

PRESS RELEASE

CELEBRATION OF BELGIAN ANTARCTIC PIONEERS RAISES CLIMATE AWARENESS

03 10 2023

CLIMATE, THE ENVIRONMENT AND BIODIVERSITY ([/EN/CLIMATE-ENVIRONMENT-AND-BIODIVERSITY](#))

Belgium was among the very first countries to explore the Antarctic continent. A new exhibition in Brussels to celebrate its pioneering first scientific expedition offers intriguing insights into how the global climate – and that of Antarctica in particular – has changed in the 125 years since the crew of the steamship *Belgica* became the first people ever to spend a winter on the southern polar ice.

“In search of... the end of the world!” runs from 4 October 2023 to 4 February 2024 at the King Baudouin Foundation’s BELvue museum. Visitors will embark on a voyage of their own, into the past, present and future of Antarctica, to a planet that is gradually reaching the limits of its resources, and discover how they can help steer us toward a sustainable new world.

The exhibition recalls the extraordinary human achievement of the two-year journey as well as its vast trove of data and observations – which are still being drawn on by today’s scientists. Commanded by Belgian naval officer Adrien de Gerlache, the small, multinational crew, from six countries, undertook the first major international scientific expedition to Antarctica, eschewing the territorial and commercial ambitions typical of the age. Among them were a young Norwegian, Roald Amundsen, who would go on to make his name by beating Britain’s Captain Scott to the South Pole, and Frederick Cook, an American physician who later tackled the North Pole. Along with Polish and Romanian scientists, they survived an entire year trapped in pack ice, probing into the uncharted southern continent.

The Antarctica they left behind is not the same today: the ice cap is melting, species are under threat... Our Earth is reaching its limits. The extraction and consumption of natural resources is causing significant climate disruption. The exhibition takes the pulse of a planet that is running out of breath, challenging our own survival. But it doesn’t end there: the audience, and youngsters in particular, will also be able to explore practical actions that offer new prospects for the future of humanity.

Several themes form the common thread of the exhibition: human challenges 125 years ago and today, scientific research, the future of Antarctica and the consequences of the ice melting, including those here in Europe. The whale also plays a role: it is a metaphor for the depletion of the planet’s resources and the threats it poses, but also for the real hope for a new, liveable world. Because - as the exhibition makes clear - if we save the whale, we also participate to save the planet.

The adventure of the *Belgica’s* crew is illustrated with documents, photographs and objects from the expedition. Maps, infographics and never-before-seen samples and plants from the polar voyage, contributions from meteorologists, glaciologists, climate experts and even a clinical psychologist, theatrical special effects and interactive displays offer a broad insight into the challenges of tomorrow.

Curated by Belgian geographer, climate expert and TV weather presenter Jill Peeters, with special effects by Pièce Montée, the exhibition is an initiative of the King Baudouin Foundation in cooperation with *de Gerlache Polar Memory*, a non-profit run by the expedition leader’s descendants, the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, the Royal Library of Belgium and the Meise Botanic Garden.

The *Belgica* left Antwerp in August 1897 and reached mainland Antarctica five months later. It returned to Belgium in November 1899.

Download :

· **Press file** (https://media.kbs-frb.be/en/media/11006/Belgica_press_EN)

· **Photos in high resolution** (<https://images.kbs-frb.be/gn5VBozkMI>)

Practical information

“In search of... The end of the world! A climate expedition aboard the Belgica”

From 04.10.2023 to 04.02.2024

BELvue museum

Place des Palais 7
1000 Bruxelles

Free admission

Trilingual exhibition (FR, NL, EN) - visitor guide available in all three languages

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