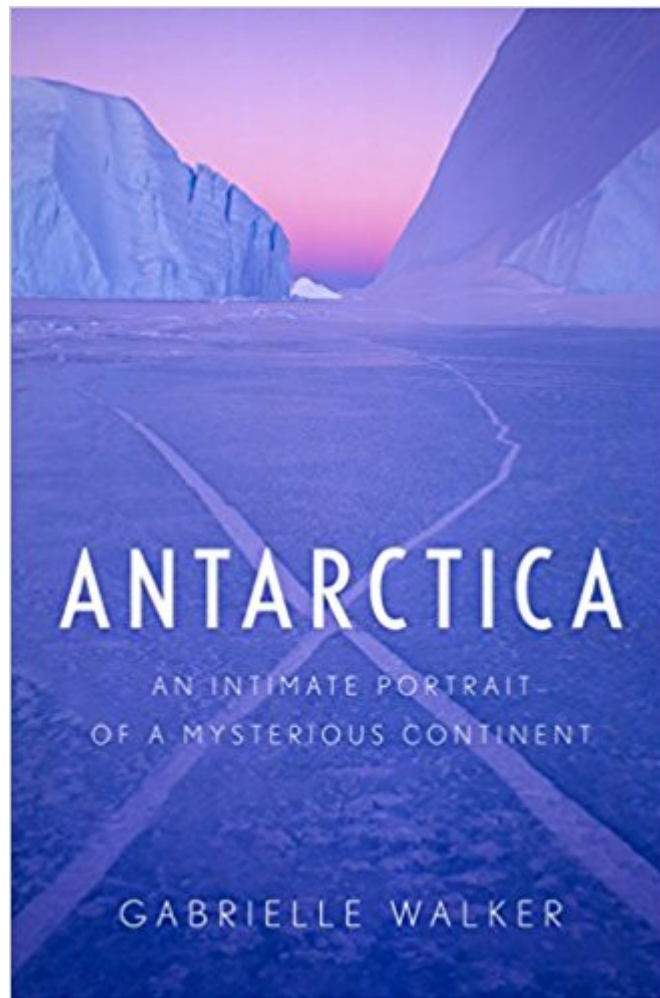


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Antarctica: An Intimate Portrait Of A Mysterious Continent



Synopsis

Antarctica is the most alien place on the planet, the only part of the earth where humans could never survive unaided. Out of our fascination with it have come many books, most of which focus on only one aspect of its unique strangeness. None has managed to capture the whole story—until now. Drawing on her broad travels across the continent, in *Antarctica* Gabrielle Walker weaves all the significant threads of life on the vast ice sheet into an intricate tapestry, illuminating what it really feels like to be there and why it draws so many different kinds of people. With her we witness cutting-edge science experiments, visit the South Pole, lodge with American, Italian, and French researchers, drive snowdozers, drill ice cores, and listen for the message Antarctica is sending us about our future in an age of global warming. This is a thrilling trip to the farthest reaches of earth by one of the best science writers working today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Who travels to Antarctica, and why? Setting aside tourists who sail to the relatively accessible Antarctic Peninsula, Walker (*An Ocean of Air*, 2007) addresses her curiosity to the scientists and support personnel at stations various nations maintain on the ice-encased continent. During several separate journeys, she stayed at a half-dozen outposts operated by the U.S., the UK, Russia, France, Italy, and Argentina and learned the protocols of cold-weather survival, accompanied scientists on their fieldwork, and observed how people cope with the environmental extremes and awesome geographical isolation of Antarctica. Accenting particular individuals she met, Walker notes their motivations to come to Antarctica—usually professional for the

scientists and often an interest in adventure for construction workers and cooks while also paying attention to women who challenged no-girls attitudes on staffing Antarctic stations. Together with the human-interest element, science propels Walker's narrative, which refracts scientists' explanations of their research into penguins, glaciology, geology, astronomy, and climate change. Interspersed with historical vignettes of Antarctic exploration, Walker's account affords a vibrant vicarious experience of traveling around the place on earth most like an alien planet. --Gilbert Taylor

