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ATOLLS

By Don Long

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What Is an Atoll?

Atolls are some of the most remote and challenging places to live on Earth. They are rings of **coral** that form islands in the ocean. The coral grows up from the cone of a **volcano** that is under the water, and inside the coral ring is a **lagoon**.

Many people have never heard of atolls. Visualize a tropical island. Perhaps you imagined an island covered in jungle, with coconut trees growing along a beach and a smoking volcano in the middle. Atolls are pretty much the complete opposite of this, and what's happening on them right now may be a sign of things to come - for everyone on Earth.

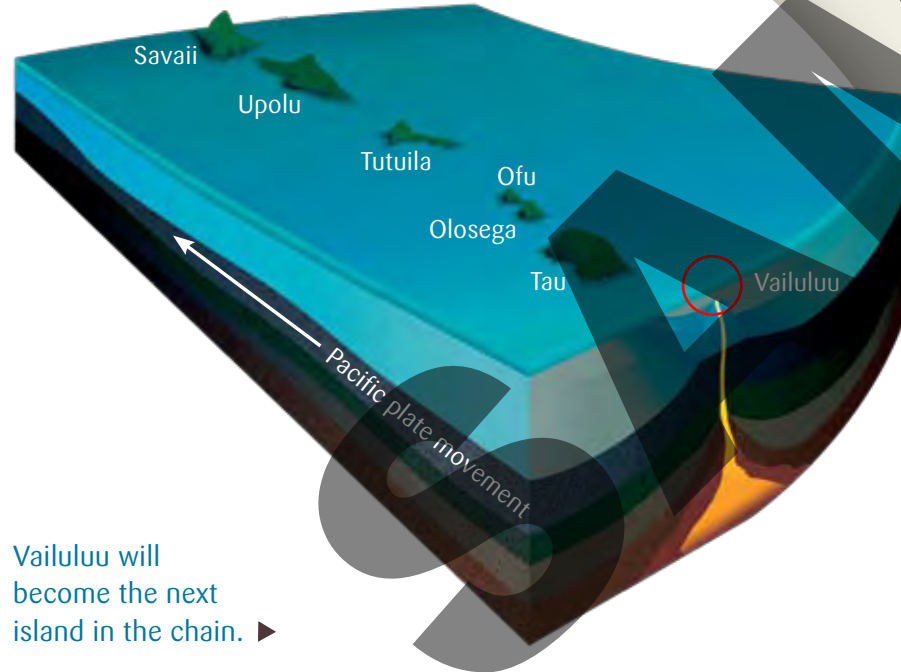


The fact that most atolls are circular tells you a lot about how they form. Imagine an underwater volcano rising slowly from the ocean floor, over thousands of years. Eventually, it reaches the surface and becomes an island. In American Samoa, an underwater volcano called Vailuluu (Vy-loo-loo-oo) is growing toward the ocean's surface.

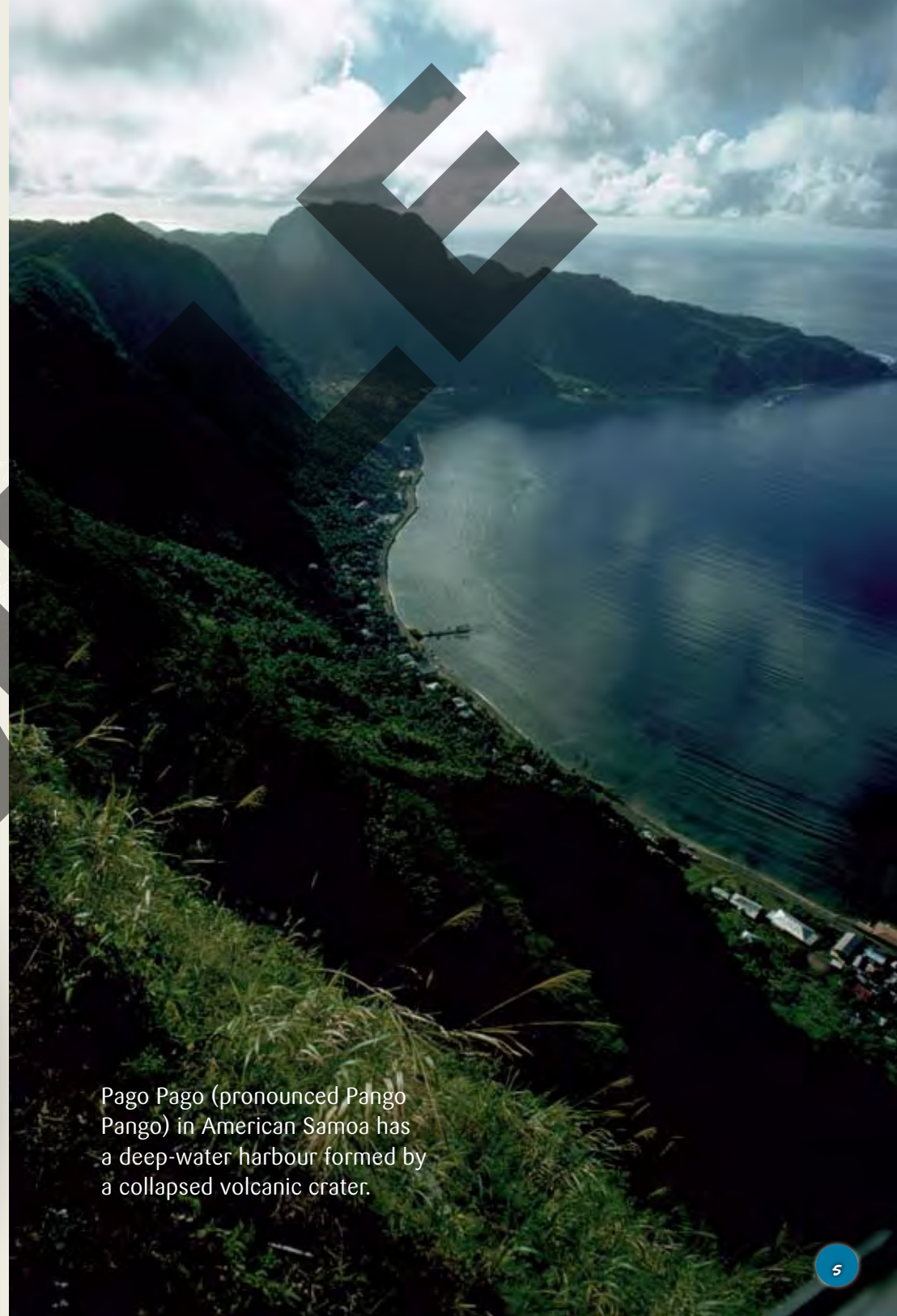
With only 1,935 feet (590 meters) to go, it will probably rise above the ocean in just a few hundred years.



The Samoan Islands



Vailuluu will become the next island in the chain. ▶



Pago Pago (pronounced Pango Pango) in American Samoa has a deep-water harbour formed by a collapsed volcanic crater.