1911 Postcard of Trinidad Volcanic Island.

View of Trinidad's new Island.
Appeared 3rd November, 1911.
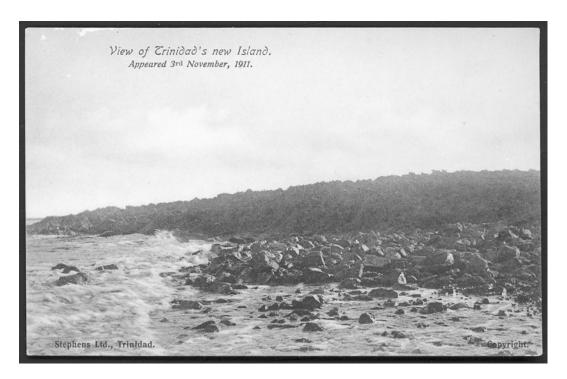
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The south of Trinidad is peppered with active mud volcanoes. These are caused by natural gas slowly leaking through underground layers of mud and water. Mud bubbles to the surface and can form distinctive cones. Often, however, the release of gas and mud can be explosive. Members may remember the 1997 Piparo eruption that spewed mud 150 feet in the air and blanketed the town with thick mud.

Such explosions can occur off shore as well and create new islands. The area off Chatham on the South coast is a particularly active area in this respect. On October 31st 1911, fishermen in this area noticed bubbles rising from the water. This continued until on November 3rd a small island emerged. It was initially thought to be a log washed down by the Orinoco, but by the next day it was clear that it was a new island. On November 4th Sergeant Wilkey, a police officer from neighbouring Erin, visited the island which was about an acre in size with 20 to 50 foot cone. (The island became known as Wilkey's Land as he was the first person to set foot on it).

Shortly after Sgt. Wilkey's visit the natural gas emanating from the crater caught fire and smoke was seen rising from the island. The sight of smoke filled the local residents with fear so Sgt. Wilkey asked them to all knell down and pray. At this point a violent eruption shot flames 500 to 1000 feet in the air and the light illuminated the costal village. Pandemonium ensued with villagers crying "Good Lord save us" and fleeing inland.

After the explosion the island was greatly increased in size (about 8.5 acres). The Coastal Steamer which usually moored at Erin stopped at the new island, allowing passengers to visit. (This was SS Kennet; postmark collectors will be familiar with the Coastal Steamer No.2 datestamp thought to be used on board.)

Islands have subsequently appeared in this area since, notably in 1928, 1964 and 2001. They are usually quickly eroded by the sea.

Reference; the Mirror Newspaper 1911.