



Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park Notes

Tjukurpa

Tjukurpa panya tjamulu, kamilu, mamalu, ngunytjulu nganana ungu, ku runpangka munu katangka kanyintjaku - Pitjantjatjara

This Law was given to us by our grandfathers and grandmothers, our fathers and mothers, to hold onto in our heads and in our hearts.

What is *Tjukurpa*?

Tjukurpa is the foundation of *Anangu* life and society. *Tjukurpa* refers to the creation period when ancestral beings, *Tjukaritja*, created the world as we know it, and from this the religion, law and moral systems. ‘Dreamtime’ or ‘Dreaming’ is often used to describe the way we and other Indigenous Australians see our origins. This translation suggests the beliefs are unreal. *Tjukurpa* is no dream, and there is no such word as ‘Dreamtime’ in *Anangu* languages.

The creation period

Prior to creation the world was featureless and none of the places existed until our *Tjukurpa* ancestors, in the form of people, plants and animals, travelled widely across the land. During a period of creation and destruction the ancestors formed the world as we know it today. Our land is inhabited by dozens of ancestral beings. Their journeys and activities are recorded at sites linked by *iwara* (paths or tracks) and *iwara* link places that are sometimes hundreds of kilometres outside the park and beyond *Pitjantjatjara* country.

The *Mala Tjukurpa*, for example, involves three groups of *mala* (rufous hare-wallaby people) who travel from the north to reach Uluru. Two groups then fled south and southeast to sites in South Australia. *Kuniya Tjukurpa* involves the travels of the woma python from the east. Many other *Tjukurpa* such as *kałaya* (emu), *liru* (poisonous snake), *lungkața* (blue tongue lizard), *luunpa* (kingfisher) and *tjintirtjintirpa* (willie wagtail) travel through the park.

Anangu land is mapped through the events of *Tjukurpa* and is therefore full of meaning. *Tjukurpa* is the basis of all *Anangu* knowledge. Where you are born, where you live and where you die are of great significance to *Anangu*. When *Anangu* travel across the land we do so with the knowledge of the ancestral beings. Knowledge of the land, and the behaviour and distribution of plants and animals is based on knowledge of *Tjukurpa*. *Anangu* recount, maintain and pass on this knowledge through ceremony, song, dance and art.

Our social structure

Anangu refer to sites as being ‘my grandmother’ or ‘my grandfather’ because we are part of the land and we identity with the land. *Tjukurpa* shapes *Anangu* relationships with other people and the kinship system, based on *Tjukurpa*, prescribes a range of proper behaviour within the immediate family and with other relations. It outlines rules about marriage and other relationships between men and women, young and old. Family obligations extend to the entire language group.

Our moral belief system

Tjukurpa provides *Anangu* with a system of beliefs and morality with which we can judge right and wrong. *Tjukurpa* guides daily life through a series of symbolic stories and metaphors. The stories are not simple stories as they represent complex explanations of the origins and structure of the universe, and the place and behaviour of all elements within it. Understanding of such stories increases throughout an individual’s life. For a child, a story may be a moral tale about greed, while for an adult it may provide complex explanations of ethical behaviour.



Law

Tjukurpa establishes the rules we use to govern society and manage the land. It dictates correct procedures for dealing with problems, and penalties for breaking the Law. The proper way of doing things is the way things are done in *Tjukurpa*. Since the coming of non-Aboriginal people we have had to modify some of the penalties under traditional Law. We have also adapted non-Aboriginal law to help enforce *Tjukurpa*. Sacred sites are protected under Commonwealth and Northern Territory legislation and hunting and foraging rights are protected under the legislation and lease agreement with Parks Australia. The Uluru-Kata Tjuṛa National Park Plan of Management protects *Tjukurpa* by using it as a guide for making management and policy decisions.

Passing on *Tjukurpa*

Tjukurpa is not written down, but memorised. It is a cultural obligation to pass on this knowledge to the right people. Ceremonies play an important role in the passing on of knowledge. Specific people or groups in the kinship system have responsibilities to maintain different sections or 'chapters' of *Tjukurpa*. These chapters may relate to a specific site, or a section of an *iwara* (ancestral path) and this knowledge is carefully passed on to people who have inherited the right to that knowledge either through their birthplace, or through having earned the right by progressive attendance at ceremonies.



Left to right - Anangu elders and park staff educating local school children on *Tjukurpa* at Muṛitjulu Waterhole and Barbara Tjikatu performing *inma* (traditional ceremonial dance)

Tjukurpa is taught and remembered through specific verses of *inma* (songs), site related stories, ritual dances or rock art. The *iwara* (ancestral paths) are recalled in long sequential lists of sites, sometimes including sites beyond country which have been visited, and including sites belonging to other people. *Tjukurpa* may also be recorded in physical forms such as ritual objects and some objects are created for a specific ritual and then destroyed, and others are very old and passed on from one generation to the next. These objects are extremely important, and knowledge of their form and existence is highly restricted. They are not discussed in front of children, and may be specifically restricted to men or women.

Tjukurpa is also recorded in various designs and paintings, such as the 'dot' paintings of the Western Desert Region. These designs are often sacred and use and creation is restricted to specific groups or individuals. Some sounds are particularly associated with particular *Tjukurpa*. The sound of the bull roarer, for example, is associated with secret men's ceremonies. It is for this reason that Anangu don't want bull roarer objects sold to tourists. *Tjukurpa* is extremely important to Anangu and we can share some of its information with non-Aboriginal people, but the secret sacred information must stay only with Anangu.



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