

Ocean Challenge Live!—The Vendée Globe Solo, non-stop, around-the-world race

WEEK

6 Antarctica

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Next Week:
Climate Change



**By Rich Wilson, Skipper
Aboard *Great American III***

The turning mark in the Vendée Globe is Antarctica. We will not see this cold continent as we circumnavigate it, but we will be affected by it.

Already we have passed Ice Gate #1, located to keep the fleet north of icebergs drifting out of the Weddell Sea. Six more ice gates across the Indian and Pacific Oceans serve a similar purpose. When the Southern Ocean's low-pressure systems hammer the fleet, they will do so with strong winds, big seas, and with frigid air spinning clockwise and north from Antarctica.

Many failed expeditions to the South Pole have proved it a brutal, inhospitable place. Yet it is also a

place that reveals great courage and leadership, as with Sir Ernest Shackleton's legendary expedition.

Diplomatically, the Antarctic Treaty, which reserves the continent for scientific research and prohibits mineral exploitation, is a fantastic example of how people can cooperate internationally when they act as planetary citizens. Research conducted on this massive continent revealed the ozone hole in the earth's atmosphere; information on global warming and the planet's past climate comes from studying Antarctica's ice cores; and the seas surrounding the continent are teeming with penguins, birds, krill, and phytoplankton used for scientific study.

Although sailing past this time, I want to visit Antarctica some day, to see the white, to feel the cold, to experience the bottom of the world.



The Southern Ocean

**By Sam Scott, Associate Curator
Peabody Essex Museum**

Turn your globe on its head so that the continent of Antarctica is at the top. Notice the ring of ocean that encircles the continent. These waters are known as the Southern Ocean, and they have earned the deep respect of mariners for generations. Wind and wave move unimpeded all the way around the globe causing sailors to name the regions south of 70 degrees latitude the Shrieking Sixties, Furious Fifties and Roaring Forties. In addition to strong winds and massive waves, there are also icebergs with which to contend. Rich will be sailing into these waters as he rounds the Cape of Good Hope and turns the bow of *Great American III* for the long run eastward.

For much of the long passage toward Cape Horn, the closest continental land mass to Rich and *Great American III* will be Antarctica itself—the coldest, windiest and driest place on earth. Human contact with Antarctica began in the 19th century, and the long difficult journey across the Southern Ocean to this cold continent delayed a sustained human presence there until the 20th century.

The Antarctica Treaty System, begun in 1959, prevents any nation from claiming territory on the continent and promotes international scientific research. Long thought to be far beyond the reach of human impact, Antarctica is now seen as one of our best barometers for measuring the pace and magnitude of global climate change.

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