

INTRODUCTION

Antarctica, the last virgin spot of land on earth. It takes 20 days on a ship to get to Antarctica but only half as many hours in an aeroplane.

Size: It is twice the size of Australia at 14 million sq km (est.) land area, its coastline is 17,968 km.

Climate: severe low temperatures Change depending on your latitude, elevation, and how far away from the ocean you are; Eastern Antarctica is colder than Western Antarctica because it is higher; The Antarctic Peninsula has the most moderate climate; higher temperatures occur in January along the coastline and are normally just below freezing.

Terrain: About 98% thick is continental ice sheet and 2% of it is barren rock, with average height between 2 000 and 4 000 meters. Mountain ranges go up to up to 4 897 meters high; ice-free coastal areas include parts of southern Victoria Land, Wilkes Land, the Antarctic Peninsula area, and parts of Ross Island on McMurdo Sound. Glaciers form ice shelves along half of the coastline, and floating ice shelves make up 11% of the area of the continent.

This huge island is at the centre of one big and very important argument. Whether it should be exploited for its possible rich mineral content. Or whether it should just be left alone and made a world park.

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In this barren desert for half the year it is light and the other half it is dark.

The Ownership of Antarctica.

Many countrys claim to own Antarctica. The Antarctic Treaty of 1961 does not deny of accept any of these claims and so has avoided disputes over the matter.

The Argument for Development

Antarctica is very rich in minerals and has hidden in it gold, silver, nickel, tin and many other things. It has a commercial amount of coal so coal miners are attracted come and mess up Antarctica.

Antarctica exists today in an ice age. Future economic development of the ice-covered land mass is not very likely. Resource exploitation on the continental shelf is possible but certainly not for many years to come, sea life in the waters surrounding Antarctica is currently being developed economically. This sea life includes whales and a tiny shrimp look-alike animal called krill.

The Russian Expedition survey predicted that the scale of diamond in the huge continent was similar to the amount found in South Africa and Yakutia, in Russia's far east.

So far, the economics of extracting resources from the harsh Antarctic environment have prevented any commercial operations, but Antarctica's climate may not protect its minerals indefinitely. What can prevent such exploitation is a strong, well-supported international agreement. Nations of the Antarctic Treaty System agreed in 1991 to put a halt to the exploitation of minerals when signed a comprehensive Protocol on Environmental Protection (the Madrid Protocol), which banned mining in Antarctica indefinitely. This important agreement came into force in January 1998.

The Argument against Development

Antarctica is really the only unspoilt continent on Earth. Green peace and the governments of some countries believe Antarctica should be preserved as the world's last great wilderness.

But other organisations and countries, would like to set up military bases in Antarctica and exploit the minerals and coal from Antarctica which test have shown are in abundance. They would ruin the only unspoilt continent on earth just for a supply of minerals last might last only 100 years and bring a profit of only 200 million dollars.

The Development Decision

Should development be allowed in the future?

The Choices: -

A/. No development at all.

B/. Limited development.

C/. Some development in specific areas where damage to the eco-structure would be minimum.

D/. Development.

My view is that there should be no development at all for as long as possible but I think that it is unrealistic to expect that Antarctica will be undeveloped forever.

The way I would enforce this "no development" bill would be to: -

1/. Ban tourist trips to the continent.

2/. Stop all development on the existing bases on Antarctica.

3/. Set a five year deadline for completion of any research being carried out on the existing bases and camps.

4/. Insist on the dismantling of all the bases within the next seven years.