



Fact sheet: The Island Emerges

If you were standing on St Helena you would be standing on top of a volcano that is about 5km high and 14 million years old. The rock and ash that forms St Helena was forced out of the sea by an eruption that began deep within the earth. Massive lava flows spread out from two volcanoes, first in the North east and later in the South West.

Erosion has radically changed the island since the eruptions ended 7 million years ago. At least one quarter of the original island has been removed by the sea, rain and wind. The sea cuts away rock and ash to form cliffs that are still slowly becoming higher. Inland, streams had cut through layers of rock to lengthen and deepen valleys. Different rocks erode at different rates, creating the dramatic landscape that we see today.

Changes in the sea level have had a big impact on the island's shape. During the last Ice Age the sea level dropped about 120 metres and exposed the coastal plain that surrounds the island. If we lived then, we would have had our choice of many sandy beaches!