

## Royal High School graduate honoured by King Charles

In the first New Year Honours of his reign, King Charles has awarded the Polar Medal to Edinburgh Royal High School former pupil and Edinburgh University graduate, John Smellie. It's the second time he has been awarded it. Her Majesty, the late Queen, also awarded



him the Polar Medal in 1986. Double recipients of the Polar Medal are very rare, with just 20 in the medal's 150 year history. The Polar Medal is awarded *to individuals who have given outstanding achievement and service to the UK in the field of polar research, often over prolonged periods of time and in harsh conditions.* John is Honorary Professor of Volcanology at the University of Leicester but he spent most of his career working as Senior Volcanologist for the British Antarctic Survey. He first visited Antarctica as a 21 year old just 4 years after leaving

the Royal High School at Barnton and completing his first degree at Edinburgh University. He has carried out 27 expeditions to Antarctica. He is a prolific publisher of his research, with hundreds of scientific papers and two books to his credit. As a volcanologist, he has visited and worked on more volcanoes in Antarctica than any other person, living or dead, a statistic that is unlikely ever to be exceeded. No wonder that his nickname is 'Mr Antarctic volcano'.



He returned from his latest expedition to Antarctica in November this year, where he worked on volcanoes that erupted 5-7 million years ago. It was a time when the world was several degrees warmer than present but Antarctica was still draped by its vast ice sheet. During the eruptive period the ice was climatically stressed similar to how it is projected to be in the next few centuries. Knowing what happened in Antarctica shall help us to understand much better how Antarctica's ice (and sea levels) shall react due to current global warming.