

LEVELED Book • P

Amazing Antarctica

MULTI
level
J•M•P

Written by Sean P. McCollum

Amazing Antarctica



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Focus Question

How does Antarctica compare
to other continents?

Words to Know

continents
extremes
globe
habitat
predators

prey
protect
research
survive

Title page: Icebergs help scientists learn about Antarctica's past and current climate, but they can be dangerous for ships.

Page 3: Tourists explore one of Antarctica's many icebergs.

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The Seven Continents



- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|
| ① North America | ④ Africa | ⑦ Antarctica |
| ② South America | ⑤ Asia | |
| ③ Europe | ⑥ Australia | |

The Seventh Continent

Give a **globe** a spin.

On it you can easily find six **continents**: Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America. These lands have been home to humans for many thousands of years.

Now look at the bottom of the globe. There you will find continent number seven: Antarctica.



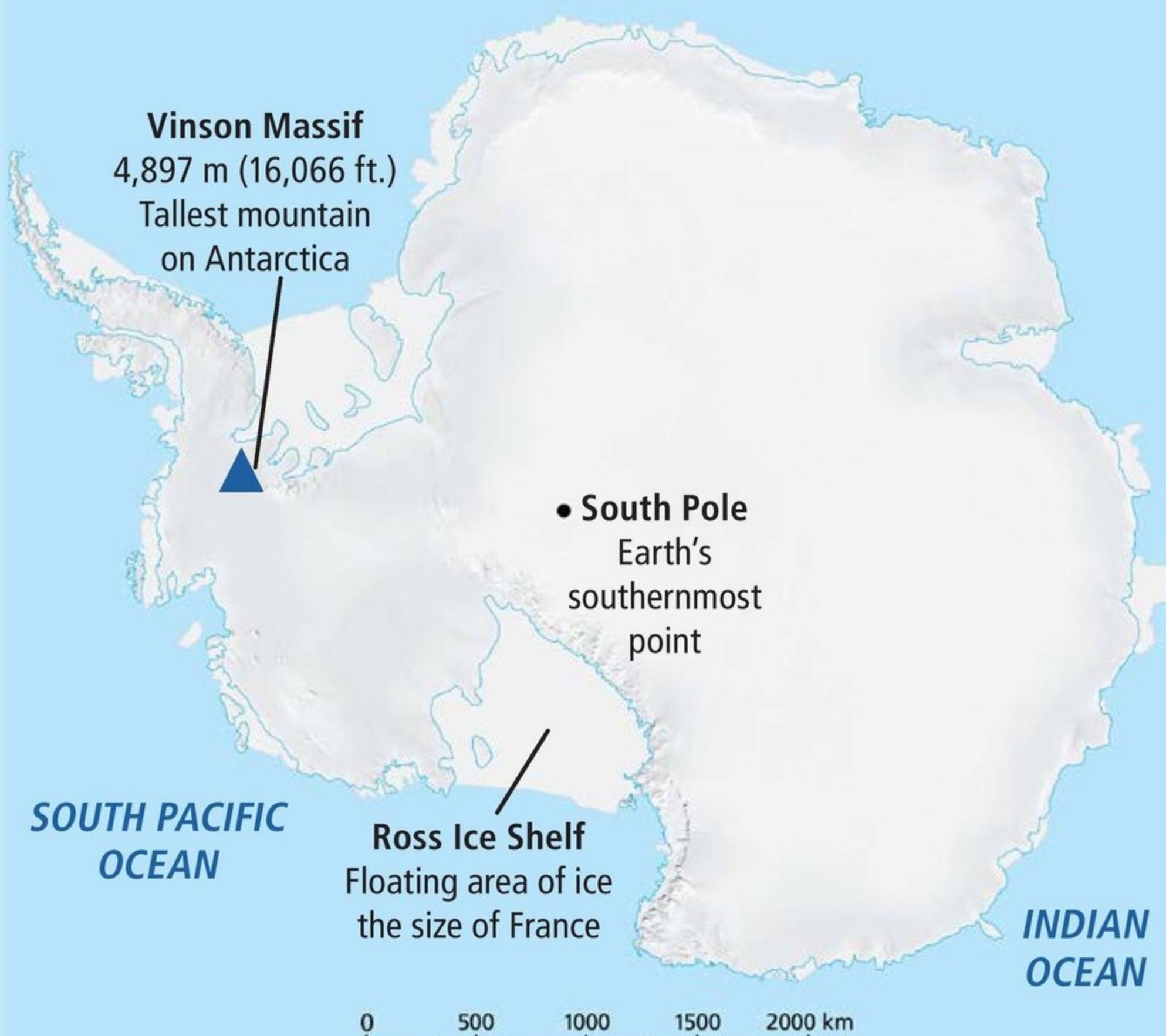
The crew of British explorer Ernest Shackleton works to free their ship from Antarctica's ice in February 1915.

