

BOOK REVIEW

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ISLAND OF FIRE – THE NATURAL SPECTACLE OF THE SOUFRIERE HILLS VOLCANO, MONTSERRAT

In 1995 the Soufriere Hills volcano on Montserrat erupted, the start of a modern period of activity which continues today. The responsibility for monitoring the volcano and providing warning for the residents of the island falls to the scientists of the Montserrat Volcano Observatory, who have published *Island of Fire – The Natural Spectacle of the Soufriere Hills Volcano*.

This book is an interesting combination of science and art, capturing views of the volcano as well as providing explanations of the eruption. The public has no doubt seen many pictures of the volcano by night and day. At the height of the activity volcano souvenirs provided a source of income for some Montserrations. This book, compiled by the scientists who for over a decade and a half have studied the volcano goes beyond the scenic shots, providing spectacular close-ups of lava domes and pyroclastic flows, taken from vantage points inaccessible to others

There is also a human aspect to this book. Any resident of the island can identify with the picture of the ash being shoveled from the roof of an abandoned building which acts as a landing pad for the helicopter, or the school bus ploughing its way through fresh ash surrounded by a cloud of grey. The pictures of destroyed buildings and dead wildlife record the toll of the volcanic activity, which also took 19 lives. The book also gives us an idea of what is entailed in monitoring an erupting volcano, and how important the work of the Montserrat Volcano Observatory is in ensuring the safety of the island's residents.

The greatest value of the book though, lies in the explanation of the science behind the pictures in language which everyone, including students, can understand. The text demystifies the volcanic activity of Soufriere and explains many of the phenomena which residents of Montserrat would have observed.

Island of Fire is an important addition to the chronicling of the activity of the Soufriere Volcano, one of the few andesitic volcanoes which show pyroclastic type eruptions, but it can also be used as a teaching aid up to high school level. For anyone with an interest in volcanoes, Island of Fire is a unique combination of reference book and coffee table book well worth owning.