



Name _____

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Antarctica

Antarctica is an ice-covered continent. It lies near the South Pole. It is larger than Australia and just a bit smaller than South America. Antarctica covers 5.4 million square miles. That is about 9.7 percent of Earth's land area. It is not a nation, and there are no citizens. No one lives there permanently. However, several nations have scientific research posts there.

About 98 percent of the continent is covered with ice. Its ice cap holds about 70 percent of all of the fresh water on Earth. At its thickest point, the ice covering Antarctica is about three miles in depth. The ice sheet is so thick and heavy that it keeps most of the land underwater!

Antarctica is the coldest continent on Earth. Average temperatures rarely climb over -31°F. That is still 63°F below freezing! The lowest temperature recorded on Earth was in Antarctica. It was a bone-chilling -128°F. It is also one of the driest places on the planet. There is a great deal of wind but hardly any rain or snow.

Until about eighty million years ago, Antarctica was connected to Australia. We know this because of the fossil record. Fossils of plants, reptiles, and other creatures prove that the continent was actually a tropical paradise at that time.

Check Your Understanding

- Which continent is slightly larger than Antarctica?
 - Australia
 - Asia
 - South America
 - Greenland
- Why do you think there are no native settlements or permanent cities on Antarctica?
 - The climate is too cold.
 - Food would be hard to find.
 - There are no edible plants.
 - all of the above
- How do you know that Antarctica was *not* always as cold as it is today?
 - Australia is not covered with ice.
 - Fossil plants and animals found in Antarctica are from warmer climates.
 - People are living on Antarctica today.
 - Antarctica looks like it will warm up.
- How many degrees below freezing was the lowest recorded temperature on Antarctica?
 - 128°F
 - 160°F
 - 96°F
 - 200°F

