



Pack ice, with Mount Discovery in the distance. The ice surrounding most of the Antarctic continent hinders any off-shore oil operations.

## ANTARCTICA—a continent under threat

WITH MORE ICE than land Antarctica is a continent unlike any other. Remote from the rest of the world and almost inaccessible during the long polar night of every winter, Antarctica is a lonely place, stunning for its vastness and its pure and desolate beauty.

ANTARCTICA'S interior, a platform of ice averaging 1600 m thick, is the coldest desert on earth and is barren of all but the most primitive life-forms. The withering cold can easily kill those who are ill prepared for it, as Captain Scott discovered.

Yet Antarctica's shores, and the surrounding Southern Ocean, abound with life. The nutrient-rich waters sustain a broth of algae and plankton, which in turn supports great numbers of fish, seals, penguins, sea birds, and (at one

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time) whales. Unlike the human intruders, these animals have all adapted superbly to the rigours of the polar environment.

Why then have people ever ventured into so bleak and hostile a land? Though Cook despaired of the world ever benefiting from "a Country doomed by Nature never once to feel the warmth of the Sun's

rays" (and he did not see the continent), many followed in his wake, keen for commercial promise and national gain.

### Plundered for seals

In the 1820s the Antarctic peninsula and nearby islands were plundered for seals and again in the 1860s to 1880s. By then, too, whalers were looking south, having wiped out the northern whale stocks with the new harpoon gun. The first landing on the continent itself, in Victoria Land in 1895, was made by a Norwegian expedit-