
Antarctica: Land of Ice

Introducing Antarctica

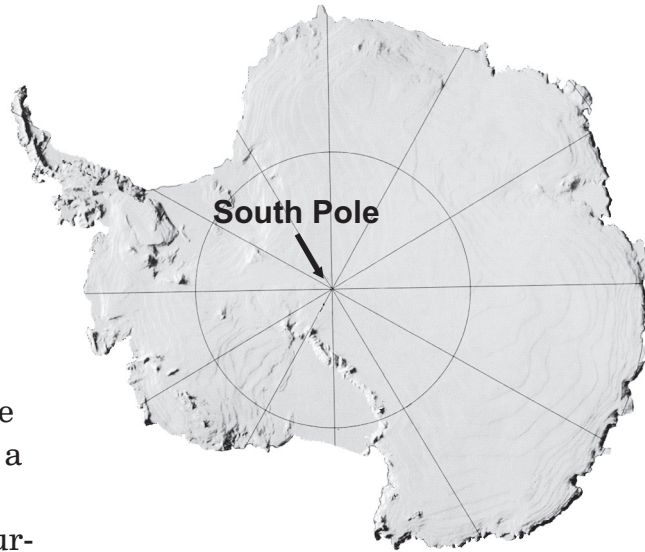
What is Antarctica?

Antarctica is a continent that is right at the south of the planet. (If you try to find it on a globe, you will see that it is at the bottom.)

It takes up one-tenth of the Earth's surface and is covered with a blanket of ice that can be as thick as 1,500 metres or more. The South Pole is right in the middle of Antarctica.

Antarctica is the coldest continent, as well as the driest, the highest and the windiest. Very few people live there all year round. Scientists stay there for short periods, living in specially built research stations.

Summer in Antarctica is between October and March. During this time there is non-stop daylight. In winter, April to September, the opposite happens and Antarctica is plunged into six months of constant darkness.



A Map of Antarctica



In Antarctica, it is colder than you can possibly imagine, even in the summer! The South Pole is the coldest part of Antarctica. The average temperature for January, the middle of the summer, is minus 28 degrees Celsius (written as -28°C). Minus means colder than the freezing point, which is 0°C .

In the winter, April to September, the average temperature at the South Pole can be as cold as -89°C . When it is that cold, a mug of boiling water thrown in the air would freeze before it hit the ice. Sometimes the scientists have to use fridges to keep their samples warm!



Penguins in Antarctica

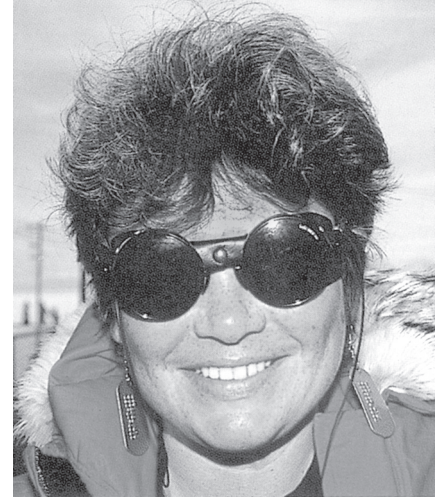
There are more penguins in the Antarctic than any other bird.

They cannot fly but use their short wings as swimming flippers. They are superb swimmers. On land, they waddle upright or move in short hops.

Penguins have many feathers that overlap each other. These, together with woolly down feathers and a thick layer of fat, keep out the cold air, wind and water. For extra warmth, penguins huddle together in groups.

A Letter from Antarctica

Sara Wheeler is one of the scientists working in Antarctica. By reading her letter to her nephew Daniel, you can learn more about her Antarctic experience.



Antarctica

Friday, 9 December

Dear Daniel,

Here is the letter I promised to write to you from Antarctica, and a photograph. Imagine how excited I am to be here at last, following in the footsteps of so many famous explorers. It is very different from the world I am used to.

There is nothing fresh down here—and no supermarkets—so we have to eat a lot of dried, tinned or frozen food (it doesn't have to be put in the freezer—you can just leave it outside). We cook on small gas stoves, which take much longer than cookers at home. Yesterday I made noodles with tomato paste and vegetables out of a tin, followed by dried strawberries that tasted like cardboard.

I miss fresh apples and oranges—I wish you could send me some!

Love from Sara