Antarctica is located far from where anyone lives and is surrounded by rough seas. For a long time, no one knew it was there. Many explorers have sailed the stormy Antarctic waters throughout history. However, people didn't actually discover Antarctica until around 1820. No one individual is given credit for its discovery. A few men are said to have sighted it within days of each other. Historians also do not agree on the first people to explore its lands.

Antarctica



SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN



Over the last two hundred years, we have learned that Antarctica is a place of **extremes**. It is the coldest and windiest continent, and it gets the least rain and snow. Antarctica also has some of the most amazing wildlife in the world.



These pictures taken at midnight show that the Sun never falls below the horizon during the Antarctic summer.

Freezing Antarctica

During the winter, Earth's southern half is turned away from the Sun. For a couple of weeks in June and July—winter in Antarctica—the Sun never rises. For a period in December and January—summer in Antarctica—the Sun never sets. Antarctica's location means the weather is usually cold, icy, and windy.

The temperature in summer most often reaches just above 0°C (32°F). In winter, the temperature is almost always below -18°C (0°F).

The coldest temperature ever recorded on Earth was at an Antarctic science station in July 1983. It got down to -89°C (-128°F).



When a snowstorm blows through Antarctica, it can be difficult to tell the difference between sky, mountain, and sea.

This extreme cold is why thick sheets of ice cover Antarctica. At its deepest, Antarctica's ice is 4 kilometers (2.5 mi.) thick.

With all that ice, it might seem surprising that Antarctica is also the driest continent. It gets less than 5 centimeters (2 in.) of rain and snow a year.

Most of Earth is covered by water. However, this water is mostly salt water. Most of Earth's fresh water is frozen in Antarctica's ice. Since snow doesn't melt away during the cold Antarctic summers, ice has been building up over thousands of years.



Icebergs—large pieces of ice that break off and float out to sea—are also called “ice mountains.”



More than a million emperor penguins live in Antarctica.

Life on and Around Antarctica

The bitter weather conditions in Antarctica have made it a dangerous **habitat** for life to **survive**. The continent has no trees, and only low plants, such as moss, grow there. The continent has one native insect: the tiny Antarctic midge.

Almost all plant and animal life on Antarctica is found near the coasts or in the sea. Among the creatures that call the icy Antarctic waters home is the emperor penguin, the largest penguin in the world. It stands more than 1.2 meters (4 ft.) tall.

