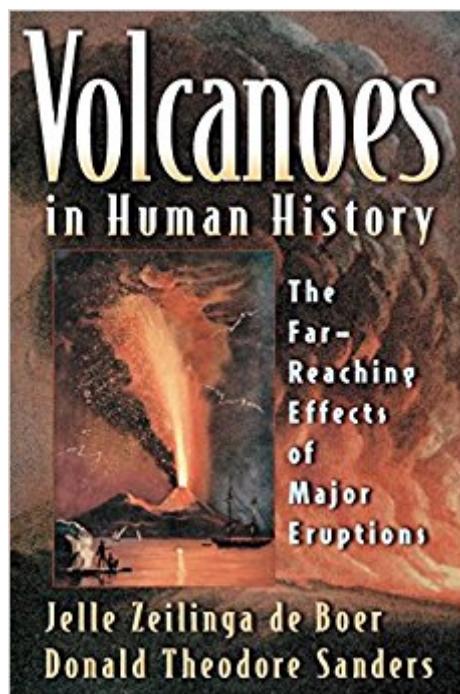


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Volcanoes In Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects Of Major Eruptions



Synopsis

When the volcano Tambora erupted in Indonesia in 1815, as many as 100,000 people perished as a result of the blast and an ensuing famine caused by the destruction of rice fields on Sumbawa and neighboring islands. Gases and dust particles ejected into the atmosphere changed weather patterns around the world, resulting in the infamous "year without a summer" in North America, food riots in Europe, and a widespread cholera epidemic. And the gloomy weather inspired Mary Shelley to write the gothic novel *Frankenstein*. This book tells the story of nine such epic volcanic events, explaining the related geology for the general reader and exploring the myriad ways in which the earth's volcanism has affected human history. Zeilinga de Boer and Sanders describe in depth how volcanic activity has had long-lasting effects on societies, cultures, and the environment. After introducing the origins and mechanisms of volcanism, the authors draw on ancient as well as modern accounts--from folklore to poetry and from philosophy to literature. Beginning with the Bronze Age eruption that caused the demise of Minoan Crete, the book tells the human and geological stories of eruptions of such volcanoes as Vesuvius, Krakatau, Mount Pelée, and Tristan da Cunha. Along the way, it shows how volcanism shaped religion in Hawaii, permeated Icelandic mythology and literature, caused widespread population migrations, and spurred scientific discovery. From the prodigious eruption of Thera more than 3,600 years ago to the relative burp of Mount St. Helens in 1980, the results of volcanism attest to the enduring connections between geology and human destiny.

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Customer Reviews

For someone who enjoys both history and natural science, "Volcanoes in Human History" is a happy marriage. It's not exactly a page-turner, because the authors don't try to be too dramatic. They do, however, write simply and clearly, letting the eruptions and their consequences speak for themselves. The authors' thesis is that each major eruption produces a "vibrating string" of historical effects, ranging from the eruption itself, to the immediate aftermath, to climate change, famine and epidemic, to economic and ecological revival, and finally to cultural effects that can span centuries. The book covers nine volcanic systems, their eruptions and the resulting historical fallout: The Hawaiian Islands, where the clash between lava and ocean gave rise to a colorful mythology; Thera, whose catastrophic eruption in the Bronze Age may have destroyed Minoan civilization and produced the legend of Atlantis; Mount Vesuvius, whose eruption in 79 AD entombed and preserved the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum; Iceland, whose position above a magma plume and the spreading ocean floor gave rise to horrific eruptions and grim legends; Mount Tambora, the Indonesian volcano that caused the "Year Without a Summer" in 1816; Krakatau, whose tidal waves killed tens of thousands of people in 1883; Mount Pelee, whose pyroclastic flows killed the 30,000 citizens of St. Pierre in an instant in 1902; Tristan da Cunha, whose eruption displaced an idyllic island society; and Mount St. Helens, which in 1980 reminded the Pacific Northwest that "the Giants are only asleep."

The new book, *Volcanoes in Human History* by Dr. Jelle DeBoer and Theodore Sanders is a must-have for anyone interested in, or teaching, volcanism. Dr. DeBoer is the Stearns Professor of Earth Science at Wesleyan University (CT), and Mr. Sanders has been a petroleum geologist and science editor. Having taught Honors Earth Science in high school for the last 26 years, I can attest to the relevance of the book. The authors show how nine of the most famous eruptions have affected human history. Each chapter discusses one eruption, in both scientific and historical detail. The science is immediately useful in teaching a high school or introductory college level class. I found new information about all nine eruptions that I will use in my classes, combining it with an AP text. The long lasting effects that these eruptions have had on human history will make the study of volcanoes even more interesting. Relating the earlier eruptions with folklore and mythology shows the effects, other than devastation, that these events had on humanity. The first chapter is a perfect overview of volcanism, its origins and consequences. The following chapters tell us both the geologic causes of these eruptions and their ramifications on current and subsequent generations, be it social, economic, environmental, or artistic. Beginning with the Hawaiian folklore of Pele, the fire goddess, and her battles with her sister Namaka o Kahai, the goddess of the sea, one can see

the epic battles as shaping the thinking and lifestyles of the people of Hawaii. When the chapter turned to geology, I learned that there are two parallel sets of active vents. The explanation of a "bow wave" effect, causing lithospheric uplift and faulting is a concept that is sure to be incorporated into my classes.

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