

## HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

It's one of Australia's and the world's most recognised Indigenous icons – anchored deep beneath our earth's surface, and in our hearts.

Mirroring our country's rich history and culture, it stands strong, proud and sacred; appropriately located in the heart of Australia.

Uluru.

The carvings, or sacred sites as they are referred to by Australia's Indigenous people, are the chapters in the book of Australia's history. They tell the story of sacrifice, hunting, protecting and nurturing.

They tell the story of survival of the world's longest living Indigenous culture.

On the weekend of 18 July 2015, Uluru was acknowledged by the Indigenous Marathon Project (IMP), a program of the Indigenous Marathon Foundation (IMF), when more than 100 Indigenous runners, IMP Graduates, supporters and sponsors gathered to celebrate the 30 year anniversary of handing back the rock to its Traditional Owners – the Mutitjulu Community – with a 10km Anniversary Relay Run around the base of Australia's most treasured rock.

It was a weekend-long celebration that began on Friday 17 July with representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island regional, remote and city communities across the country arriving at our red centre to participate in the Relay Run and also the fourth annual Deadly Fun Run Championships.

Runners, Graduates and supporters were treated to a Welcome Dinner which included a representative from each community sharing the meaning and significance of their 10km Anniversary Relay Run message stick – the 'baton' used to handover at each leg of the relay, which was presented to the Traditional Owners in a special ceremony at the end of the 10km Anniversary Relay Run.

Boomerangs, emu sticks, the Olympic flag, and a hand-woven bag, were just a few of the symbolic artefacts received by Reggie Uluru, the Elder of the Mutitjulu community; permanent reminders of the personal gratitude of being allowed to run on sacred ochre coloured ground.

As the sun rose on Saturday 18 July, children and adults prepared to represent their communities in the fourth annual Deadly Fun Run Championships. Juniors took on a 3km course while the seniors pushed through an extra couple of kilometres to complete their 5km distance.

With Uluru as an inspirational backdrop under the southern blue sky and radiating a sense of spirituality and empowerment, the Deadly Runners huddled together as one; one community, one family, one purpose.

This event wasn't about smashing out an Olympic record or qualifying for the Commonwealth Games.

It was a display of unwavering commitment, a steely determination to be the pride of the community, a symbol of resilience and a role model for future generations.

Some walked, others ran.

They all finished.

They all won.

While all the runners and supporters gathered to celebrate their achievement, it was soon time to make the trip out to Uluru for the nation's first ever relay run around the base of the world's most recognised rock.

Four legs combined to make up the 10km distance and each team strategically chose runners for the varying distances.

Before runners were taken to the various hand-over stations around the rock, all participants shook hands with the Anangu people – local people of the Mutitjulu community - who were so welcoming and hospitable.

Without their support and permission, the event would not have been possible.

Then it was time.

Time to come together as one to acknowledge our country's history.

Time to leave our footprints in the footprints of our ancestors and founders of our land.

Time to reflect on the privilege we have been blessed with, having such a strong, significant culture that has outlived every other Indigenous culture in the world.

It was an experience that can't be measured by words alone; its measure was in the solidarity of each and every person who took part in such an historic occasion and the respect that was paid to those who allowed it to happen.

For the first time in Australian history, 21 teams from communities across our country ran around the base of Uluru.

The sense of pride, patriotism and spirituality was abound as runners crossed the finish line hand in hand, bound by friendship, family and an unforgettable experience that will last long after those hands have separated.

As the sun set that night, the Sounds of Silence Dinner was the perfect finale to a magical weekend.

Under the stars of our southern sky, the smudge of the milky-way clear as the night sky, the Qantas Australis "Jet Star" constellation making an appearance, we learnt of the billions of stars shining down on us every night.

We were reminded of how lucky we are; sitting under the stars that tell stories of navigation, Greek Mythology and zodiac, and just a few kilometres in the distance we have our own sacred landscape story.

A story that on this particular weekend, created new chapters of friendship, family, history and life.

It's the heart of our culture; the heart of our Indigenous Australians and the heart of our country.

Uluru; home to the most unforgettable weekend imaginable.