

Volcano. We were told that a lorry carrying a ~~pile of~~ ^{women in labour} ~~women~~ had been swept away on one occasion because of its suddenness, but this might have been a fictitious trimming), and then through banana plantations to where the Land-Rover could go no further.

We were soon in luxuriant forest, climbing steeply. We passed the Pastojan settlement unharmed, and huddled through showers of rain. There was little life around: the St. Vincent parrot is probably extinct and the rare iguanas stay well-concealed in the rainy season. We could not see the peak: the path rapidly deteriorated into a series of stony, steep gulleys, though our guide and his 7 year-old assistant, both barefoot, leaped nimbly along. We attempted to shelter during an immense downpour; our guide regaling us with the information that his last party had had to turn back because of the rain. Eventually, the landscape flattened out somewhat, and between billowing clouds we could see the crater rim. Several hundred feet below us, down a sheer scree, lay a hot water lake a mile across with a smoking sulphurous island about 600 yards wide. (The guide had never seen it smoking before). The wind was severe enough to make it dangerous to go near the edge, as the clouds made the far, sunlit, side only momentarily visible. Luckily, it did not occur to us that the boiling vat might suddenly explode, otherwise we might have careered hopelessly back down the mountain. The view was worth the arduous climb, as while a ~~rest~~ Guardian reader wrote recently of a stroll out to the volcano, a swim in the lake, and getting back in time for lunch, he did approach it from the (easy) west side. Even though it now seems dormant again, no one will make that same climb again.