before saying goodbye to Black Tank. For dinner it was steak sandwiches and the tables were in a U shape to signify community. There was a traditional flower arrangement with red dirt around it and the traditional owners joined us. The group had a classical Aussie dessert of Damper, which was fantastic. Then we had group stories about the customary laws and the Dreamtime story as The Two Sisters.

Photos:

- Veronica and Pamela with a corkwood tree. Corkwood dreaming associated with Black Tank homeland. Them boxing and having fun.
- Photos of skin name groups doing bush medicine
- School and Group photos at homeland





8. Day Eight

Day Eight in the Northern Territory promised a lengthy journey from Apmwerre back to Yulara. Sadness filled the air as we woke bright and early for pack up. Our goal was an "hour of power" to smoothly depart Apmwerre, although things did not go according to plan. By 8:30, our teamwork was evident as we were all ready on the bus with our swags and bags packed on the trailers. We said our goodbyes to the land we called home, taking irreplaceable memories and experiences with us.

A mere 10 minutes after leaving the homeland, we faced, yet again, a travel related mishap. The trailer had broken, leaving the wheel snapped and delaying our road trip from Apmwerre to Yulara. All hands were on deck as we moved our baggage off of the broken trailer and determined what was necessary and unnecessary to continue driving with. After transferring equipment across vehicles, another difficulty occurred; the leader's ute broke down. Showing great resilience, all the teachers, Rhi, and Jen jump started the ute to successfully revive our eight hour journey.

We were lucky enough to be lent a hand from Pam's nephew. He explained that the spirits must have really liked us and wanted us to stay at Black Tank, which we all believed to be incredibly touching and memorable.

Successfully on the road again at around 10:30, we continued our travels. We witnessed a men's sacred site from a distance, as described in the stars the night before by Pamela and Veronica. The two hills symbolised two sisters venturing on a journey to Port Augusta who were banded together, even when facing hardship. The song line of this Dreamtime story runs from the Northern Territory to South Australia. Later, we travelled to Alice Springs telegraph station. Chips, lollies, and the fan favourite, iced chocolates, left us reenergised and prepared for the next part of our journey. We stopped for a lunch of wraps and sandwiches, and were surprised with chocolate for our solid effort hours earlier. Singing, conversations and a spontaneous disco filled the remaining part of our journey to Yulara, where we spent Night One.

Our day was filled with new moments to treasure as well as those that shared nostalgic similarities to the beginning of our marvellous trip. A sense of closure and peace enveloped our camp community as we shared our final sunset together from inside our bus, just as we had shared our first beautiful sunset, only a week ago. So much growth has occurred since the beginning, and today's cyclical nature reminded us just how much has changed. Our community now stands on the same land where we first met, filled with love, friendship and a delicious nachos dinner with campfire-roasted marshmallows and chocolate for dessert.

As we prepare for our final night under the stars, our circle holds, stronger together, more knowledgeable and experienced than we began, and hopeful for the future.

Emma, Annabelle and Ana

9a. Day Nine

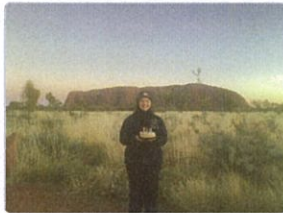
We woke up bright and early at 6:15 ready for our last sunrise at Central Australia. We woke to the song of happy birthday for Emma's big 16th birthday, something different to our usual morning song and clap sticks. We hopped on the bus with our sleeping bags and as many layers as we had to keep us warm. We arrived at the sunset viewing site with the sun cresting over the horizon.

We saw and appreciated the beauty of the place we sat and took as many photos as our storage would let us. In celebration of Emma's birthday we lit some candles and presented her with cake for breakfast as the whole car park joined us in singing Happy Birthday again. After our health breakfast of white chocolate, milk chocolate and caramel mud cake we were lead in our final deep breathing and stretching.

We headed back to camp with the sun still rising in the background and we were lead in our final reflection. Thinking back to the highlights of our trip, what we have gained and what the traditional owners we meet have gained through this in incredible experience.

We are now packing up camp for the last time, trying to fit all the things back in our packs excited to know our flight is on schedule this time.

Lynsey



9b. Welcome Home!

The Final Day - Welcome Home Students and Teachers! From all of us at Red Earth, thank you for being a part of this immersion.

To the families, we hope that this Blog has provided a real-time window into what the experience was like for the group. Hopefully, it will also help stimulate some excited storytelling, discussions and reflections around the dinner table at home.

So that we can continue to develop our immersion experience, we would love all participating students to complete our online survey. It only takes 5 minutes, and can be found at the below link (copy and paste it into your web browser). We take on board all the positive and constructive things you have to say, and use it to help our Traditional Owners, Leaders and the entire Red Earth team to grow and improve.

<https://forms.office.com/r/sHRYTJ7Pi6>

Our thanks once again for your interest, support and commitment to Red Earth and our mission! If you like, you can stay up to date with our work by following @redearthorg on social media.

Take care,
From all of us at Red Earth.

HAVE QUESTIONS?

Call us (02) 9223 3833