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ANCIENT ANTARCTIC CLIMATES

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Last year three members of Admiral Byrd's expedition climbed a glacier about 280 miles from the South Pole. In the rocks at its summit they found a deposit of coal. Previous expeditions had found coal at other places in Antarctica, and it now appears that the coal fields of that ice-bound continent may be among the largest in the world.

The coal fossils brought back by explorers have revealed to geologists a general idea of the climatic conditions that prevailed in the Antarctic at the time the coal was forming; supposed to have been somewhere around 250 million years ago. The climate was mild and humid, but also very windy. On the wind-swept hills plants were rather scarce. In the valleys, however, there was a luxuriant swamp vegetation of ferns and trees.

Geological evidence also tells us something about Antarctic climate at other remote epochs. There were long periods when the land was a cold desert, though not glaciated. There were others when it was a warm desert. Great glaciers appear to have formed for the first time between twenty and twenty-five million years ago.

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