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**Ocean expedition to explore ancient coral gardens
on undersea mountain—
*Public can share discoveries on NOAA web site***

MOSS LANDING, California—A team of scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI), and Moss Landing Marine Laboratories, along with film makers from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), set sail today on MBARI's research ship *Western Flyer* to explore Davidson Seamount, a huge undersea mountain that harbors a variety of spectacular marine life, including large, ancient, and fragile coral gardens.

Davidson Seamount, located 75 miles southwest of Monterey and just outside the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary boundary, is an inactive volcano that was first mapped as a "sea mountain" in 1933. It is one of the largest known seamounts in U.S. waters, rising 7,546 feet above the ocean floor, with another 4,265 feet of water above its summit. Davidson Seamount dominates the relatively flat ocean floor off Central California much like Mount Shasta dominates the landscape of Northern California.

In 2002, during a week-long cruise funded by NOAA's Office of Exploration and led by the sanctuary, MBARI and other partners made an initial survey of the biology and geology of the Davidson Seamount. One of the primary purposes of this cruise was to characterize the distribution and abundance of the creatures living on the seamount. A log of this expedition can be found on the web at: <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/explorations/02davidson/davidson.html>.

"We were blown away by the size, age and diversity of the deep-water corals we saw during our 2002 Davidson cruise," said Andrew DeVogelaere, Sanctuary Research Coordinator and Chief Scientist for the 2006 expedition. "Indeed, the discoveries we made during that cruise prompted members of the public to propose that Davidson Seamount be protected as part of the

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Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. We wanted to go back to learn why so many extraordinary corals thrive there and to determine their age and growth patterns.”

The main scientific goal of the current cruise is to improve our understanding of deep-water corals. Scientists on the cruise include experts on the ecology of deep-sea organisms and the ageing of corals. Using MBARI’s research vessel *Western Flyer* and its remotely operated vehicle (ROV) *Tiburón*, scientists will be able to explore coral colonies, take samples, and capture high definition digital images.

When exploring deep-sea areas such as Davidson Seamount, marine scientists never know what they will find. As MBARI marine biologist George Matsumoto explains, “The last time we went to Davidson, we saw several new species of organisms. I’m sure we’ll find new animals on this cruise as well. It will be a great opportunity do some interesting science, as well as to inform the public.”

In order to share the wonders of Davidson Seamount with as many people as possible, MBARI has made arrangements for film makers from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to join the cruise. The BBC will film the Davidson Seamount’s spectacular deep-sea life for an upcoming television series, *Planet Earth*, which will be broadcast in the United States and internationally.

Starting on January 26, 2006, students and the general public can share the expedition’s discoveries through NOAA’s Ocean Explorer web site at <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/explorations/explorations.html>. Daily logs and video clips will be posted there. Visitors to the web site will also have opportunities to email questions to scientists on the cruise.

A press conference will be held at the MBARI campus in Moss Landing, California on Wednesday, February 8, 2006 at 9:30 a.m. Scientists at the conference will present the expedition’s initial findings to the news media. Still and video images from the cruise will be available as well.

The Davidson Seamount cruise will continue from January 26 through February 4, 2006. NOAA’s Office of Exploration, MBARI, and the BBC provided funding for the expedition.

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Sources of additional information on the web:

- **Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary:** <http://montereybay.noaa.gov>
- **Monterey Bay Sanctuary Integrated Monitoring Network (SIMoN):**
<http://www.mbnms-simon.org/other/photos/> (photographs of Davidson Seamount)
<http://www.mbnms-simon.org/> (see "seamounts")
- **NOAA Office of Exploration:** <http://explore.noaa.gov/>
- **Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI):** <http://www.mbari.org>
- **Moss Landing Marine Laboratory:** <http://www.mlml.calstate.edu/>
- **British Broadcasting Corporation:** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>