"Gabrielle Walker describes very well current activities on the vast ice sheet, from the constant discovery of new undersea life to the ongoing hunt for meteorites, which are relatively easy to track down on the white ice. For anyone who has ever wondered what it's like to winter at 70 degrees below zero, her account will be telling...Absorbing." --Bill McKibben, New York Review of Books "A dazzling array of narratives throngs Antarctica...Antarctica is still the 'world's most mysterious continent,' as it remains the only one on which humans have never lived permanently. Walker captures that mystique through interviews with people who have made Antarctica part of their lives." --Nature "Walker's a clear explainer and engaging guide, her descriptions evocative...The true protagonist here is Antarctica itself, and in Walker's rendering it easily carries that leading role." --Tampa Bay Times "Walker tells in rich detail what it's like to survive and do science on the only continent never inhabited by human beings. She spends time with dozens of investigators, revealing both their work and the inner workings of their minds...Walker offers a diverse sampling of the seventh continent and the science done there." --American Scientist "A vivid portrait...We are all anxious Antarctic watchers now, and Walker's book is the essential primer." --The Guardian "Walker gained access to a variety of fascinating places and projects. There are fresh and informative sections on the fauna and microflora of this harshest of all habitats, on the use of Antarctica as a terrestrial and cosmic observatory...Walker is also good at sketching the oddly beguiling world of the scientists and support workers who return year after year to Antarctic research stations." --The Telegraph "Hugely informative...Walker uses direct speech to render the material digestible, allowing her protagonists to speak for themselves. She has a gift for lay analogy, as a popular science writer must." --The Spectator "The fascinating story of Antarctica, from the hardships of exploration to its future survival." --The Ecologist "Walker's account affords a vibrant vicarious experience of traveling around the place on earth most like an alien planet." --Booklist

Gabrielle Walker is a scientist who writes like a novelist and the result is a fascinating book about a place that is highly relevant to today's world and what is happening ecologically. Honestly I thought I'd only read the last third which is about the part I'll be visiting. However, as usual I started with the introduction and found I was into the first chapter and didn't want to put it down! I'm reading slowly, taking notes and bookmarking pages: and still haven't gotten to the part I thought would be the only one of interest! I knew Antarctica was an interesting place to go but Walker is enticing me with ideas of how awe inspiring it is. From the theoretical history of how it became frozen and separated into its own land mass to the ecological warning signs for our future and the variety of work being done there it is a book you want to binge read but will force yourself to take it slowly to really internalize every bit. Whether you're going to Antarctica or are just interested in why this spot at the bottom of the world captivates the attention and draws so many people who are not scientists, you will be engrossed in this book. Get it, read it, you'll be so very glad you did.

I chose this book because I thought it would be an overview of Antarctica, a place I've wanted to know more about for a long time. It was that and so much more. It's the perfect place to start learning about the continent. "Antarctica: An Intimate Portrait of the World's Most Mysterious Continent" is a profound narrative of the author's stay on the continent. She spent quite a bit of time there, and shares it all - the scientific studies she visited and took part in, the history she found, the people she met, and the feelings she had along the way. I appreciate that the author didn't get too technical, but the material isn't "dumbed down" either. It's exactly the right narrative for us non-scientists and history nerds. I really couldn't ask more from a book like this. It was a more than satisfying read. Thanks to the fantastic notes the author has left us, including a list of "further reading," it will be easy to find out more about this lonely, dynamic continent. I'll be searching out more of Gabrielle Walker's writings. I thoroughly enjoyed this book.

This is the best book I have ever read on Antarctica - and I have read many. First I borrowed it in hard copy from our local library. I had to sign up on a waiting list to get it. Then I decided I had to own it, so I downloaded it to my Kindle Fire. Now I can go back and read again the parts of this book I found particularly fascinating. It's hard to choose which ones those are, since all of the chapters are full of wondrous facts and stories. No one who has ever dreamed of going to Antarctica should miss this book. If you're planning a trip there, this is a must have, must read.

The book covers the history of the early expeditions in a way that that feels personal, like you're there with the explorers. The science currently happening there is described in a fascinating and accessible way, partly by revealing it through the personalities of the scientists, making you feel as if you're right beside them ever so cautiously, nervously drilling out ice core samples that reveal tens of thousands of years of Antarctic natural history. The window the author provides on to the singular nature of life on "the continent" and the personalities of the people who inhabit it was completely fascinating.

The book is a trip report by a science journalist who visited several research stations in Antarctica to learn what they were doing, what they were learning and what it was like to visit them. As a traveler I enjoyed it very much. As a long time reader of science books in many fields, I wish there was more detail in the science reports. Still, I learned many things, just not as deeply as I prefer.

I've never read about this continent before, and honestly, not even sure why I chose this book. But I started to read diligently, figuring I'd give it a shot. I found I couldn't put it down. It read like an adventure, and it was easy to see and almost feel the scene in the way the author described everything. I learned so much about the area from this book, and I thoroughly enjoyed every chapter!

Fascinating topic, good writer, excellent presentation. A bit harder to appreciate the maps on an ereader, but that is not the author's fault. If you're considering travelling there (don't laugh, 20,000+ folks come as tourists every year), this a well-rounded introduction - history, science, and plenty of personal stories.

This book describes Antarctica with such detail you feel like you are actually there. You will learn so much about this mysterious and intriguing continent. Brilliantly written.

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