ANTARCTIC WORDS

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The Antarctic Dictionary, A Complete Guide To Antarctic English by Bernadette Hince was published by CSIRO Publishing, Australia in 2000. This work has been meticulously researched, with more than 15,000 quotations from about a thousand different sources, giving the reader a unique insight into the language of Antarctica. The world’s most isolated continent has spawned some of the most unusual words in the English language. In the space of a mere century, a remarkable vocabulary has evolved to deal with the extraordinary environment and living organisms of the Antarctic. There is even a little humour here and there!

The dictionary covers the language of Antarctica and its surrounding seas and islands, as well as all the subantarctic islands and other islands south of 40 degrees. It also includes Tristan da Cunha, which is slightly north of this, and the Falkland Islands. These are the only two permanently inhabited places in the entire region. Some of the terms recorded are used in other parts of the world, but often they have different shades of meaning in the Antarctic.

English explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes makes some pertinent comments in his Foreword:

Humans are a restless, adaptable and inventive species. As we have spread around the globe to colonise new environments, both benign and hostile, we have constantly had to invent new words to describe unfamiliar landscapes, identify new plants and animals, report the changing of the seasons and the weather, and to catalogue the new tools and techniques we have needed to survive. Language lubricates the complex social machinery that has driven our evolutionary success.

Inevitably, the exigencies of life in the frozen continent have spawned a new vocabulary. This vocabulary, like the English language itself, is a fresh synthesis of ingredients from other, older languages—the languages of the scientists, engineers, technicians and doctors of the nations that have established permanent bases in Antarctica.

Everyday words sometime take on a whole new meaning in the Antarctic. For example:

DAY generally from sunrise to sunset; at the South Pole, this period is six months long
LAKE an area of clear sea surrounded by pack ice, also called a POLynyA
OASIS an ice and snow-free area of land
TOURIST a summer worker in Antarctica

There are lots of terms relating to the harsh environment:

BERGY SELTZER the fizzing produced when air trapped in a melting iceberg is liberated
DEGOMBLE to disencumber of snow
FUMIGATOR a vicious local wind on the Antarctic Peninsula
GLACIERET a miniature glacier
ICEBERGOLOGY glaciology
JOKULHLAUP a flood of meltwater from beneath a glacier or icecap
MEGABERG an unusually large iceberg
NILAS a thin elastic film of ice on the sea surface
SASTRUGIZED of a snow surface formed into SASTRUGI, ridges of snow hardened by wind
ette Hince was firstly researched, giving the reader a present and living

Wildlife names in the “deep South” are appropriately exotic. There are birds such as the

Fish names are even stranger. Some weird creatures live in the icy waters down there. How would you like to swim into a school of BLOODLESS ICEFISH, BLUNT SCALYHEADS, THREADFIN PITHEADS, CROCODILE DRAGONFISH, DOLLO’S PLUNDERFISH, HUMPHEAD NOTOTHENS, PATAGONIAN TOOTHFISH or LONGFIN ICEDEVILS? Perhaps BATHY-DRACONIDS, CHANNICHTHYIDS, EUPHAUSIIDS, HARPAGIFERS or ICEQUABS would be preferable.

Marine mammals thrive in the southern climes: SPECTACLED PORPOISE, STRAPTOOTHED WHALE, HOURGLASS DOLPHIN, ELLIE (sea elephant), WED (Weddell seal) and ROSS’S SEAL with its four consecutive S’s.

The whaling and sealing industries have a language of their own:

There is also the cynical term SCIENTIFIC WHALING, defined as “whaling for sale of the meat, done in the name of scientific research in order to circumvent regulations banning whaling for consumption.”

Finally, here are some more of my favourite examples of lexical Antarcticana:

SHUGA a spongy porridge-like mass of ice suspended in water
SKAUUK a jumbled impassable field of crevassed ice
SKAVL an irregular sharp-edged ridge of snow.

There are also nesting site names like ALBATROSSERY, SKUARY and PENGUINRY. By the way, PENGUINOLOGISTS study penguins, and a SPHENISCIPHILE is a lover of penguins.
JAFA an egghead, a scientist (acronym for “just another fucking academic”)
KODAK POISONING the imaginary affliction of a subject of frenzied photography
MANFOOD rations for human consumption, as opposed to those for sledge dogs
MIDRATS a meal served or eaten at midnight, short for “midnight rations”
MOOP someone disoriented by changing patterns of light and dark in polar regions (acronym for “man out of phase”)
MUKLUKKED shod in thick-soled mukluk boots
OICERY the office or sleeping quarters of an OIC (Officer In Charge)
PINNIPEDOPHAGE someone who eats seal meat
PLASMAPAUSE the outer boundary of the ionized region of the earth’s upper atmosphere
POLAR BEAR no, there are no polar bears in Antarctica, nor penguins in the Arctic
POLAR ENNUI a darkness of the soul in the polar night
PONT to pose in polar discomfort for a photo (H.G. Ponting, Scott expedition photographer)
QUAD BIKE a four-wheeled two-wheeled cycle (?)
QUIKE a single-seater motorcycle with four wheels
RRRRR also EELEE and ILLI, a dog command meaning “turn left” (or sometimes “turn right”)
SKUA BOX a box where unwanted goods can be picked over and claimed for reuse
SLEDGING BISCUIT a hard and durable biscuit, purportedly for human consumption
SLUSHYING performing the kitchen and cleaning duties of a “slushy”
SNOTSICLE a thread of frozen mucus suspended from the nose of the owner
THUMPER a short piece of heavy rope, used as an aid in administering discipline to sledge dogs
TOSSEL the crest of a rockhopper penguin, formerly made into tossel mats on Tristan da Cunha
TURDICLE the anal version of snotsicle (observed on sledge dogs)
UNWEKA’D unaffected by weka birds (Macquarie Island)
WYZZA a telex message sent or received in the Antarctic (from an Australian telex code standing for “all my love darling”)

It is worth noting that AAAAAAH takes over from AAAATAMAD in W.R. Cooper’s 1876 An Archaic Dictionary as the first dictionary entry containing a consonant.