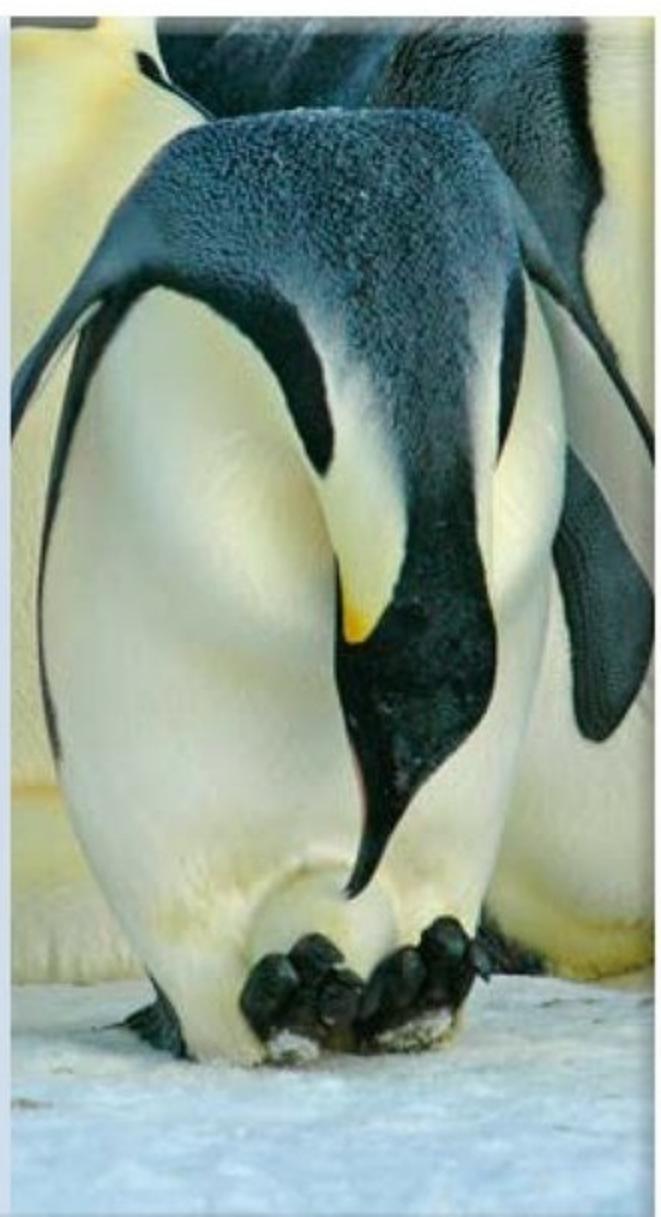


Giant leopard seals spend most of their time alone. This one yawns while resting on a chunk of ice.

Leopard seals are fast, fierce predators that hunt penguins and other **prey** in the open water. The second-largest kind of seal in the world, leopard seals can grow more than 3.3 meters (11 ft.) long and can weigh up to 590 kilograms (1,300 lb.).

Wowser!

A male emperor penguin has a big job when it comes to a baby penguin. It stands on ice and holds an egg between its feet and body for two months. The male doesn't eat for this entire period and loses almost half its weight. If the chick hatches before the mother returns, the father stays with the chick. Once the mother comes back, she feeds fish to the chick. The father can finally go to the sea to eat.





Blizzards often keep the scientists who live at Australia's Mawson Station indoors. They pass the time on the indoor climbing wall, watching movies, or reading.

