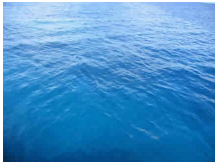


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By: Dan Talpalariu, Science Editor



Afar Ocean, possibly  
10 million years from  
now  
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## [New Ocean Forming In Ethiopia](#)

### *An Ethiopian desert makes way for a new ocean's formation*

Although the birth of an ocean is an extremely rare phenomenon on the largest of historical scales, the geophysics is currently experiencing such an event. Even more dazzling, this occurs in one of the Earth's most inhospitable and arid regions, the Afar Depression in Ethiopia.

The African continent is literally unstitching itself apart just like the sleeve of an old shirt, along the area known as the East African Rift, which traverses it beginning with the southern end of the Red Sea, going through Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique. The molten lava beneath the Earth's surface makes it thin by constantly pushing against it, and eventually breaks it and tears it apart. As the forces that drive the lava from the sinews of the crust don't encounter much resistance anymore, they keep applying unbelievable pressures, widening the gaps. This will all end about ten million years from today, when the Red Sea's water, that will soon flood the rift, will have completely submerged the region.

This scenario is not far from happening, as currently the surface of the continental crust under the Afar Depression is just 20 km (about 12.5 miles)-thick, half its original thickness. There are many portions of the regional landscape situated more than 100 meters (328 feet) below the sea level, and the only thing that keeps the sea water from invading them is the low eastern hills. Such closeness to the planet's boiling blood shape shifted the zone into one of seismic, volcano and hydrothermal activity, a true Eldorado for scientists who have the means to overcome its obstacles. The temperatures in Afar reach 48 degrees Celsius (118 degrees Fahrenheit) during summer days, while there is way too little and too scarce rain to quench the thirst of the land. And, besides the geological issues, the war between Ethiopia and its neighbor, Eritrea, also comes as a deterring factor for any person who would be interested in scientific observations.

The geologists who are involved, though, foresee that the crust will continue to stretch, thin and sink for about another million years, culminating with a massive flood by the Red Sea waters, which in the end will cause the Afar Depression to lay at the bottom of a new ocean. Obviously, none of us will still be alive in order to prove them right or wrong.

For now, the landscape of Afar doesn't look anything like an ocean, instead, it rather appears similar to a hellish design ripped from a video game. Vegetation cannot survive due to the lava beneath, the heat stifles most other life forms, while toxic fumes emanate from strange formations. Thankfully, the salty remains of past Red Sea deluges allow Afar's nomad tribes to make a living out of exportations.