



## MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM

### NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **EXPEDITION TO EXPLORE REMARKABLE DEEP-SEA MOUNTAIN; PUBLIC CAN FOLLOW DAILY PROGRESS VIA NOAA WEB SITE**

Biologically rich deep-sea mountains called “seamounts” have long been known to science. The waters around seamounts are incredibly productive—feeding grounds for everything from fishes to sharks, albatrosses and sperm whales. They may be home to vast fields of sponges and forests of centuries-old corals, deep-water relatives of the tropical corals. But by and large, little is known about what lives on the slopes of these ancient undersea volcanoes.

Beginning Friday, May 17, the secrets of one seamount will be revealed. A team of researchers from four marine science institutions will explore the Davidson Seamount 1,300 meters (4,000 feet) below the ocean’s surface off California’s Big Sur coast, just outside the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The public can share their daily discoveries through a web site created by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The expedition will continue through Friday, May 24.

Based on a preliminary survey of the seamount conducted in May 2000 by the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI), scientists expect both biological and geological surprises. They will use a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) to take their closest look ever at the 2,300-meter (7,874-foot) high underwater mountain—the first deep-sea feature to be formally categorized as a seamount.

The expedition will use MBARI’s research ship, the *Western Flyer*, and its state-of-the-art ROV *Tiburon*, a robotic submersible that can dive 4,000 meters (13,000 feet) below the ocean’s surface. In addition to MBARI researchers, the expedition team will include scientists from the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Moss Landing Marine Labs.

The team will travel 120 kilometers (75 miles) southwest of Monterey to study the Davidson Seamount. Headed by chief scientist Dr. Andrew De Vogelaere, research coordinator for the Monterey National

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Marine Sanctuary, the explorers will be an interdisciplinary team including geologists, marine biologists, educators and resource managers, with a wide range of expertise.

They will be studying the living creatures found on and around the seamount, taking geological samples and mapping the 40-kilometer (25-mile) long seamount.

What they discover will be available to the public on a daily basis on NOAA's Ocean Explorer web site, <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/explorations/02davidson/davidson.html>. Photos, video clips and diary entries by the scientists will be posted there. Visitors to the web site will also have opportunities to email questions about the work for the scientists to answer.

"Seamounts are biological hot-spots in the world's oceans," De Vogelaere said. "Because they're distant from shore and in deep water, they haven't been heavily exploited—yet. We're eager to bring new scientific tools to the project, and to use the web site to reach the public as we're making discoveries about this unique and special place."

Explorers will be expanding on the video surveys of bottom communities made earlier by MBARI, collecting biological samples of seafloor organisms, and conducting surveys of fish, seabird and marine mammal populations around the seamount. If possible, they will also use special darts to collect tissue samples from passing sperm whales for genetic studies to understand broader population patterns among these marine mammals.

Some deep-water animals could be collected and become part of the Monterey Bay Aquarium's living deep sea exhibit, "Mysteries of the Deep." Video from the expedition could ultimately be featured in the aquarium's "Exploring Monterey Canyon" auditorium program.

"The expedition may also help shape ocean policy," De Vogelaere said. "If seamounts are as biologically rich as we believe, what we find could show that they're in need of special protection."

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**This is a joint release from the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute and Moss Landing Marine Labs. Background photos, maps and video clips from the 2000 expedition are available through the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (see [www.mbari.org/news/news\\_releases/2002/may08\\_davidson.html](http://www.mbari.org/news/news_releases/2002/may08_davidson.html));**

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