

About Arctic

The Arctic is generally seen as the region at the north of the Earth, within and around the margins of the Arctic Circle.

Discover...

Arctic Ocean

Climate

History

Peoples of the Arctic

- Indigenous peoples of the Arctic
- Political organization and territorial claims

The fauna and the flora

Science

To begin

The name of the Arctic comes from the Great Bear constellation, located to the north (arctos = bear (Greek)). This region takes in the Arctic Ocean, a large part of which is permanent ice (sea-ice) and the north of the continents which surround it: including the Scandinavian Peninsula, the north of Russia and Siberia, of Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Spitsbergen. The geopolitical situation of the Arctic is very different from that of the Antarctic. In fact, the territories concerned are all possessions of the countries encircling the Arctic Ocean (Norway, Russia, Canada, and so on). 

Spitsbergen, and the whole of the Svalbard Islands, is dependent on Norway. However, the archipelago is governed by the 1920 Treaty of Paris signed by 14 countries, subsequently ratified by more than 40 nations. In 1925, Svalbard became an integral part of the kingdom of Norway. However, the terms of the treaty, give the citizens of several different countries the right to exploit the natural resources "on absolutely equal terms". It also declares the complete demilitarization of the islands, but permits the establishment of scientific research stations. For this reason a considerable international community of scientists is based at Ny Ålesund, the location of the French bases Jean Corbel and Charles Rabot.

If the limits of the Arctic Ocean (13 000 000 km² and more than 4000 m depth) are perfectly defined, how can the border of the Arctic regions on land be fixed? By the Arctic Circle, the treeline or by the limit of the land that is constantly frozen at depth, the permafrost? The most commonly

recognized answer is the line within which the air temperature never exceeds 10°C during the warmest months (July). This isotherm, called the Köppen line, coincides quite well with the transition from boreal forest (taiga) to tundra. According to this, **the Arctic would stretch over an area of about 24 million km²**, including 17 million of ocean, a little more than 3 million of continent and nearly 4 million of scattered islands, from the Aleutians to Labrador, with its maximum diameter exceeding 7000 km.

Some definitions...