

Death Valley and the Blood Falls

The McMurdo Dry Valleys in Victoria Land, Antarctica, were discovered by the British Navy commander Robert Scott in 1903. Upon discovery, Scott saw that there were no trees, plants, rodents, or even molluscs, unlike elsewhere on the coast of Antarctica, so he called it "Death Valley". Located at the end of the valleys is a waterfall whose flow, which comes from an underground lake, contains dissolved salt and iron, making the water always appear blood red and earning it the name "Blood Falls". Even more bizarre, this is some of the driest land in the world because the speed of the wind – as high as 320 km/h – keeps the air dry and makes it almost impossible for rain and snow to fall. The geography of many of the valleys even prevents water or ice from flowing through them to the sea.

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The surface of the McMurdo Dry Valleys has terrain very similar to that of Mars, which opens up opportunities for scientists to study Mars on Earth. Scientists also use the temperatures and the rate of melting ice near the valleys to make meteorological assessments, allowing them to precisely track the progress of global climate change.

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What makes the blood falls red?

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Why are the dry valleys dry?

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What makes the dry valleys useful?