

Eruption update: Island in British Overseas Territory is growing in size

November 23 2005

A rare volcanic eruption is expanding the size of an island in British Overseas Territory. Spectacular new satellite images show that Montagu Island, an erupting volcano in the South Sandwich Islands, South Atlantic has grown by 50 acres (0.2 km²), equivalent to 40 football pitches in the last month.

Researchers from the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) and the Hawaii Institute of Geophysics and Planetology (HIGP) were alerted to satellite data showing a large and fast flowing lava flow that is pouring into the sea like a huge waterfall.

Dr John Smellie, a leading authority on volcanoes from BAS said, "Red hot lava has formed a molten river 90 metres wide that is moving fast, possibly several metres per second and extending the shoreline on the north side of the island. This event is special because Montagu Island is mostly ice covered and it's very rare that we get to make direct observations of eruptions under ice sheets."

"My work usually involves studying Antarctic rock formations to find out how past eruptions affected the growth and retreat of ice sheets over the last 30 million years. This opportunity to monitor a live eruption and see how it affects ice cover is priceless."

Dr Smellie plans to fly over the volcano in the New Year to get more close-up views for his research. "It will be the highlight of my career" he says.

Source: British Antarctic Survey

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