

# Summary: Antarctica

## The Continent of Antarctica

Antarctica is the coldest, driest, windiest, and iciest continent on Earth. It was the last continent to be explored. It is the only continent with no permanent residents.

Antarctica is the fifth largest continent on Earth. It covers over five million square miles. Only two percent of Antarctica is not covered by ice. The icecap holds about 70 percent of the fresh water in the world. Ice shelves, sheets of ice that connect to land on one side and float on water, line much of the coastline. Areas away from the ocean are colder and drier than coastal areas. Inland winter temperatures from May to August may fall to 100°F below zero or colder.

The Transantarctic Mountains divide the continent into eastern and western parts. The South Pole is the southernmost point on earth. The Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific oceans meet around Antarctica to form the Southern Ocean.

Norwegian whalers first landed on Antarctica by the 1890s. British explorers soon followed. Robert Falcon Scott and Ernest Shackleton led expeditions. Scott lost his life on the harsh land. In 1929, Robert Byrd from the United States was the first person to fly a plane over the South Pole. Today, scientists from more than 25 countries are the main inhabitants of Antarctica.

## Resources

Few living things can survive the cold, dry climate of Antarctica's interior. Just a few lichens, mosses, and insects live there. Animals from tiny shrimp-like krill to enormous whales live in the Southern Ocean, however. Birds, penguins, and seals share the coast. Antarctica has coal and iron, but these would be costly to mine.

Since 1959, more than 30 nations have signed the Antarctic Treaty. This treaty stated that the continent would be used for research. Countries would share the research results. Today, because of the treaty, scientists from around the world gather in Antarctica to conduct research. They examine the icecap and polar melt to see whether human activity and burning fossil fuels are raising worldwide temperatures. This theory is called global warming.



### Before You Read

Find and underline the vocabulary word.

**ice shelf** *noun*, a sheet of ice that floats on water and is connected to land on one side



### After You Read

**REVIEW** Why do you think Antarctica remained undiscovered for so long?

Underline details about the land, its location, and its climate that have affected settlement.

**REVIEW** Why do you think so few people inhabit Antarctica during the winter?

Circle the sentence that discusses the Antarctic winter.