How the events unfolded...

• On 18 July 1995, Montserrat’s ‘Chances Peak’ volcano began to awaken after being dormant for almost 400 years. Small earthquakes and eruptions of dust and ash were the first warning signs that a more violent eruption might occur.

• By the end of 1996, 11,000 people living in the danger area had been evacuated to a safe zone on the north of the island, or to other Caribbean islands. Some even fled to the UK.

• On 25 June 1997, the ‘Soufrière Hills’ volcano erupted, burying two thirds of Montserrat under volcanic rock and ash. The capital city of Plymouth, farmland, homes and Montserrat’s only airport were lost forever.

• Further major eruptions occurred in 2001 and 2003.

• In 2010 a partial collapse of the lava dome caused floods of gas, dust and ash to flow down the sides of the volcano at high speeds (pyroclastic flows) and an ash column to rise 15km into the air.

• By 2012 only 4,500 residents remained on Montserrat, all in the safe zone to the north of the island. However, moderate pyroclastic flows are still occurring and scientists agree that the eruptions are not yet over.

What is life like on Montserrat today?

• A new capital town is being constructed in the Little Bay area in the north of the island. A name for the new capital is yet to be decided.

• Some residents who fled the island have returned to live in the safe zone as the infrastructure (roads, communication networks and water supply) has been improved with the help of overseas aid.

• Tourism is increasing as visitors are attracted to the new volcanic landscapes and the spectacular natural scenery and wildlife.

What can we learn from Montserrat?

Vulcanologists (volcano scientists) continue to monitor the volcano using special cameras and equipment. These measure any changes in the ground or the air which may indicate that another major eruption is about to occur. In fact, the Soufrière Hills volcano is now one of the most closely monitored volcanoes in the world as scientists hope to learn more about predicting the behaviour of volcanoes in the future.
Is Montserrat still feeling Hot Hot Hot?

1 Using the information in the article and pp132-136 of your geog.1 students’ book, complete the word boxes below.

A volcano scientist

A flood of volcanic gas, dust and ash travelling at high speeds

A cloud which rises high into the sky from the crater of the volcano

A general name given to our transport, water supply and communication networks

An area where people can flee to if they are in danger from a natural hazard

Melted rock which erupts from a volcano

2 Rearrange the letters in the shaded boxes to find the name given to any volcano which refuses to sleep.

3 Draw a timeline of events to describe the volcanic activity on Montserrat since 1995. Try and include all of the key words above in your timeline.

4 Find out more about what Montserrat is like today. Units 9.7 and 9.8 in geog.1 or www.visitmontserrat.com and www.mvo.ms are useful starting points. Imagine that you are responsible for planning Montserrat’s new capital town in Little Bay.

a Make a list of all of the essential buildings and services you would need to provide for the residents of the town. Rank them in order of priority.

b Decide upon a name for the new town based upon what you have found out about Montserrat. Be prepared to justify your decision.

c Design a poster, webpage or presentation to encourage residents who have left Montserrat to return to the new town.
Is Montserrat still feeling Hot Hot Hot?

About this article
The article builds upon students’ understanding of how volcanoes are formed and the impacts of volcanic activity. The worksheet activities could be completed as a homework task. Question 4 could form the basis of a geographical investigation conducted in small groups, lasting a number of lessons.

Key vocabulary
vulcanologist, monitor, pyroclastic flow, earthquake, safe zone, ash column, lava dome, infrastructure, active, dormant.

Skills practised:
◆ Geography skills and understanding: The worksheet encourages students to learn key vocabulary and to help them develop a core geographical understanding which could be applied to other real life situations.
◆ Literacy skills: Learning key words and definitions. Extracting and summarising key information. Presenting written information in different ways.
◆ PLTS: Question 4 lends itself to students being independent enquirers, creative thinkers, effective participants and team workers.

Extension ideas
Students could research another recent volcanic eruption to compare with the 1997 Soufrière Hills eruption. Make a list of the similarities and differences between the two eruptions (causes, effects, impacts, responses). Is there a link between a country’s wealth and its ability to cope with natural disasters?

Further information
◆ The Montserrat Volcano Observatory website www.mvo.ms
◆ The Montserrat Tourism website www.visitmontserrat.com

Answers
1 a) vulcanologist
   b) pyroclastic flow
   c) ash column
   d) infrastructure
   e) safe zone
   f) lava

2 Active

3 Answers will vary depending upon which information students have identified as being significant.

4 a) Essential buildings and services may include water supply, sewage disposal, household waste disposal, electricity, gas, roads, rail networks, telephone and broadband networks, schools, hospitals, leisure facilities etc. Rankings will depend upon the students’ own views.
   
   b) Answers will depend upon the students’ own views.
   
   c) Higher level responses will include:
      ◆ an understanding of the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors involved in any decision to return to Montserrat
      ◆ a recognition of the different social, environmental and economic considerations.