

Ross Sea



The Ross Sea region is accurately called the 'Gateway to the South Pole,' since the explorers of the Heroic Age who sailed these ice-choked seas gained a crucial foothold on the continent for exploration of the interior. James Clark Ross, for whom the sea is named, pushed through the Ross Sea pack ice in February 1842, becoming the first to reach the Ross Ice Shelf, so incomprehensibly large that his men referred to it simply as 'The Barrier.'

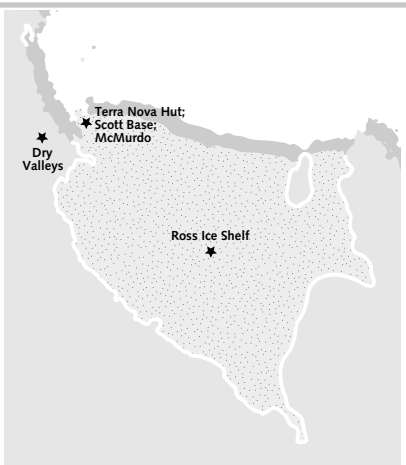
This region boasts Antarctica's richest historic heritage. Most stirring of all are the wooden huts left behind by Scott and Shackleton on Ross Island at the Ross Sea's southernmost reach. The huts at Cape Adare, the first structures ever built on the continent, remain today for those lucky enough to get ashore at this difficult site. And if the Ross Ice Shelf didn't periodically calve huge sections, there would be even more history to see, but Amundsen's base at Framheim in the Bay of Whales, plus all five of the Little America stations covered by drifting snow, have long since gone to sea inside giant tabular bergs.

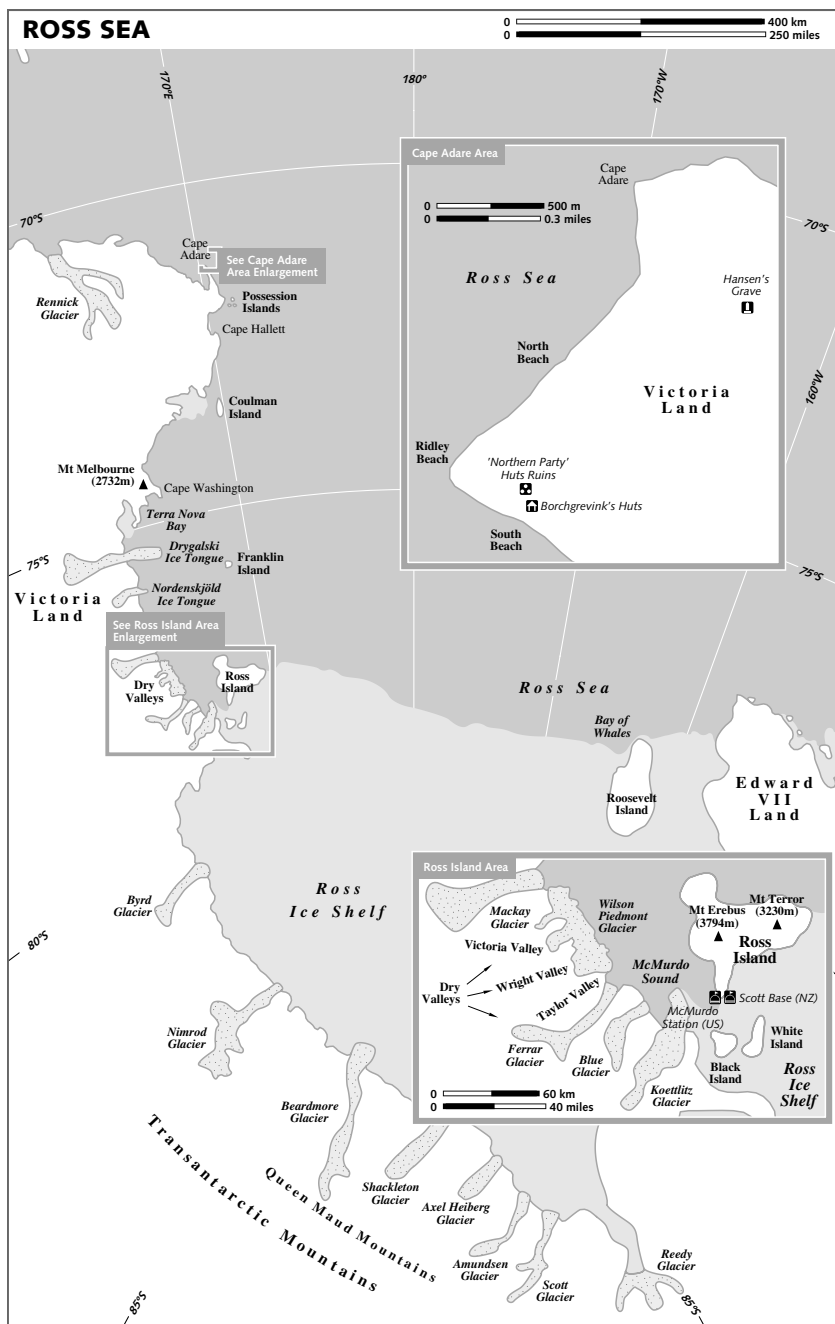
The volcano Mt Erebus, the mysterious and otherworldly Dry Valleys and the awe-inspiring Ross Ice Shelf are three additional prizes won by travelers persistent and fortunate enough to reach this relatively inaccessible part of Antarctica.

