

ICELAND

Volcano comes to life after 6,000 years

Associated Press
 REYKJAVIK, Iceland — A long dormant volcano on the Reykjanes Peninsula in southwestern Iceland flared to life Friday night, spilling lava down two sides in that area's first volcanic eruption in hundreds of years.

The glow from the lava could be seen from the outskirts of Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, about 20 miles away.

The country was not anticipating evacuations because the volcano is in a remote valley.

The Fagradals Mountain volcano had been dormant for 6,000 years, and the Reykjanes Peninsula hadn't seen an eruption of any volcano in 781 years. There had been signs of a possible eruption recently, with earthquakes occurring daily for the past three weeks. But volcanologists were still taken by surprise because the seismic activity had calmed down before the eruption.

Iceland, located above a volcanic hotspot in the North Atlantic, averages one eruption every four to five years. The last one was at Holuhraun in 2014, when a fissure eruption spread lava the size of Manhattan over the interior highland region.

In 2010, an eruption of the Eyjafjalajokull volcano in Iceland sent clouds of ash and dust into the atmosphere, interrupting air travel between Europe and North America because of concerns the material could damage jet engines. More than 100,000 flights were grounded, stranding millions of passengers.

But the Fagradals eruption shouldn't interfere with air travel, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said Saturday.



The Fagradals Mountain volcano, on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, began erupting Friday.

Icelandic Met Office via AP

U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

Crossings on pace for 2-decade high as smugglers exploit hopes for Biden

BY KATE LINTHICUM, MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE AND PATRICK J. MCDONNELL

Los Angeles Times

MISSION, Texas — As dusk closed in on the Texas border with Mexico, Melania Rivera and her 3-year-old twin boys climbed up the banks of the Rio Grande, at last setting foot in the United States.

Her former partner and their two older children had been in the U.S. since 2019, waiting for their asylum cases to be heard. Rivera, whose home in Honduras was destroyed by a hurricane in November, set out to join them after a relative in Virginia urged her to come quickly, saying border restrictions had relaxed under President Joe Biden.

"He told me there was an opportunity," said Rivera, 42, who was intercepted south of the city of Mission with seven other migrants by local police working with the Border Patrol.

The belief that the end of the Trump administration has opened the border has spread throughout the region alongside another rumor: Young children are the ticket in.

Human smugglers began pushing those ideas soon after Biden won the election in November, accelerating an exodus from Central America that was already underway after devastating back-to-back hurricanes and economic decline caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The message that now was a propitious time to head north was amplified on social media, television and radio in Central America.

Border crossings recorded by U.S. authorities climbed steadily through the summer and fall as countries lifted coronavirus lockdowns, then rose sharply this year, jumping from 78,442 in January to 100,441



Julio Cortez/AP

Migrants in custody wait Friday at a U.S. Customs and Border Protection processing area in Mission, Texas. The Biden administration is facing growing questions about why it wasn't more prepared for an influx of migrants at the southern border.

in February — nearly triple the total for February 2020.

The increase is evident in the streams of families trudging north through the jungles of southern Mexico, in the crowded shelters of northern Mexican border cities and in southern Texas, where in recent days a constant flow of people has crossed the swiftly moving Rio Grande on rafts and turned themselves in to federal authorities.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said that U.S. agents are on pace to intercept more migrants on the southwest border in 2021 than they have in the last 20 years.

While the majority of those crossing are single adults, as has traditionally been the case, there has been a dramatic spike in the number of children making the trip.

Last month, 9,457 people under 18 arrived at the border without adults, up from 3,490 in February of last year and, according to the Washington Office on Latin America think tank, the fourth-highest monthly total in a decade.

More children are also coming with relatives. The number of migrants arriving in "family units" — which by government

definition include at least one child — was 19,246 last month, up from 7,117 a year earlier.

"A lot of them think that now that Trump is gone, if they arrive with children it will be easy to cross into the United States," said Gabriel Romero, a Franciscan priest who runs a shelter in southern Mexico that assisted about 6,000 migrants during January and February — compared with 4,000 all of last year.

"Easy" is an exaggeration, but there is some truth to the rumors.

Strict immigration policies were a Trump hallmark, such as a program known as Remain in Mexico that forced 70,000 asylum seekers to wait in Tijuana, Juárez and other Mexican border cities while their cases wound through U.S. courts.

Then there was the obscure public health statute known as Title 42 that the Trump administration invoked last year in response to the coronavirus crisis. It directed border authorities to rapidly expel hundreds of thousands of people with no due process or opportunity to pursue asylum. Biden has maintained some of those Trump restrictions, while loosening others.

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