

Earth's Frozen Continent



photo by Daniel Enchev

Mini Fact:

Supplies for workers in Antarctica are brought by ship or by airplane.

It may be steamy hot where you are this summer, but at the “bottom” of the world, in Antarctica, it’s the dead of winter. Let’s visit our southernmost continent.

A frozen landscape

Antarctica is the fifth-largest continent, with an area of about 5.4 million square miles, but its size changes depending on the season. In the winter, more sea ice along its coasts makes it bigger.



map by Alexrk2

The continent is home to the South Pole, one of two points on Earth’s axis of rotation.

It is surrounded by three oceans. Just about all of Antarctica (more than 99%) is covered with ice. The ground is too cold for anything to grow except lichens, mosses, algae and some grasses.

There are some mountains, and there are two active volcanos. It is usually very cold, but just about 2 inches of snow fall there each year — the air is too dry for much snow to form. Still, huge blizzards happen when the high winds pick up snow on the ground.

Scientists have discovered **subglacial** lakes and rivers — waterways under the thick sheet of ice.

Living on Antarctica

Antarctica does not belong to any one country. It is governed by the Antarctic Treaty System, which prohibits military activities and



photo by Ariel Waldman

The McMurdo Station is a U.S. research station on the south tip of Ross Island in southern Antarctica.

nuclear waste disposal, among other things. The treaty supports scientific exploration and protects the continent’s ecology.

Several thousand people live in Antarctica at any one time. They are scattered at about 100 research stations across the continent.

History

Antarctica was the last continent to be discovered. Although some ships spotted ice shelves and came close to land there, the first confirmed landing was in 1895. Other explorers traveled to the magnetic South Pole and the geographic South Pole in the early 1900s.

There are no **indigenous**, or native, people in Antarctica. There are, however, many species of animals.



Roald Amundsen, a Norwegian explorer, was the first to reach the South Pole in December 1911.

Antarctic animals

One tiny animal is very important to Antarctica’s ecosystem. It’s the krill.

Krill are small, shrimplike animals that swim off the coast. Seals, whales and penguins depend on them for food. A blue whale might eat a ton of krill each day.

When you think of Antarctica, you may think of **penguins**. These flightless birds live and breed on islands near the main continent. Emperor and Adelie penguins breed farther south than any other type of penguin.

Other animals that live in the sea around Antarctica include **orcas**, **blue whales**, **colossal squids** and several species of **fur seals**. Birds such as **albatrosses**, **gulls**, **terns** and **shags** are also found in Antarctica.



photo courtesy Australian Antarctic Program



photo by Andrew Shiva

Adelie penguin



photo by Ed Dumonts

Wandering albatross

Resources



On the Web:

- bit.ly/MPAntarctica

At the library:

- “Antarctica” by Karen Kellaher
- “Antarctic Researchers” by Emily Jankowski Mahoney
- “Ten Animals in Antarctica” by Moira Court

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Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of Antarctica are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:

ANTARCTICA, AXIS, COAST, CONTINENT, ICE, INDIGENOUS, KRILL, ORCA, PENGUIN, POLE, RESEARCH, SEALS, SOUTH, SQUID, STATION, SUBGLACIAL, TREATY, VOLCANO, WHALE, WINTER.

T	I	S	C	A	E	A	X	S	E	A	L	S	I	H
R	F	U	O	I	X	C	A	D	I	U	Q	S	N	T
E	Z	B	N	K	R	I	L	L	I	R	N	P	D	U
A	N	G	T	X	Z	T	S	H	E	Y	O	W	I	O
T	I	L	I	X	K	C	Q	S	S	L	I	H	G	S
Y	U	A	N	I	A	R	E	Y	E	N	T	A	E	T
J	G	C	E	C	C	A	E	U	T	Q	A	L	N	S
R	N	I	N	E	R	T	T	E	G	G	T	E	O	A
F	E	A	T	C	O	N	R	N	Z	S	S	H	U	O
X	P	L	H	O	N	A	C	L	O	V	K	M	S	C

Cook's Corner

Leopard Spots Ice Cream

You'll need:

- 1 quart vanilla ice cream
- 1 1/2 cups creamy peanut butter

What to do:

1. Thaw the ice cream in its container until soft, but not melted.
2. With a teaspoon, poke holes about 2 inches deep all through the ice cream.
3. A teaspoon at a time, push peanut butter down in the holes for the spots.
4. Cover the holes with ice cream and put container back in freezer to harden.
5. Serve in glass cups. Serves 10.

* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

1. Hardened into a solid by loss of heat (6-letter adjective)

□ □ □ □ □ □

2. A small, shaking body movement due to cold (6-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □

3. Someone who has an adventure or discovers (8-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

4. How a wet, cold surface may feel underfoot (8-letter adjective)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

1. _____ grass made a crunching noise under Anna's boots.


2. Donald felt a _____ after going outside without his coat.

3. Billy plans to be an _____ to find hidden caves.

4. Jonah fell on the _____ road full of snow and ice.

ROOTONYM®


by Jan & Carey Orr Cook



Study the definition. When you know the missing word, fill in the letter boxes and the sentence blanks.

Answers: Frozen, Shiver, Explorer, Slippery.


Mini Jokes



Amy: Who's a penguin's favorite relative?

Alan: Aunt Arctica!

Eco Note



The massive Thwaites Glacier on the coast of West Antarctica is falling to pieces because of climate change. The Thwaites Glacier is a vast expanse of ice in West Antarctica, covering an area about the size of Florida. Shifting ocean currents are bringing warm seawater up under its vulnerable underside, melting out the ice at its base and accelerating its movement into the ocean. As more of it falls into the ocean, it releases the water that was once frozen within it and raises sea levels the world over.


adapted from The Antarctic Sun

For later:

Look in your newspaper for articles about Antarctica.

Teachers:

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