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Antarctica, Is It Really In Danger?

By Julee Mitchelsin

With all of the fervor these days about the dangers of global warming many people are concerned

about the fate of Antarctica. The fears are that the ice that makes up the continent is melting faster than normal and not freezing back as it usually does with a very even ebb and flow. The concerns are that this will eventually raise the sea level enough to put major cities and land masses under water and leave millions of people homeless and/or even dead.

So who are making these claims? Well there are many scientists that have been looking at the earth's climates and weather systems for a long time and trying to make sense of them. The earliest reason for doing this was not to measure the affect of the greenhouse gases that are magnifying the suns intensity and causing the heat to stay within it. They originally wanted to learn about the earth so that they could by recognizing signs be could warn of natural disasters like earth quakes and hurricanes and tsunamis. Since they have kept data to look for these signs they have noticed disturbing trends in things like the average temperature and the increasing sea level and other things like the sized of the ice cap over Antarctica and they seem to only be going in one direction which spells trouble.

Then they start looking for why this is happening, and the buzzword is generally global warming. They cite the increase in certain gases like CO2 which are purportedly on the rise do to the millions of different engines that burn fossil fuels across the world. Supposedly this changes the qualities of the atmosphere that hold in the energy from the sun much like a green house does. What people don't realize is that these are all theories to explain trends in the environment that no one has any clue about. We know that Antarctica melts in places and at certain times and since we have been measuring these things it appears that the land mass has gotten smaller—but this is very flawed thinking.

You see we have only been able to make specialized measurements like this for several decades which may seem like a long enough time to make good guesses about the earth which is thousands of years old (some even say billions). You just can't make definitive statements about trends that may just be natural cycles that are 500 years in length. Even 100 year or 50 year cycles would not have been fully measured yet. So we must cool our jets and take ourselves so seriously. We know a lot less about the melting Antarctica and many other things that seem to be slowly headed toward disaster than we

think.

Julee Mitchelsin is a grade school science teacher with a PhD in earth science and a skepticism about the media that can make you laugh or cry. If you are still interested in the fate of Antarctica you should visit

<http://www.learnantarctica.info>

Antarctica: Ultimate Wilderness

By Steven Cronin

In the distance something stirs. A drifting polar bear searches for food on the edge of camp. Despite the presence of the huge beast, the men are in little danger. The guns take care of that. It is rare for a bear to wander so close. She must be hungry.

For the scientists and professionals who choose to live and work in this unforgiving land, Antarctica can seem a very lonely place. Perched upon a hill or mountain somewhere on this great continent, the dry air allows a clear view for many miles. On one of the rare moments the wind drops, the predominantly white landscape offers an eerie silence. You can feel like the only person on the planet.

What attracts anyone to such an inhospitable place? Despite the valuable science and work that is undertaken here, I believe many would choose to live here anyway. For me, the biggest attraction is the alien landscape, unlike anywhere else on the planet. If man is to one-day land on another world, then this is how I would envisage it. Regardless of the barren wilderness and blanket white surroundings, there is no more fascinating place on earth, probably because it is so different.

Despite the inhospitable environment, Antarctica is testament to the tenacity of life. Temperatures have been recorded as low as -89°C ; katabatic winds have reached speeds of up to 200 mph. In the face of these daunting figures, it seems incredible that anything can exist here at all. Life always appears to find a way.

My favourite Antarctica phenomenon has to be the static icebergs, fixed in position by the frozen sea. As winter approaches and temperatures plunge, the freezing sea slowly renders the icebergs immobile as they become trapped by the ice. Here they remain until the following spring, when the subsequent rise in sea temperatures melt the frozen ocean, allowing the icebergs to set off once more for foreign shores.

During winter it becomes possible to walk out over the sea and stand next to one of the huge icebergs. It is a very humbling experience standing next to an iceberg the size of an office block. In this planet's evolutionary mix, you realize just how insignificant a human being is.

Steven Cronin owns the Sargas Travel online magazine featuring travel reviews, news, inspiration, advice and special offers. For further reading please visit

<http://www.sargas.co.uk>

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