

Quirky fact:

Canegrass thrives in arid environments because it is almost leafless, so **water is not lost through evaporation**. When it rains, the green stems direct moisture straight to the roots through photosynthesis.

CURRICULUM INFORMATION

Year	Learning and Assessment (Place and Space)
6	Conserving a Natural Biome
7	Sustainability of a Natural Phenomenon

DESCRIPTION

At one million hectares, Simpson Desert National Park is Queensland's largest protected area. At Poeppel Corner it meets South Australia's Simpson Desert Conservation Park and the Northern Territory's Simpson Desert Regional Reserve. The entire Simpson Desert covers more than 17 million hectares of Central Australia.

Across the Simpson, parallel dunes run south-east to north-west, the dominant wind direction when they formed during the Pleistocene epoch about 80,000 years ago. Spaced about 1 km apart, dunes can extend 200 kms.

The range in temperature can be extreme. In the summer months temperatures average at 39 degrees but can reach up to 50 degrees, while in the winter morning temperatures can drop to zero. There is no surface water in the Simpson Desert and dust storms are common. The average annual rainfall is less than 150 mm. While it usually rains in short bursts from December to March, heavy falls and overflows from the Channel Country occasionally sweep across the plains quenching the dry rivers and creek beds that feed Lake Eyre.

Bare, windswept crests stand atop slopes secured by spinifex and canegrass. Flat plains between dunes can be wind-polished gibber pebbles or mineral-encrusted claypans but many, surprisingly, support open shrublands of acacias, hakeas and grevilleas. Georgina gidgee, a rounded wattle tree, is found extensively in dune swales and is well known for its pungent odour after rain.

Far from deserted, the Simpson Desert is home to hardy mammals, many reptiles and over 180 bird species.

Sandhill canegrass shelters small birds. Lizards hide from predators in spiky, rounded clumps of lobed spinifex. Mulgaras, small and venerable carnivorous marsupials with a distinctive crest of short black hairs on their tails, burrow into dunes to escape the heat.



Couple on Big Red sand dunes

HISTORY - Bedourie

First residents: Wangkangurru, Lanima, Kungalenja, Karanja, Mitaka, Jeljendi, Maiawali, and Wangkamadla peoples

European exploration: Charles Sturt, 1845

European settlement: early 1880s

Town gazetted: 1888

History highlights:

- Home of the Bedourie Camp Oven

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- Invite a guest speaker from the Aboriginal community or National Parks and Wildlife to come and speak about the importance of maintaining the Simpson Desert in as pristine condition as possible
- Make a list of the most important words in the main descriptive text
- Create a PowerPoint which gives a visual image of the landscape, plus the most important flora and fauna, in the Simpson Desert

BEST EXPERIENCE

Big Red, Simpson Desert National Park

The Simpson Desert National Park is Queensland's largest national park, and 80 kilometres west of Birdsville

Cost: Entry to the park is free, however fees apply for camping

Hours: Open 24 hours

Contact: Information, access and maps available at www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests/find_a_park_or_forest/

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- The Simpson Desert National Park is vast and remote and should be accessed by 4WD only.
- All visitors must check their travel plans with local authorities i.e. EPA, Police and Warrari Information Centre
- From Birdsville take the Birdsville Track to Big Red (35 kms).

OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST

- Diamantina National Park, via Bedourie
- Burke and Wills Dig Tree - Cameron Corner, via Thargomindah

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Queensland Environmental Protection Agency

Source: Many sources of information
www.epa.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests/find_a_park_or_forest/simpson_desert_national_park/#park_features

The Encyclopedia of Earth

Source: Many sources and additional reference material
www.eoearth.org/article/Simpson_desert

World Wildlife Organisation

Source: Many sources
www.nationalgeographic.com/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/aa/aa1308.html

Diamantina Shire Council

www.diamantina.qld.gov.au/

Diamantina Touring

Source: History of European explorers of the region. Excellent source for bioregional (land systems) information
www.diamantina-tour.com.au/outback_info/simpson_desert/european_exploration/european_exploration.htm

REFERENCES

Queensland Environmental Protection Agency

www.epa.qld.gov.au

National Geographic

www.nationalgeographic.com/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/aa/aa1308.html

FURTHER INFORMATION

Environmental Protection Agency, Birdsville

Cnr Billabong Boulevard and Jardine Streets, Birdsville QLD 4482
Phone: (07) 4656 3249 or (07) 4656 3272

Warrari Visitor Information Centre

Billabong Boulevard, Birdsville QLD 4482
Phone: (07) 4656 3300
Email: warrari.centre@bigpond.com
www.diamantina.qld.gov.au

