Behind the news

A visit with royalty, meeting the Prime Minister and a flight over the South Pole were all part of an extraordinary day for Anil Zirek, as KELLY BROWN finds out.

Isik College student Anil Zirek, 16, visited Antarctica as part of a Royal Society of Victoria expedition to mark the 100th anniversary of the positioning of the South Pole.

Picture: JULIE BEST N296O900

In awe of the icy pole

JANUARY 17, 2009 is not a day 16-year-old Anil Zirek will easily forget. It is already shaping his future: skewing his original dreams of studying medicine to instead becoming a medic on an Antarctic station.

The Isik College student from Meadow Heights was one of 52 students selected and sponsored from across the world to be a young science ambassador on a Royal Society of Victoria expedition. The journey marked the 100th anniversary of the positioning of the South Pole as a landmark.

The day before the flight he and the other young ambassadors received speeches from Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, historians and scientists on the importance of the South Pole marking and about Antarctic explorers Douglas Mawson, Edgeworth David and Alistair McKay.

At 8am the next day the adventure began when he boarded a plane at Tullamarine with a ticket to a “mystery destination”. It was a 12-hour return flight to the most “beautiful” scenery Anil had ever seen.

“The Antarctic is the last frontier, the last unexplored area of earth,” Anil said. “The beauty of it all was quite amazing.

“At first you were just looking for an iceberg. Then there was pack ice and then ice one and a half metres thick with all these mountains and crevasses.”

It was an educational trip of a life time for Anil, with in-flight talks from scientists and explorers who had spent time on Antarctic stations. “It was just fantastic,” he said.

“To think with global warming my children or their children may not be able to see the same thing is just a horrific thought.”

Anil said the inspirational stories from those who’d lived at the stations — including having to go outside every three hours to clear the frozen carbon dioxide off air vents — had inspired him to one day become part of the Antarctic mission as a medic.