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'Understanding volcanoes and society: the key for risk mitigation'



La Soufriere Volcano National Park – management and protection of an important Heritage site.

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La Soufrière is the youngest volcanic centre on the island of St. Vincent in the Lesser Antilles Island Arc. It is a spectacular volcanic landscape that annually draws hundreds of Vincentians and foreign visitors to its slopes. It occupies the northernmost third of the island and is considered to be the only volcano likely to erupt on St. Vincent. Its edifice consists of an older strato-cone (2.5 km diameter) and a younger pyroclastic cone (1.6km diameter; 300-600m depth), which has been the source of historic (post 1700) eruptions, nestled within this crater. The older stratovolcano is thought to have been active during the late Pleistocene (~700 ka). The impact of past eruptions and dominance of the volcano on the physical landscape has ensured that it maintains a special place on the Vincentian psyche. It is the focus of an annual Volcano Awareness Week during which various activities are undertaken to raise awareness among the population of the hazards and phenomenon associated with an erupting volcano. La Soufriere is a national park protected by various legislative measures and managed by the National Parks Authority. The record of visitors to the site indicates that the peak visiting periods are March-April and July-August. Recent efforts have been made to enhance the site's full potential as a recreational facility with a 'visitor' facility constructed that enables safe parking and access to various facilities. Plans have been made for further development of the site as a major attraction and key component of local efforts to promote Heritage Tourism on the island. This presentation shares the experiences of organisations and individuals involved in the management, protection and scientific work on La Soufriere. The importance of and challenges to continued efforts at environmental promotion and hazard awareness is reviewed in the context of the site.