

Science at the South Pole



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Jane Roberts is a marine biologist. She worked for two years in Antarctica. Here, she answers your questions.

Is there really a pole at the South Pole?

Yes, there is. It's in front of the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station. In 1911 a Norwegian explorer called Roald Amundsen was the first person to get there, followed by a British man, Robert Falcon Scott, thirty-four days later. Unfortunately, Scott and his team of five all died on the return journey. When the first explorers **reached** the South Pole there was nothing there. Now, several hundred people work at the Station. There's an **airstrip** for small planes, a **canteen**, hot showers, a post office, a tourist shop, a basketball court and a movie theatre.

Who does Antarctica belong to?

Antarctica doesn't belong to any nation. There's no permanent population, but there are bases that look like small towns. Thirty different countries **run** about seventy research stations in Antarctica. People stay there between three and eighteen months. Most people work only in the summer months, but some stay all year round. The population is around 4,000 in summer and 1,000 in winter.

Why did you want to work in Antarctica?

I was studying in London and I read about an exciting research project in Antarctica. I applied for the job, but thousands of other people also applied. I was lucky!

What exactly were you doing there?

I was doing research into marine life. I collected specimens of ice and examined them in the laboratory. There are **layers** of ice thousands of years old! We found the **remains** of a dinosaur. It was in millions of pieces and we had to put all the pieces together like a **jigsaw**. Our research showed us that millions of years ago the Antarctic was much warmer.

What did you wear in Antarctica?

It's extremely cold all year round. When I was doing experiments outside, I wore three pairs of socks and often five layers of clothing. Winter temperatures fall to -80°C and even summer temperatures are below zero at the South Pole. For several months, there's no sunlight at all. Sometimes it's too cold to go outside.

What did you do in your free time?

When it was snowing, we read lots of books and played games. There isn't much to do in Antarctica, but I enjoy reading and I made some good friends there too.

Did you miss home?

No, but I missed colours – it's very white in Antarctica! But I was working all day and it was really interesting work.

