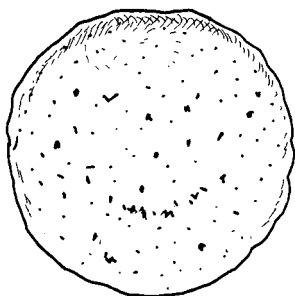


An Expensive Old Biscuit



In the year 2011, a 100 year old biscuit sold for £1250 at a British auction. Why would anyone possibly want to pay that much for such an old biscuit? It wasn't even a whole packet, just one biscuit.

It just happened to be one of thousands of such biscuits taken to the Antarctic by an early British explorer, Shackleton, and his companions when they went looking for the South Pole.

In the early 1900s British biscuit makers Huntly and Palmers made many thousands of such biscuits for British Antarctic Expeditions. It was the time when the whole world wanted to know what the bottom of the world beyond the Southern Ocean was really like and many men joined expeditions to go there. The biscuits were specially fortified with milk protein and an important part of the explorers' diets.

For thousands of years, the Antarctic was a mystery to the rest of the world. No one knew whether it was even a single piece of land because the only way to get to it was to cross a fierce, broad ocean current (known as Antarctic Convergence) of the Southern Ocean which surrounds Antarctica.

There were many strange ideas about it: some thought people who went there would have to walk on their heads, or perhaps

they just fell off the planet; others thought it was a place where cheerful people lived in a lush green world.

We now know that it is a continent, 99 percent covered in hard ice, and on average 8,000 feet deep. It is about 5.5 million square miles in size, bigger than Mexico and the United States put together, but its actual size and shape change with the seasons. The ice never melts, but sometimes pieces break off and float into the ocean that lies round it. These icebergs are dangerous for ships.

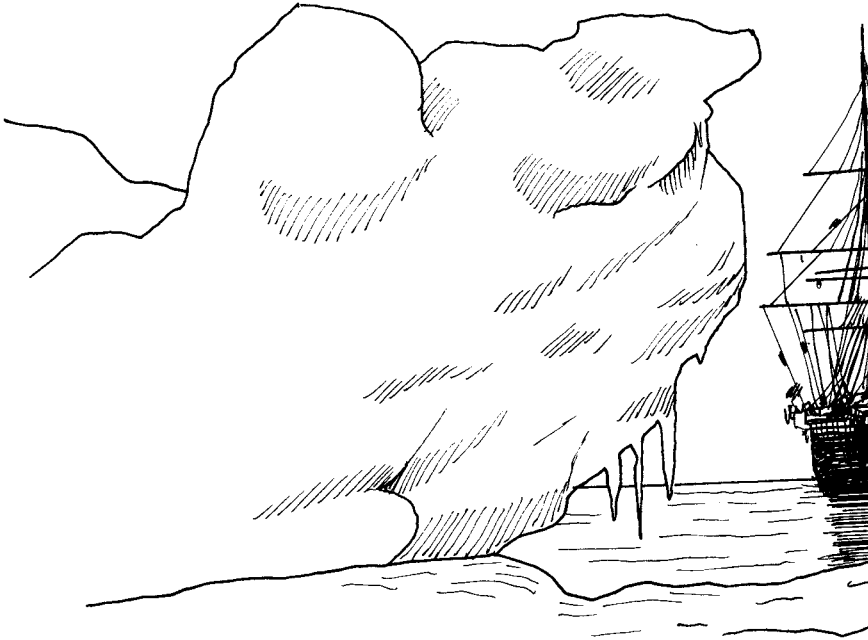
Early explorers like Francis Drake (1570s) and George Shelvocke (1719) got near Antarctica. Shelvocke even said he saw an iceberg, but he never actually found the continent. Then the British Admiralty sent Captain James Cook to look for it. Captain Cook had already explored other parts of the South Pacific Ocean, and he was now commissioned to search a specific area and find out once and for all what was there. His ship was the *Endeavour*, and as well as a crew of ninety-four sailors and a few scientists, he had sheep, pigs, duck, chickens and a goat to provide food for them.



Antarctic Adventures

If you have a globe or a map, this is a good time to look at it and trace Captain Cook's journey. Starting from England he sailed round South America to Tahiti. Then he went South to the 40 degree latitude and sailed right along it. He did not see Antarctica but what he did discover was that if it was a continent it was not attached to any of the other continents people knew about. He also mapped the whole coast of New Zealand, Australia and New Guinea.

What he had seen made him want to go back and explore the mystery of Antarctica. So the British Government gave him two ships, the *Adventure* and the *Resolution*, and he set out again, with instructions to start in New Zealand, go as far south as he could and then sail round the 60 degrees south latitude.

