

In this unit you will learn how an erupting volcano has changed a Caribbean island forever.

A paradise island

At the start of 1995, 11 000 people lived on the island of Montserrat in the Caribbean. Some farmed for a living. Some worked in the island's few factories. But most depended on the tourists who came to enjoy the peace on this paradise isle.

Then, on 18 July, life on the island began to change forever. The volcano, asleep for nearly 400 years, began to waken.

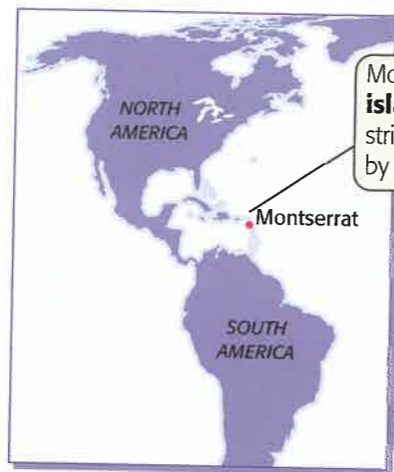
The volcano awakens

The first signs were rumbling noises, and showers of ash, and a strong smell of sulphur. The government acted quickly. It called in **vulcanologists** (volcano scientists) to check or **monitor** the volcano, and made plans to move people to safety.

That was way back in 1995. Twelve years later, in 2007, the volcano was still busy!

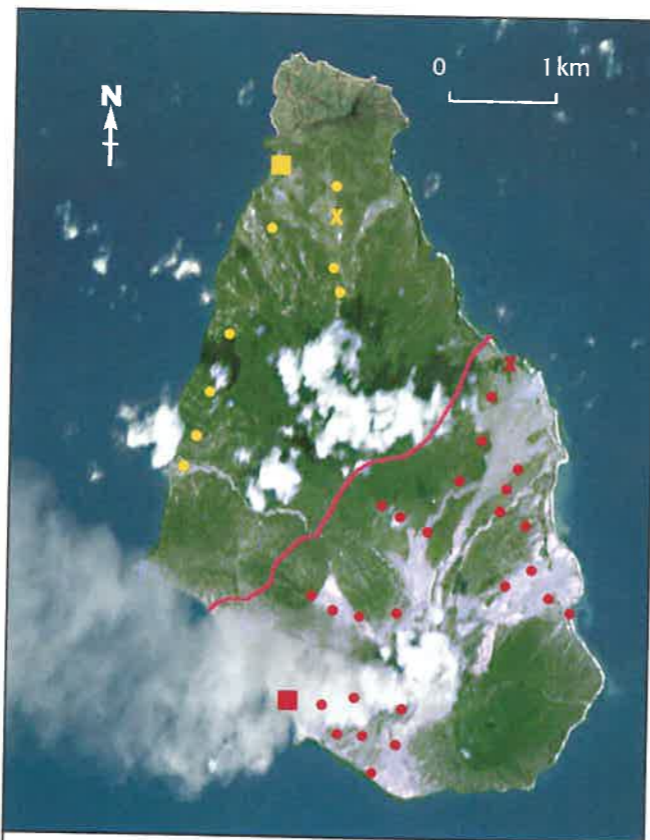
- ◆ Over the years, it has blasted out clouds of dust and ash that turned the sky black.
- ◆ It has grown domes full of lava that glowed at night before exploding.
- ◆ Many pyroclastic flows have raced down the slopes. Some have turned rivers into mudflows.

The vulcanologists watch it night and day. But they can't predict when it will go back to sleep again.



Montserrat is part of this **island arc** – a curved string of islands created by volcanic eruptions.

