

Excerpt from “Earth’s Undersea World”

Imagine you are a geologist searching for a hydrothermal vent as you read the following excerpt. Answer the questions following the excerpt in complete sentences.

Hydrothermal Vents

At first glance, it looks like a fire. Black smoke is billowing up from a spot in the ridge. It’s not smoke, though. It’s searing hot, dark water gushing out of cracks in the rock. It’s a **hydrothermal vent**.

Hydrothermal vents are a bit like geysers in Yellowstone National Park. These deep-sea geysers are much, much hotter than anything on land. Hydrothermal vents form as seawater sinks down through cracks in the oceanic crust. As it nears the magma lying below the crust, the water is heated to incredibly high temperatures. It can reach an astonishing 750°F! The water is so hot that it dissolves minerals from the surrounding basalt. The minerals become part of the hot liquid, like salt does when it’s stirred into a glass of water.

At a hydrothermal vent, the super-heated, mineral-rich water comes roaring back up through cracks in the crust. It shoots out of the rock with the force of water blasting out of a fire hydrant. When hot vent water meets cold seawater, the dissolved minerals in vent water become solid again. They form tiny particles. The particles make the vent water look like dark smoke.

Hunting for Hydrothermal Vents



Hydrothermal vents

How do scientists find hydrothermal vents? They hunt for them from ships at sea. Hot, mineral-rich vent water moves slowly away from hydrothermal vents. It forms a plume, or cloud, of mineral particles that drifts away from the vent, like smoke from a chimney. If the scientists locate a plume, they send down a robot vehicle. When it locates the vent, the robot sends pictures back to the scientists.

There is more to hydrothermal vents than clouds of hot, black water. Communities of amazing and unusual animals live around many of these deep-sea geysers. Red-topped giant tube worms are the largest animals near vents. Some types of giant tube worms can grow as tall as a person. The vents are also home to ghostly white crabs, football-sized clams, and pale, blind shrimp.

Scientists believe there are tens of thousands of hydrothermal vents along the world's mid-ocean ridges. Scientists, however, have explored only a handful of them. Finding a new one is always exciting. Scientists often discover new types of animals as well.



Giant tube worms near a hydrothermal vent in the Pacific Ocean

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

1. What clues tell you that you are close to a vent?

2. How would you get close enough to observe the vent?

3. What would you discover on the seafloor near the vent?

4. Why is it important to conduct your underwater mission?