The Ross Sea is infrequently visited, with just a couple of voyages going to the region each year (compared with the hundreds of trips to the Antarctic Peninsula annually). Even then, heavy sea ice sometimes prevents them from reaching Ross Island.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Feel the chill of the ghosts of the polar party who never returned to Scott's **Terra Nova Hut** (p296)
- Land atop the magnificent **Ross Ice Shelf** (p300) via helicopter and enjoy a memorable glass of bubbly
- Visit the small museum inside one of the three original buildings remaining at **Scott Base** (p290)
- Puzzle over the fantastic natural wind-sculptures called ventifacts in the **Dry Valleys** (p288)
- Peer into the marine aquariums at McMurdo station's **Crary Lab** (p295) to see local sealife up close





CAPE ADARE

This northernmost headland at the entrance to the Ross Sea was named for Britain's Viscount Adare, member of parliament for Glamorganshire, by his friend James Clark Ross, who discovered the cape in 1841. Here is Antarctica's largest **Adélie rookery** – 250,000 nesting pairs – as well as two sets of historic huts. Unfortunately, Cape Adare is an extremely difficult landing, with heavy surf and strong offshore winds usual. Because of the penguin rookery, helicopters cannot be used except very late in the season. Between 200 and 500 people land at Cape Adare annually; the exact number varies with the weather.

One of the first landings on the Antarctic continent – approximately the fifth, in fact (see the *Earliest Antarctic Landings*, p29) – occurred here on January 24, 1895, when Captain Leonard Kristensen of the whaling ship *Antarctic* landed a party including expedition leader HJ Bull and Carsten Borchgrevink.

Borchgrevink's Huts

Four years after Kristensen's landing, Borchgrevink was back at Cape Adare as the leader of the *Southern Cross* expedition, which landed in 1899. Two weeks later, two prefabricated huts had been erected, the remains of which can be seen today just back from Ridley Beach, which Borchgrevink named for his mother. These are the oldest buildings in Antarctica.

Here, a party of 10 spent one of the loneliest Antarctic winters ever, being the only humans on the continent, although they had the company of 90 dogs.

When they were occupied, the huts must have felt something like rustic fishing or hunting cabins. In *First on the Antarctic Continent*, Borchgrevink wrote:

On the ceiling were hanging guns, fishing tackle, knives, mittens, chains, and odds and ends. The bunks were closed after the plan followed by sailors on board whaling vessels, with a small opening, leaving yourself in an enclosure which can hold its own with our modern coffin; and, like this, it is private; for some minds it is absolutely necessary to be alone, out of sight and entirely undisturbed by others. It was by special recommendation from the doctor that I made this arrangement and found that it answered well.

Borchgrevink's huts have outlasted the 'Northern Party' huts (see p285), even though they are 12 years older, because they were built from sturdier materials – interlocking boards of Norwegian spruce.

The accommodations hut, which housed all 10 men, was 5.5m by 6.5m. Upon entering the hut, an office/storeroom is to your left and a darkroom to your right. Both were once lined with furs for insulation. Continuing inside, a

THE HISTORIC HUTS

Only by entering the historic huts of explorers can one truly sense what it must have been like on early expeditions. In the black-and-white photos of the era, explorers crowd around a table or pack together in groups of bunks. When you step inside Scott's hut at Cape Evans, you suddenly realize that those men didn't crowd together just for the photographer – this was how they lived every day. Note also the rough construction of the huts' interiors – the buildings were only expected to be in use for two or three years, so they were built in a hurry, without having their corners squared off or rough edges sanded.

