

ANTARCTIC ADVENTURES





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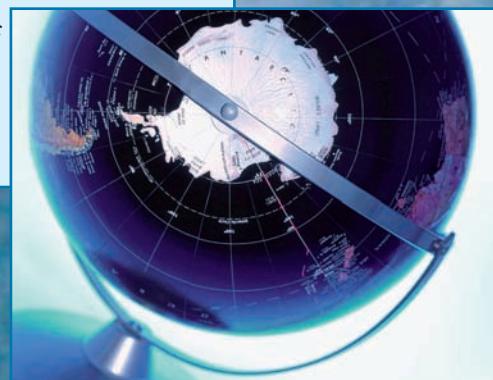
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ANTARCTICA

Where is Antarctica?

Antarctica is the icy land at the South Pole. It is a huge area of land, about 60 times larger than the United Kingdom, and surrounded by the Antarctic Ocean. Almost all of Antarctica is covered with an enormous blanket of ice. Beneath the ice is permanently frozen ground, known as permafrost.



What is the weather like?

The South Pole is the coldest, windiest and driest place on Earth. The lowest temperature ever recorded on Earth was in Antarctica. This was minus 88°C. It doesn't snow very often: on average, most of Antarctica gets less than 5 centimetres of snowfall each year. The Antarctic summer is at the same time as our winter. It is daylight almost all the time in the summer in Antarctica. In winter, it is almost always dark.



Does anyone live there?

Some scientific expeditions visit Antarctica. The scientists stay at research stations while they work, but no one actually lives there all the time: it is just too cold.



What is it like staying there?

Modern research stations are very busy, especially in summer. In spite of the cold, they are comfortable places. They are made of wood and have central heating and there is even a chef to make sure everyone is well fed.



What animals live there?

Penguins, seals, sea birds, dolphins and whales can all live on Antarctica. Some species of seal, such as the Weddell seal, live further south than any other mammal. Polar bears do not live there – they only live in the Arctic.



The Race to the South Pole

On 14 December 1911, Roald Amundsen stood at the South Pole. He had reached a goal that was the dream of many people. For the first time, human voices were heard in the vast openness of the world's most southerly point.

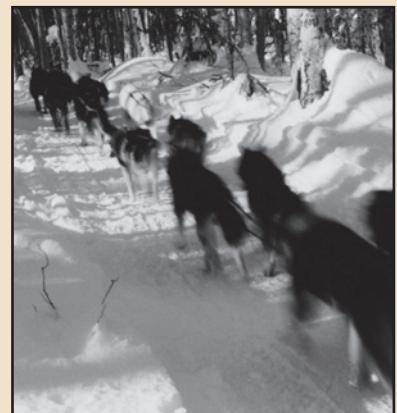


Roald Amundsen

Amundsen spent his life exploring the polar lands. As a boy in Norway, he read books about expeditions to the North Pole. These inspired him and he started training to become a ship's captain.

Roald Amundsen's first two expeditions were on board ships. First of all, he was captain of a ship that became trapped in the ice in Antarctica over the winter of 1898. The ship was finally freed in March 1899, at the end of the Antarctic summer. In spite of the hardship, this experience encouraged Amundsen to attempt more exploration.

Amundsen started to plan his second expedition. He sailed across the ocean to the north of Canada and remained there for two years, learning about life in the extreme cold from the people who lived there (the Inuit). He learned about how the Inuit people drove dog teams, the clothes they wore, the food they ate and their customs, so that he could use this knowledge later.



When he returned to Norway, Amundsen was not satisfied. He never forgot the stories he had read and he dreamed of leading the first team to reach one of the Poles.

In 1909, Amundsen decided to explore the North Pole. He was as good at planning expeditions as he was at exploring new places. He made sure that members of his crew were fit for long polar journeys, and the crew knew he was firm but fair. But while he was planning the expedition, the news "The North Pole is reached!" flashed all over the world.

Amundsen was shocked to hear that an American had arrived at the North Pole first. Amundsen quickly and secretly changed his plans and began to head for the South Pole. On the way, he found out that a British man, Robert Scott, was also preparing to lead an expedition to the South Pole.

The race to the South Pole had begun.

Amundsen sailed to Antarctica in 1910 and chose the spot for his base. His team spent several months getting ready for the hard journey over the ice. Finally, in October 1911, Amundsen and his team of four set out for the South Pole. They travelled in the way the Inuit people did, with a large pack of dogs to pull the four sledges.



