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# Uluru climb closed permanently as hundreds scale sacred site on final day

By Chelsea Heaney and Samantha Jonscher

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PHOTO: The Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park board of management has officially closed the climb up Uluru. (AAP: Dan Peled)

Almost 34 years to the day since the Anangu traditional owners were handed back the title to Uluru, their wishes that people not climb the rock will now be enforced by law.

Rangers officially closed the climb at 4:00pm (ACST) and stopped any more people making the

Any remaining visitors on the rock will be allowed to stay there until sunset, they will be the last people to have legally scaled the culturally significant site.

Anyone else now caught climbing Uluru could face thousands of dollars in fines.

In the final hours of the Uluru climb, Parks Australia rangers had to escort a man in distress from the top of the ascent.

Rangers left the base about 2:00pm and arrived back with the traveller just after 5:00pm.

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## **Key Points:**

- Parks Australia have said they would be running extra patrols over the weekend and would impose heavy fines on anyone caught climbing
- Traditional owners waited for over two years to officially close the climb, which came into effect this afternoon
- Hundreds of tourists hoping to be some of the last to climb had to wait for hours this morning after it was closed due to dangerous conditions

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The man said he ran out of water but didn't regret making the climb.

Local Anangu ranger Tjiangu Thomas said it had been an important day for the community and the region.

"It's rather emotional, having elders who picked up this long journey before I was born, to close the climb, and now they are no longer here but we are carrying on their legacy," he said.

"It's a rather big example of how Anangu are starting to speak up for their country — not only here but for other Indigenous people throughout the nation.



PHOTO: Tjiangu Thomas said Anangu felt both sadness and happiness following the climb closure, as elders had passed away before seeing their plan come to fruition. (ABC News: Samantha Jonscher)

"Hopefully we can use that momentum and keep moving forward to build a brighter future for this generation and the next generation."

Mr Thomas said he believed a lack of education was predominantly the reason people would still want to climb.

"I'd say to those people, come out with an open mind and heart and immerse yourself in the culture," he said.

"Once the focus is away from the climb, there is going to be more focus on the culture and the environment and that is what this park is world heritage-listed for."

But Mr Thomas said he was still disheartened by how many had come to scale the rock in recent weeks, knowing how the traditional owners felt.

"At the end of the day, respect is a choice. Obviously it is disappointing but, compared to the school holidays, today hasn't had very large numbers," he said.

# 'Today I'm really happy'

A media throng crowded around traditional owners who'd gathered to see the new sign marking the permanent closure.

Elder Nelly Patterson said she was relieved the climb had been closed.

"Really good, I'm really happy," she said to cheers from the crowd.



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PHOTO: Elder Nelly Patterson addresses the media after the Uluru climb closes. (ABC News: Samantha Jonscher)

She said seeing people climb Uluru had been hurtful for Anangu.

"I was worrying all the time because a lot of people climb here ... go in and make a mess for the toilet and everything, rubbish mess," she said.

"That's why a lot of people pass away, everyone pass away, all the elders people, that's why I worry and today I'm really happy," she said.



"No more climb today ... close it. Thank you very much."

# Climbers now facing prosecution

In a statement, a spokesperson for Parks Australia said anyone who chose to ignore the closure would be pursued and that extra patrols of Uluru would be conducted over the weekend.

"Although we expect our visitors to respect the law and the wishes of traditional owners when they visit, significant penalties can be issued," the statement said.

"If a serious offence is pursued by Parks Australia it could attract courtordered fines of up to \$10,000."

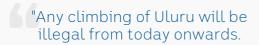
As of 4:00pm Australian Central Standard Time (ACST), anyone aiming to ascend Uluru will be in breach of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act (EPBC).

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park manager Mike Misso said there was a range of legislative instruments under the Act to enforce the ban.

"Under the EPBC, we can issue fines or infringement notices for people who climb up and then that can scale to actually taking people to court if they're illegally climbing Uluru," he said.



**PHOTO:** The Uluru climb reopened after dangerous weather conditions threatened to close it early on the final day. (ABC News: Samantha Jonscher)



"We'll have extra rangers on over this period, over the period of the climb closure, so there'll be a lot more staff on the ground. The Northern Territory Police are also supporting us, so there'll be a very high level of compliance presence over this period."

# Tourists kept waiting on final day





VIDEO: Climbers wait to ascend Uluru as traditional owners aim to educate (ABC News)

Earlier this morning, a line of tourists snaked around the base of Uluru, after hundreds of climbers' plans were thrown into disarray when rangers closed the trail due to dangerous weather conditions.

The climb was scheduled to open at 7:00am ACST but high winds kept hopeful hikers stuck at the base for several hours.

After a mid-morning assessment, the trek was reopened and the scores of visitors began scrambling to the top

Over the past few weeks, tourists have flocked to the region in a last-ditch effort to scale one of Australia's most famous landmarks.

Traditional owners said they had been left frustrated and disappointed that so many had rushed in and disregarded their wishes in the final few weeks.

Uluru is a sacred site and of great spiritual significance to First Australians, and Anangu traditional owners say climbing it is not only disrespectful but also dangerous.



PHOTO: A sign at the base of Uluru confirming the landmark's permanent closure. (ABC Darwin: Samantha Jonscher)

Uluru and Kata Tjuta was handed back to the Anangu traditional owners on October 26, 1985.

In Uluru's history, at least 37 people have died while climbing and the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park board of management said they shared in the grieving process each time a visitor died.

"Tjukurpa [Cultural law and dreaming] requires that Nguraritja [traditional owners] take responsibility for looking after visitors to their country and each time a visitor is seriously or fatally injured at Uluru, Nguraritja share in the grieving process," they said.

The dismantling of the chain and trail is expected to commence over the weekend.

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