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Special School Photocopy Master Edition

Cool Antarctica Resource Book



Image courtesy of NOAA

by Jane Bourke



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Antarctica – The Last Land

Did you know that Antarctica was the last of the Earth's continents to be explored by humans?

And did you know that people who lived a long time ago knew that Antarctica existed even though they had never ever seen it?

Around 2000 years ago, ancient philosophers referred to Antarctica as **Terra Australis Incognita** which means "unknown southern land". Australia and New Zealand were also known by this name as they had not yet been discovered.

Many people thought the southern lands would be a place worth visiting. However, in those days it was very difficult to move around the planet as this was hundreds of years before the invention of ships and aeroplanes. Back then, exploring Antarctica was about as impossible an idea as travelling to Mars!

NAMING ANTARCTICA



Antarctica was named hundreds of years before it was actually discovered!

Thousands of years ago, ancient Greek philosophers talked about a land that was at the South Pole that would balance the land at the North Pole. The Arctic was named after the Greek word for bear (arktos). From the Arctic, the bear constellation was clear in the sky – just as how the Southern Cross constellation is only visible from southern parts of the world, like Australia. Ant means opposite and so Antarctica means "opposite the arctic" – or opposite the bear!

The people who named Antarctica never even got to know if it even existed!

Who Discovered Antarctica?



Captain James Cook

In 1772, Captain James Cook set off from England in search of a great southern continent.

In January 1774, Cook reached huge ice blocks that stopped him from travelling any further south. At this time, he was yet to sight any land, however, shortly after he went on to arrive at Australia and New Zealand.

Captain Cook decided that any land that was discovered in the Antarctic region would be too harsh to live or farm on, but he did note that he had seen many whales and seals on his voyage. This led to a lot of interest among whalers and sealers from America and Europe.

No one is really sure who the first person was to sight Antarctica.

Some people believe that an American sealer, Captain John Davis, was the first person to walk on Antarctica's shores at the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. According to the history books, Davis wasn't sure if he had reached an island or the actual continent.

Also in 1821, it is thought that an officer and ten men under the leadership of Lord Melville were forced to spend the entire winter on King George Island after their ship was carried away in a storm. The men were rescued the following summer.

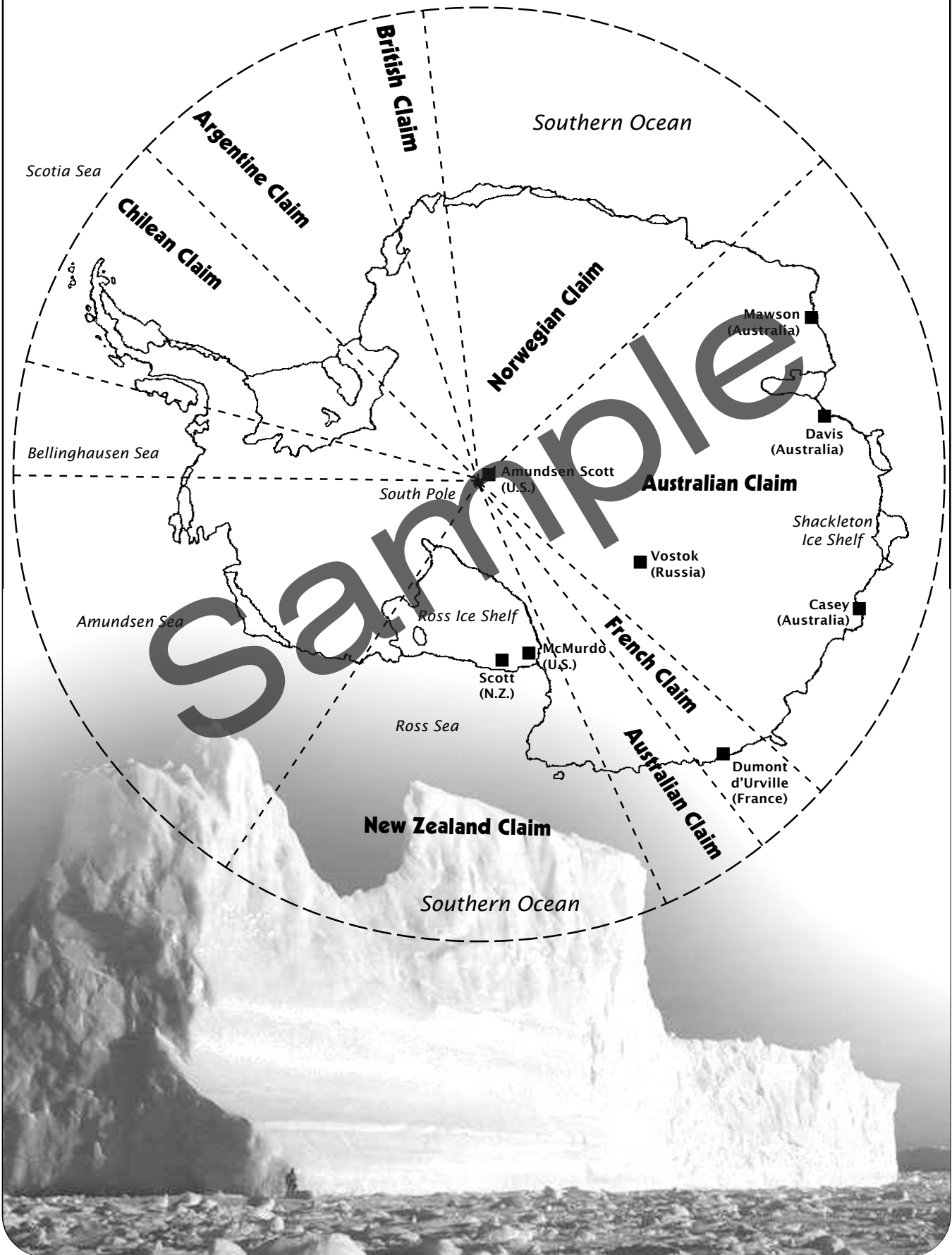
DID YOU KNOW?

Over 7000 tourists have visited Antarctica since 1990.





Antarctic Claims and Bases





Antarctica's Cold Hard Facts!

- Temperatures in Antarctica rarely pass 0° Celsius.
- The world's lowest temperature EVER in was recorded at Vostok station on 21 July, 1983. It was minus 89.2° Celsius on that day. Brrrr!
- A thick layer of ice and snow buries 98% of the Antarctic continent. This layer averages a thickness of about 2200 metres. That's over two kilometres!
- The icecap makes up approximately 70% of the earth's fresh water. If this icecap melted, the ocean levels would rise and all coastal cities around the world would be flooded!
- Some types of algae are able to grow on snow, making the snow appear pink or green.
- Antarctica covers 14 million square kilometres of the earth's surface.
- The average height of Antarctica's land is about 2300 metres above sea level.
- The icecap covers 13.72 million square kilometres and contains 90% of the world's ice.
- Winter involves six weeks of complete darkness.
- Summer has 24 hours of sunlight each day.
- The ice is four kilometres thick at the South Pole.

