

Polar Forest

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Scientists Say There Was a Forest at the South Pole 90 Million Years Ago

What image do you have in your head of Antarctica? You might think of penguins, freezing temperatures or even icebergs. It seems that 90 million years ago, things were a world away from what they are today.

A team of scientist found evidence that there was a rainforest in Antarctica. So, how did they find this out? Well, they drilled some very deep holes and took soil samples. This told them about the climate in Antarctica during the time of the dinosaurs.

In the samples, they found the fossils of plant roots. This shed light on the climate at the South Pole long ago.

Scientists believe the Antarctic had a swampy landscape and there were forests found there like those found in New Zealand today. It would have been much warmer too. The average temperature would have been 12°C. In the summer, this rose to 19°C. By contrast, it can get as cold as -60°C in Antarctica today.

The evidence also suggested that west Antarctica had the same amount of rain as Wales, in the UK, today.

During the winter in Antarctica, there can be months without sunlight. The scientists say this was the same 90 million years ago. But, unlike today, plants could still grow during the four months of darkness.

Professor Tina van de Vlierdt said that temperate rainforests were still “able to grow close to the South Pole.” This was due to the warm climate.

But what do we know about the Earth 90 million years ago? Experts call this period the Cretaceous era. It was when the mighty Tyrannosaurus rex existed.

Last year, a fossil of a huge sea reptile that lived in Antarctica during the Cretaceous era was found. It was called an Elasmosaurus and it had an extremely long neck.

Now scientists have found out about the rainforest, who knows what they will learn about the dinosaurs that lived there.

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