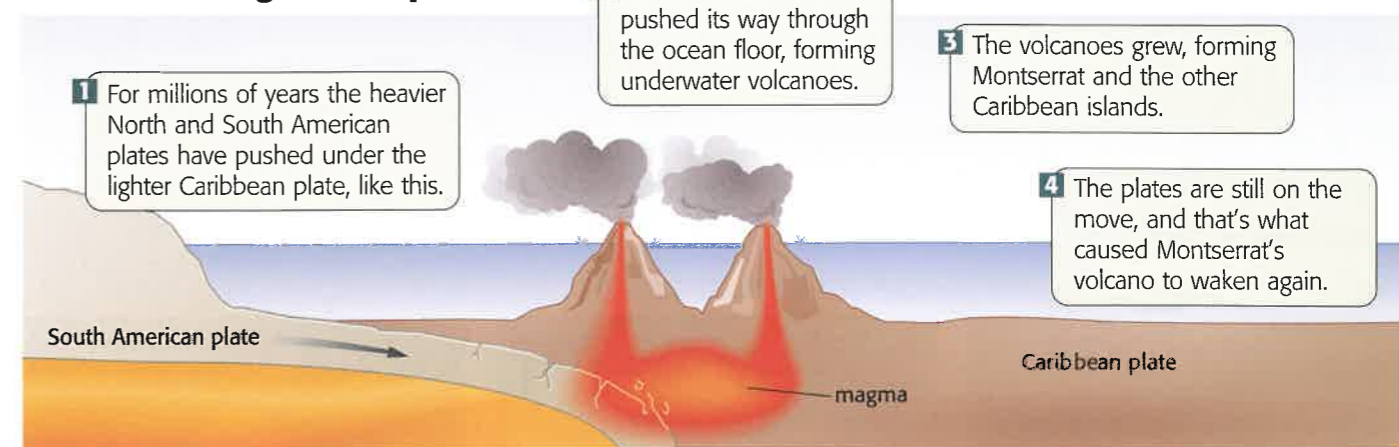
▼ Montserrat from the air. Spot the volcano!



- Key**
- capital (Plymouth) destroyed
 - X airport (destroyed)
 - small settlements, abandoned or destroyed
 - ~ out-of-bounds below this line (January 2007)
 - proposed new capital (Little Bay)
 - X new airport (2005)
 - undamaged small settlements

◀ Just another pyroclastic flow on Montserrat.

What's causing the eruptions?



People on the move

As the volcano grew more dangerous, people were moved from the south of the island. Some went to the 'safe' area in the north, to stay with friends or in shelters. Some went to other Caribbean islands, or to relatives abroad. By April 1996 the south of the island was empty.

But some refused to stay away. On 25 June 1997, pyroclastic flows killed 19 people who had crept back to work on their farms.

Life goes on

Today, only 4500 people are left on Montserrat, in the north of the island. The south is still out of bounds. (If you are caught there you will be fined and may even be sent to prison.)

There is not much farming now, since so much of the land is ruined. People depend on grants from the UK and the European Union. But they are trying hard to attract tourists again. A new airport was opened in 2005. A new capital is being built around the small port of Little Bay.

But people can't forget about the volcano. Every so often a dark plume in the sky, or a shower of ash, or a rattle of pebbles, reminds them.



▲ Out of action... forever?

Your turn

- 1 Explain in your own words why the volcano on Montserrat is erupting.
- 2 Look at the photo on page 90. It shows Plymouth, the capital of Montserrat, destroyed by the volcano. You used to live there. Write a letter to your cousin in Burnley describing what Plymouth looks like now.
- 3 How will the eruptions on Montserrat have affected:
 - a farmers? b hotel owners? c taxi drivers?
- 4 Montserrat hopes to attract tourists again – as a volcano island! You are in charge of tourism.
 - a Draw a sketch map of the island, showing the volcano, the new airport, and the safe zone.
 - b Mark in where you would put a new tourist hotel.
 - c What activities will you lay on for tourists?
 - d How will you make sure the tourists are safe?
 - e What kind of souvenirs will you sell them?
 - f Make up a slogan to attract tourists to the island.
- 5 Montserrat has received over £200 million in aid, since the volcano awoke. Much of this was from the UK, since it's a British Overseas Territory (or colony). Some people think the island should just be closed down.
 - a Give some arguments in favour of this.
 - b Give some arguments against it.
 - c If you had to make the final decision, what other information would you need?