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Antarctica

DISCOVERING THE LAST CONTINENT



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de Sebastián Arrebola - Shoshanah Jacobs

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PROLOGUE

Antarctica. The last virgin continent on Earth. Having never set foot on this land, I can only imagine the feeling of remoteness and solitude that humans, in their daring efforts to explore the hostile continent, have experienced. I suppose the unique, untamed nature strikes the heart of the visitor with humility, reviving ancient feelings.

In this marvelous book, I have discovered with awe the diversity and beauty of the creatures that populate the white continent, along with tales of audacious explorers who braved the elements to quench their thirst for exploration. My father was one of those men. Fully aware of the value of this pristine land for future generations, he

sailed to Antarctica with twelve children from all five continents and raised four million signatures throughout the world to protect Antarctica from human exploitation for fifty years.

Below is an extract of my father's impressions about Antarctica. Today, the Cousteau Society and Cousteau Divers continue his work for the respect and preservation of all life on Earth as do the millions of people he inspired to love and study the Ocean.

Pierre-Yves Cousteau

www.cousteau.org

www.cousteaudivers.org

It is a vast continent, eternally white, which clings to life on the brink of death. The icy air whisks the lungs, and the eye beholds a transparent magic. The enchanting hour of calm and sunshine is swept away by furious blizzards that forgive intruders only by chance. The great southern land was buried under mountains of snow piled up and frozen during tens of millions of years; fossil remains, important chapters in the history of our planet, sleep in their immaculate shroud. All around circulates a silent carousel of giant icebergs ripped from the shore. Dwarfed lichens dot the coastal ice with their timid coloured spots. A fringe of salty

ice advances and then disappears with the season, while on the soft ground the ice melts only for consolidation. The sea sometimes becomes a cloudy red with small shrimp – krill – which the penguins, whales, and – indirectly – the seals gorge themselves upon to survive. All these creatures circulate in the pack, singing strange songs; the fish, "icefish" inject into their blood colourless protein as antifreeze, killer whales with majestic fin mix their breath with the morning mist.

In December 1972, I first landed in Antarctica onboard the *Calypso*. A serene sun shone upon a dusting of snow that had fallen overnight. Heart pound-

ing, I took my first steps but a squeak made me go back. My footprints were smeared with a little grease that contrasted with the blinding whiteness of everything around me. Naively, I felt a rush of shame for failing to clean my boots.

The ice piled up over millions of years on this continent at the end of the world is for mankind like the sword of Damocles: its release would cause the

collapse of most urban centers, Antarctic wildlife clings to life and is at our mercy.'

Jacques-Yves Cousteau

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