Scott's British team set out two weeks later. It was a much bigger team. Scott had twelve men and they used ponies to pull their sledges. The British team also had two motor tractors, but these broke down within a week and had to be abandoned. The conditions were much harder than Scott had expected. The ponies died and the British team had to pull the sledges themselves.

The two teams had chosen different ways to the South Pole and each did not know how the other team was doing. For both teams, every step was difficult but Amundsen's team had prepared better and was more able to cope with the extreme conditions. Meanwhile, Scott's team was suffering in the harsh environment.

At 3:00 pm on Friday 14 December 1911, the five members of Amundsen's team cried out "Halt!" as the equipment on their sledges showed that they had arrived at the South Pole. They were exhausted but victorious. Roald Amundsen raised the Norwegian flag at the South Pole - he had won the race and achieved his dream. He had proved that he was one of the world's greatest explorers.

Scott's team did finally reach the South Pole, only to see the Norwegian flag already flying there. The journey back was even more difficult. Their dreams and ambitions had been shattered and Scott and his team did not survive.



Roald Amundsen and his team raise the Norwegian flag at the South Pole.

Visiting Antarctica

Lizzie Greenwood is a reporter on the children's TV programme 'Newsround'. She visited Antarctica for three weeks with the programme producer Paul. They were based at the Rothera Research Station.

Lizzie kept a diary and posted entries on this website so that everyone could read about what she was doing. She and Paul arrived at Rothera at the beginning of December after a long flight from England.

Here are three diary entries. The first one is when they had been away from home for a week and records the arrival of a supply ship.

newsround

"BLAH BLAH" CHAT QUIZ? VOTE WIN

Day 8: Sunday 7th December

The ship's here! The James Clark Ross gently floated into the wharf at about 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon. It's what everyone's been waiting for. All the stuff that has run out, broken down or just been lost can now be replaced.

Some people have been waiting months for equipment, and one just wanted to get his hands on the new supply of ketchup. Apparently they ran out about 6 months ago.

Earlier, I spoke to Thalia live on the phone for one of the weekend Newsround bulletins. It was really nice to talk to her – I'm amazed at how easy it is to contact the UK from here. I told Thalia, the only thing I really miss is fresh milk for my tea.

The photo at the top of this page is of me near to an Adelie penguin. The penguins are great and they don't seem to mind if you get up close. The seals are funny too. They lie about on the ice all day, snoring.

Now that the ship's in, I'll have a room mate, so I spent time tidying up this morning. Let's hope I don't start talking in my sleep!



Day 13: Friday 12th December

Everyone reckons we brought the beautiful weather with us when we arrived in Antarctica. Since we stepped off the little red plane 10 days ago, the sun has been beating down on Rothera.



The weather is generally good news for everyone. The pilots can happily fly their planes to far-flung research sites, the divers can take out their boats on the millpond-like sea, and Paul and I can get a great tan while we film the amazing landscape.

Every day a radio operator gets in touch with all the people who are working away from Rothera. There are scientists dotted all over the place, miles from anywhere, so it's important the people here know that everyone's safe. Radios are the main way for people to keep in touch if they're off base. Often people accidentally use radio phrases even when they're talking face to face. When I was interviewing a scientist called Mairi, she finished one of her sentences with 'over', which really made me giggle.

Lizzie, in the Antarctic, 'over and out'.



Day 15: Sunday 14th December

Yesterday afternoon I did one of the best things I have ever done. I took a ride in a blow-up boat to Lagoon Island. It might not sound very special but for me, sitting on the edge of that little boat hanging on for survival as we hurtled over the Antarctic waves doing 23 knots (very fast) was an amazing experience.



At one particularly wavy point I thought I might not be able to hang on any longer. My arms were aching and my legs were burning as we kept crashing down onto another dip in the sea's waves – bang, thump, giggle (I kept laughing).

Lagoon Island was pretty cool. That was the reason we'd made the fantastic boat journey in the first place. It's a beautiful little island with a hut which some of the guys go to when they want to escape living with 90 other people. It's a lovely hut with two bunk beds, a sink, and table and chairs.

Apart from Lagoon Island being home to the great hut and lots of birds, there are plenty of elephant seals there too. They don't seem to do very much and they're also quite smelly, so we didn't stay long.

Last night was BBQ and karaoke night at the base. The penguins must have been holding their wings over their ears!

Acknowledgements

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