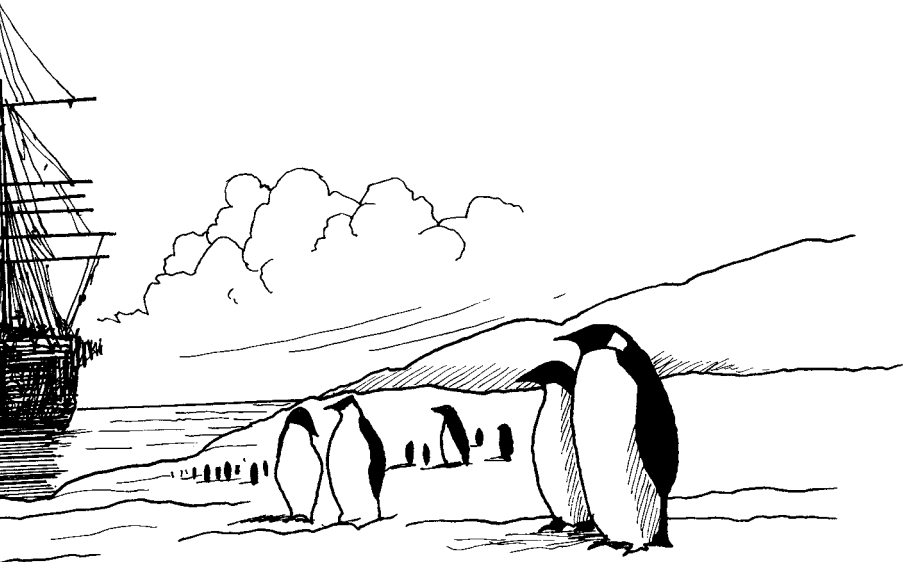


Following these instructions, he became the first explorer to cross the Antarctic Circle and see penguins and seals. But he couldn't go as far as he wanted because of icebergs and fierce storms.

He wasn't about to give up. He returned to New Zealand, restocked with food and in December 1773, went back towards the Antarctic. This time, in January 1774, he got to the 70 degrees south latitude, but still didn't see any land.

After this he decided to give up on looking for the continent of Antarctica. His final comments were:

The risk one runs in exploring a coast in these unknown and icy seas is so very great that I can be bold enough to say that no man will ever venture further than I have



Antarctic Adventures

done, and that the land which lies to the south will never be explored. Thick fogs, snowstorms, intense cold, and every other thing that can render navigation dangerous must be encountered, and these difficulties are greatly heightened by the inexpressibly horrid aspect of the country – a country doomed by nature never once to feel the warmth of the sun’s rays, but to lie buried in everlasting snow and ice.

Because of Cook’s reports sealers came to the Southern Ocean and killed thousands and thousands of seals. They made a lot of money from their furry pelts.

Even though Cook gave up, many other explorers and seal hunters came and had a look. They saw different parts of the coast of Antarctica, but no one could really say there was a continent rather than individual islands.

Then, in 1831 an explorer called James Clark Ross decided to have a look. James had already explored parts of the Arctic Ocean with his uncle John Ross, and discovered the Magnetic North Pole. He now decided he would like to also find the Magnetic South Pole.

After several trips to the Southern Ocean he reached 78 degrees south latitude and came up against a large ice shelf on the southern side of Antarctica. He studied it for the next two summers. But he didn’t land and so didn’t succeed in his goal. But he did see a live volcano erupting, spewing fiery red lava onto the sparkling white slopes. He called it Mount Erebus. Mount Erebus is the most southern active volcano in the world but it doesn’t erupt very often so he was very fortunate to have seen it.

James Ross went home and for the next fifty or so years people again gave up on Antarctica. Even the sealers didn't come much more as there weren't many seals left.

The biscuit at the beginning of this story could have made the difference between life and death for the person who carried it in his pack. By itself one biscuit isn't worth much, but if it's all the food you have then it could mean life. In 1913, a Commander Evans locked some boxes of these biscuits into a hut before leaving Antarctica. Three years later, a small group of men, desperately hungry, looked in the hut for some food and found none. It turned out many years later that ice had got into the hut and buried the biscuits. The men didn't know that, and hadn't dug deep enough.

Sometimes we feel God is far away and doesn't hear our prayers for help. We forget that God is always there, but sometimes we are not ready to listen, or we don't recognise the answer. We might have to wait.

In the book of Acts, you will find the story of how Peter was thrown in prison. The church prayed 'earnestly' for him. And God gave them an amazing miracle: Peter was released from prison! But as he knocked on the door of the house where they were praying for him, the maid got such a surprise she didn't let him in at first! Pray and trust God to answer when the time is right.