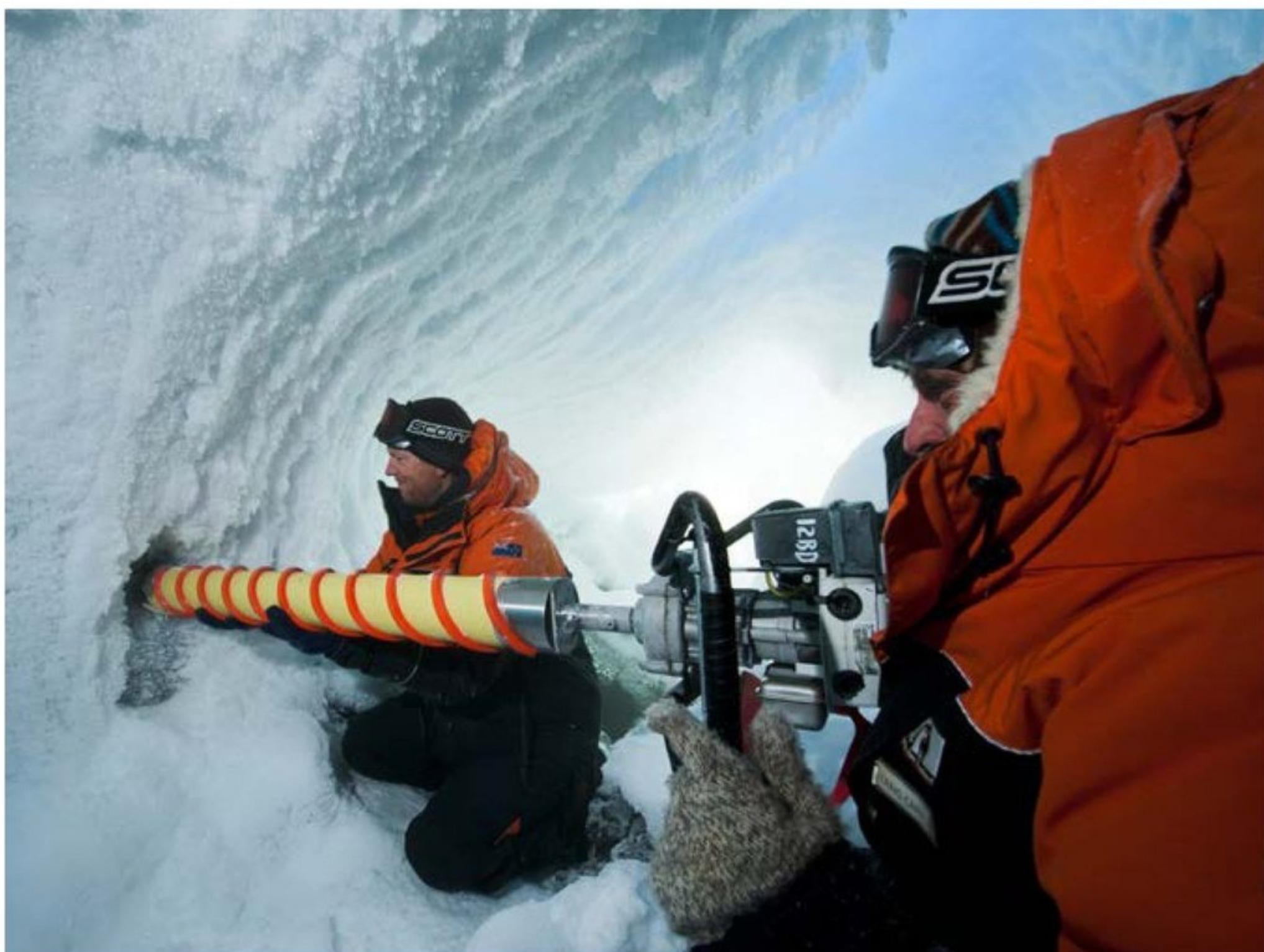
A Playground for Scientists

People around the world have worked hard to **protect** Antarctica's wildlife and land. Thirty countries have about seventy **research** bases on Antarctica. Some are open year-round, even during the extreme winter. Others are only open in summer.

Do You Know?

No one country has control of Antarctica. In 1961, many countries signed an agreement, called a *treaty*. It makes sure no wars happen in Antarctica and scientists can peacefully study there.

Some scientists come to study the wildlife—on land and in the water. For example, some scientists record what penguins eat and how they behave.



Scientists drill into the ice to learn what the weather in Antarctica was like long ago.

Other scientists study Antarctica's ice. They measure how it changes. They also drill down and pull out ice tubes called *cores*. These cores contain bubbles of air that can inform scientists about what the air in Antarctica was like long ago.

Some of Antarctica's giant ice shelves—floating pieces of ice attached to land—have been dropping into the ocean. Scientists are studying the ice melting in Antarctica and other places. It may cause problems around the world someday.



Tourists usually visit during the Antarctic summer, between November and March.

In addition to scientists, thousands of tourists visit Antarctica each year. Most arrive on ships to experience one of the most remote places on Planet Earth.



Colorful clouds fill the sky above Antarctica.

Conclusion

Antarctica remains one of the least-known lands in the world. The cold, ice, and rough seas make it a difficult place to explore and study. However, it's a place of uncommon beauty that offers opportunities to study an extreme habitat.

Glossary

continents (n.)	the main sections of land on Earth, including Africa, South America, Asia, Europe, North America, Australia, and Antarctica (p. 4)
extremes (n.)	conditions that are far beyond what is normal or expected (p. 6)
globe (n.)	a ball-shaped map of the world (p. 4)
habitat (n.)	the natural setting of a plant or animal (p. 10)
predators (n.)	animals that hunt and eat other animals (p. 11)
prey (n.)	animals that are hunted and eaten by other animals (p. 11)
protect (v.)	to guard or keep from harm or danger (p. 12)
research (n.)	a detailed study of a subject, especially to discover new information or to find facts (p. 12)
survive (v.)	to stay alive (p. 10)

Amazing Antarctica

A Reading A-Z Level P Leveled Book

Word Count: 700

Connections

Writing

Pretend you are a scientist studying Antarctica. Use the facts in the book to write a journal entry about what you see and do in a day.

Science

Learn more about emperor penguins. Make a poster about them that includes words and pictures.

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