The Geography of Antarctica

Antarctica is the fifth largest of the seven continents and is the only continent other than Australia that is an island. Antarctica sits at the bottom of the world over the South Pole of the earth. However, the South Pole is not in the middle of Antarctica; it is west of the center of the continent. Antarctica also includes the islands located near the continent. A peninsula of Antarctica, known as Graham Land, projects towards the southern tip of South America.

Antarctica is bordered by the southernmost edges of the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean. Recently geographers have named this portion of the world’s ocean the Southern Ocean or, alternatively, the Antarctic Ocean. The north boundary for the Southern Ocean is the 60º line of southern latitude. This is not an arbitrary line; oceanographers selected this boundary because the ocean shows physical differences at this line of latitude. The Weddell Sea is an extension of the South Atlantic Ocean while the Amundsen Sea and the Ross Sea are extensions of the South Pacific Ocean.

Even though the entire continent of Antarctica is covered by deep layers of ice, there is bedrock underneath the ice. Before the polar ice caps formed there was land where the ice is now. Scientists tell us that the bedrock under Antarctica has sunk due to the tremendous weight of the ice on top of it. Even though Antarctica is surrounded by salt water in the ocean, the ice that covers the continent is freshwater ice. Antarctica is largest depository of fresh water on earth. About 98% of Antarctica is covered by ice. The small amount of exposed land in Antarctica is classified as tundra biome. Technically, Antarctica is a desert because most of the continent receives very little precipitation.

There are three major mountain ranges in Antarctica: the Transantarctic Mountains, the West Antarctica Ranges, and the East Antarctica Ranges. The Transantarctic Mountains, one of the longest mountain ranges on earth, divide the continent roughly into halves called East and West Antarctica. However the Ellsworth Mountains near Graham Land are the highest mountains of Antarctica and the mountain named Vinson Massif, at 16,050 feet in height, is the highest point in Antarctica.

RI.6–8.1 & RH.6-8.8|© http://www.englishworksheetsland.com