



Welcome to Antarctica – the coldest place in the world

Antarctica is one of the most hostile places on Earth, but that hasn't stopped explorers risking their lives to cross the frozen continent.



Henry Worsley died on 24 January 2016

Late last year, an adventurer, Henry Worsley, set out to conquer Antarctica. Inspired by his hero, 20th century explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, Henry set off on an incredible attempt to do what no one had managed – to cross the Antarctic, via the South Pole, completely on his own. He pulled a sledge carrying everything he needed for a journey he hoped would take him less than 80 days to complete.

It was a huge challenge. The vast and icy continent regularly endures temperatures of -44°C with winds of more than 200mph. Many people have perished attempting to cross it. On Friday 22 January, after covering 913 miles in 71 days, Henry Worsley's journey came to an end. He was just 30 miles away from his goal when he called for help. "I have run out of time," he said in an audio message.

Dehydrated, exhausted and ill, he was flown to Chile. Two days later, on Sunday 24 January, Henry Worsley died in hospital from a bacterial infection.

General Sir Nick Carter, head of the army and a close friend of Henry's, described him as "a remarkably brave man".

Henry took Ernest Shackleton's original compass with him.



What is Antarctica?



Antarctica is 1,800 miles from Australia.

Antarctica is known as the frozen continent. It is a huge landmass, almost completely covered by ice. It is so cold, windy and remote that no-one lives there for more than a few months at a time. It is surrounded by the icy Southern Ocean, and divided by a huge mountain range – the Transantarctic Mountains. Antarctica's highest point – Vinson Massif – is almost 5,000 metres above sea level, whereas in some places, the bottom of the ice sheet is more than 2,000 metres below sea level. The water around the coast has many huge floating chunks of ice, known as ice shelves. The largest of these – the Ross Ice Shelf – is as big as France.



Antarctic ice is up to 30 million years old.

FACT!
No people live permanently in Antarctica.



POLE POSITION
An expedition led by the Norwegian explorer, Roald Amundsen, was the first to reach the South Pole on 14 December 1911.



DID YOU KNOW?
In 1899, The British Antarctic Expedition were the first group to spend winter on the Antarctic mainland. Despite the name, there were actually only two Brits in the crew, which was led by a Norwegian.

Antarctic animals



The Southern Ocean is home to several species of seals and penguins, including Emperor penguins and Weddell seals. There are very few land animals – and those that can survive the harsh conditions tend to be very small. Tiny invertebrates (animals without backbones) such as mites and midges live in bare soil at the tops of mountains and in birds' nests.

Discover more about Antarctica at discoveringantarctica.org.uk



A Weddell seal basks in the sun.

Five famous British Antarctic expeditions

Henry Worsley may not have achieved his goal but his incredible effort will go down in history. Here are five other British teams and individuals who have taken on the Antarctic.

1912



Captain Scott's doomed crew, photographed on 18 January 1912.

On 17 January 1912, Robert Falcon Scott became the first Briton to reach the South Pole, along with Edward Wilson, Edgar Evans, Henry Bowers and Lawrence Oates, on the Terra Nova expedition. Beaten to the Pole by the Norwegian, Roald Amundsen, and facing extreme cold and hunger, none of the men made it back alive. You can read Scott's diary of the expedition at spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/diaries/scottslastexpedition

1914

In 1914 Ernest Shackleton set out with a team to cross Antarctica by sledge. Their expedition was cut short when his ship, Endurance, got stuck in ice. He and his men then spent five months camping on ice before they were able to sail for help.



1979



Sir Ranulph Fiennes led the Transglobe Expedition around the world via the North and South Poles. In 2013, 101 years after Scott's death, he and a team tried to cross the Antarctic in winter. They had to give up at a huge crevasse field that was too dangerous to cross in the darkness. Crevasses are deep, open cracks in ice.

1996



David Hempleman-Adams on his way to completing the Explorers Grand Slam.

In 1996, David Hempleman-Adams became the first Briton to walk alone and unsupported to the South Pole. In 1998 he completed the Explorers Grand Slam, having reached both poles and the peaks of the highest mountains on all seven continents.

2000



On 4 January 2000, Catherine Hartley and Fiona Thornewill became the first British women to walk across Antarctica to the South Pole – 680 miles that took more than two months. They trained by running and dragging tyres. Later that month a team of five became the first British women to walk to both the North and South Poles.