Fissure to Give Birth to New Sea

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The Associated Press (AP) has reported the discovery of a fissure that could soon develop into a new ocean basin in the northeast of Ethiopia. The fissure, which has been examined by scientists from Ethiopia, America and Europe, is 37 miles long and 13 feet wide.

It reportedly split open in September 2005, three weeks after an earthquake struck the barren region of Boina, 621 miles northeast of Addis Ababa. The scientists believe it could take up to a million years for the fissure to transform into an ocean.

The research team of eighteen experts is led by Dereje Ayalew of Addis Ababa University. Speaking to the AP about the discovery Dereje said, "This is unprecedented in scientific history because we usually see the split after it has happened. But here we are watching the phenomenon." The team presented its discovery at a week-long American Geophysical Union meeting that ended in San Francisco on Friday 9 December.

Cindy Ebinger of the Royal Holloway University of London described the finding as amazing. Using sensitive scientific instruments beneath the earth's crust, the team has gained a dramatic insight into how its processes work. Dubbed the Ethiopian Afar Geophysical Lithospheric Experiment, the study has also attracted researchers from the universities of Leicester and Leeds,

The Afar fissure would eventually tear eastern Ethiopia from the rest of the African continent, creating an ocean in the gap. Each year, the fissure would widen by 0.8 inches. The crust beneath the Afar region is

similar to that under the Red Sea. Once formed, the ocean will attract water from the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.