Today, the huts are all locked. A representative of New Zealand's Antarctic Heritage Trust (AHT), which maintains and conserves the huts, will accompany you into the hut to monitor your visit. AHT representatives are not policemen, but caretakers. They're also very good guides, familiar with the huts through their restoration and conservation work, and they can point out things visitors would otherwise miss. One good suggestion, which the guides may share with you, is to keep backpacks, life jackets, fire extinguishers and other gear at least 10m from all huts so their modern look doesn't spoil your photos.

David Harrowfield's handsome book *Icy Heritage: Historic Sites of the Ross Sea Region*, available from AHT, is fascinating reading. It gives details on 34 sites and includes dozens of photographs, many in color and many published for the first time. The AHT representative on your ship will also distribute brochures about each hut.

stove stands to the left, a table and chairs are on the left past the stove, and five of the double-tiered coffinlike bunks line the remaining wall space. Borchgrevink's bunk was in the back left corner, on the top. The hut had papier-mâché insulation and a single double-paned window. Be sure to look out for the fine pencil drawing of a young Scandinavian woman on the ceiling above one of the bunks. Despite Borchgrevink's careful planning, the huts were not, apparently, comfortable homes. Australian physicist Louis Bernacchi wrote of leaving Cape Adare: 'May I never pass such another 12 months in similar surroundings and conditions.'

The stores hut, to the west, is now roofless. It contains boxes of ammunition that Borchgrevink brought in case the expedition encountered large predators such as polar bears. (He was the first to winter on the continent.) Coal briquettes and stores barrels litter the ground outside this hut.

Today the huts are completely surrounded by an Adélie penguin colony, and care must be taken to avoid disturbing the penguins. The Antarctic Heritage Trust (AHT), which is working to conserve the huts, re-roofed the accommodation hut and installed support braces during the 1989–90 season.

To limit the possibility of damage, only four people (including the AHT representative, who will accompany your cruise or come over from Scott Base) are permitted inside the Cape

Adare huts at one time. In any case, there's not much room inside. Only 40 people are allowed in the area of the huts at one time.

Hansen's Grave

The *Southern Cross* expedition's biologist, Norwegian Nicolai Hansen, died on October 14, 1899, probably of an intestinal disorder. Tragically, Hansen married shortly before leaving for Antarctica and had a daughter, Johanne, whom he never saw. His deathbed wish was to be buried on the ridge above Ridley Beach, so his expedition mates built a coffin and dynamited a grave up on the stone ridge for the first-known human burial on the continent. Dragging Hansen's heavy coffin up the steep incline was a major effort.

When *Southern Cross* returned, a graveside memorial was held and an iron cross and brass plaque were attached to a boulder on the site. Later, when Victor Campbell's men used the ridge as a lookout for *Terra Nova*, one of them spelled out Hansen's name with white quartz pebbles.

Visitors to the site in 1982 restored the inscriptions.

Unfortunately, the safest route up the 350m ridge is blocked by an Adélie penguin colony, so the gravesite is effectively off-limits unless your ship has a helicopter and the weather cooperates for flying.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR VISITING HISTORIC ANTARCTIC HUTS

These guidelines have been established by the Antarctic Heritage Trust to minimize the adverse effects of visitors. Please observe this code at all times.

- Reduce floor abrasion. Thoroughly clean grit and scoria, ice and snow, from boots before entering.
- Salt particles accelerate the corrosion of metal objects. Remove any clothing made wet by seawater, and any sea-ice crystals from boots.
- Many areas are cramped and artifacts can be accidentally bumped. Do not wear packs inside.
- Handling artifacts causes damage. Do not touch, move or sit on any items or furniture in the huts.
- When moving around the sites, take great care not to tread on any items. Many may be partially covered by snow. Do not disturb or remove anything from around the huts.
- Fire is a major risk. You are strictly forbidden to smoke or use combustion-style lanterns or naked flames in or around the huts.
- As a visitor, you should record your name in the book.
- Flash photography is permitted inside the huts.