

Deep-sea volcano a hotspot for mysterious life

Associated Press

GEOLOGIST SEAMOUNTS, Hawaii — The turquoise waters became darker and darker, and squiggly glow-in-dark marine creatures began to glide past in the inky depths like ghosts.

The three-man submarine went down, down, down into the abyss and drew within sight of something no human had ever laid eyes on: Cook seamount, a 13,000-foot extinct volcano at the bottom of the sea.

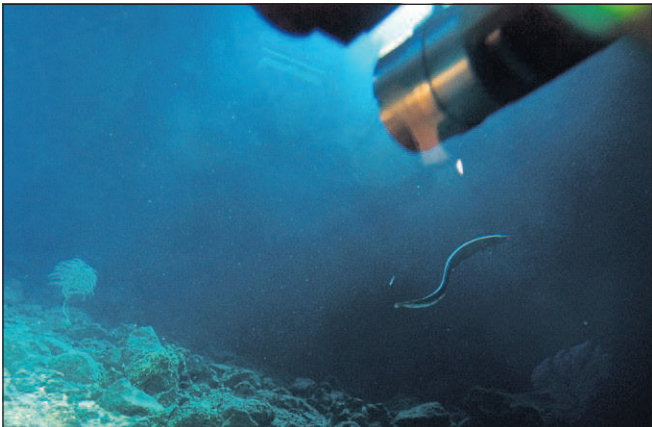
Scientists aboard the vessel Pisces V visited the volcano earlier this month to examine its geological features and its rich variety of marine life, and an Associated Press reporter was given exclusive access to the dive. It was the first-ever expedition to the Cook seamount by a manned submersible.

Among other things, the researchers from the University of Hawaii and the nonprofit group Conservation International spotted such wonders as a rare type of octopus with big fins that look like Dumbo’s ears, and a potentially new species of violet-hued coral they dubbed Purple Haze.

Conservation International hopes to study 50 seamounts, or undersea volcanoes, over the next five years.

“We don’t know anything about the ocean floor,” said Peter Seligmann, chairman, CEO and co-founder of Conservation International. “What we know is that each one of those seamounts is a refuge for new species, but we don’t know what they are. We don’t know how they’ve evolved. We don’t know what lessons they have for us.”

During the Sept. 6 dive, the submarine splashed into the water, and as it dove, the only sounds were radio communications from the



AP Photo/Caleb Jones

An eel swims between two submersibles on the summit of the Cook seamount, seen from the Pisces V submersible during a dive to the previously unexplored underwater volcano off the coast of Hawaii’s Big Island on Sept. 6.

surface, the hum of an air scrubber that removes carbon dioxide from the passenger chamber, and the voices of the crew. The thick, hot tropical air inside the steel sphere became cooler and drier as the submarine descended.

“We don’t know what we’re going to find,” said Conservation International’s Greg Stone, a marine biologist on board. “There will always be the unexpected when you go into the deep ocean.”

Halfway to the volcano’s summit, which is 3,000 feet below the surface of the Pacific, no sunlight penetrated.

The only light that could be seen from the submarine’s face-sized windows was the bluish glow of the vessel’s own bright lights. Occasionally, bioluminescent creatures drifted past in the darkness.

Stone and subpilot Terry Kerby, who helps run the Hawaii Undersea Research Laboratory at the University of Hawaii, watched as the volcano and its rugged basalt walls hundreds of yards high came into view.

Seamounts are either active or dormant volcanoes that rise dramatically from the bottom of the ocean and never reach the surface. They

are hotspots for marine life because they carry nutrient-rich water upward from the sea floor. Seamounts are believed to cover about 18 million square miles of the planet.

Cook, situated over 100 miles southwest of Hawaii’s Big Island, is part of a group of undersea volcanoes known as the Geologist Seamounts that are about 80 million years old and could hold many new animal species, as well as elements such as nickel and cobalt that mining companies could extract.

“My goal today is to ... find out what’s living on them, find out how they support ocean life, what their effect is from ocean currents and essentially what drives the ocean, what makes the ocean what it is,” Stone said. “Seamounts are a key part of that, and something which humanity knows very little about.”

Within minutes of the vessel’s arrival at the summit, life began to appear — a starfish clinging to a rock, joined shortly after by eels, sharks, chimaera (also known as “ghost sharks”), shrimp, crabs and two rare Dumbo octopuses. One of the octopuses changed color from white to pink to reddish brown as it swam by.

Officer killed man less than a second after command

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A Southern California police officer gave a man less than a second to raise his hands before opening fire and killing him, a federal appeals court noted Friday in rejecting the officer’s request to dismiss a wrongful death lawsuit against him.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco said Tustin Police Officer Osvaldo Villarreal couldn’t reasonably have feared for his safety when he shot 31-year-old Benny Herrera after responding to a domestic dispute call in December 2011.

That determination ran counter to the Orange County District Attorney’s Office, which said in 2013 that the shooting was reasonable and justified because Villarreal fired after Herrera ignored orders to show his hands.

A video captured by a police dashboard camera shows otherwise, according to the 9th Circuit judges who cited the footage.

“Less than a second elapsed between Villarreal commanding Herrera to take his hand from his pocket and Villarreal shooting him,” the court wrote. “Just as Herrera’s hand came out of his pocket, Villarreal fired two shots in rapid succession ... The command and the shots were almost simultaneous.”

The video has not been made public and is under a court seal.

The seven-page review of the case by the Orange County District Attorney’s Office does not mention the existence of a video and appears to rely heavily on Villarreal’s own statements.

Sonia Balleste, the senior deputy district attorney who wrote the review, said Friday that she didn’t immediately recall the case or why the review didn’t mention the video but that she was sure she “looked at all the evidence that was available.”

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