Mount Vesuvius

Mount Vesuvius is a stratovolcano. It is made up of layers upon layers of ash and rock.

Mount Vesuvius Volcanology Report

Volcanologists at the Vesuvius Observatory in Naples, Italy, monitor the seismic activity of Mount Vesuvius, one of the most active volcanoes in Europe, twenty-four hours a day. Sensors near the 1,281 meter (4,203 ft.) tall volcano on the west coast of Italy collect data. Scientists study the data and assess the threat level of a potential eruption. Naples, a large city, is only about 10 kilometers (6 mi.) away. Smaller towns are even closer to the looming volcano.

Currently, Mount Vesuvius is in a dormant stage. However, this stage is only one part of a cycle. Other parts of the cycle are active stages when eruptions strike. Mount Vesuvius last erupted in 1944. Scientists say that this was the end of an active cycle. That cycle is thought to have begun with a 1631 event that killed four thousand people. The largest known explosion of Mount Vesuvius was in 79 CE when ten thousand Romans died.

Mount Vesuvius last erupted during World War II.

Mount Vesuvius: Current Danger Zones

Italian authorities organized a plan in the event of an eruption. Within a 72-hour period, people who live in the red zone will leave the area. A "twinning" arrangement pairs towns in the red zone with towns in other areas of Italy.

Risk Zones

Red zones: Approximately 670,000 people live in 25 towns at the base of the volcano. If an eruption occurs, they are at the highest risk of lava flows.

Yellow zones: 1 million people who live in the areas around the red zone are at risk of falling ash and other volcanic materials.

GUIDEBOOK

Beneath the Ashes: Pompeii

When Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 CE, cities such as Pompeii disappeared. Layers of rock, ash, and pumice covered them. More than 1,500 years later, archaeologists started to uncover what lay beneath the volcanic mixture.

Walk the cobblestoned streets of this ancient Roman city.

See plaster casts of victims' bodies.

They discovered houses, workshops, roads, art—even remains of people and animals—exactly as they had been when the volcano erupted.

Archaeologists are still at work excavating these areas. They continue to learn about the people who perished in that fateful disaster.

Go inside the homes and businesses of Pompeii's residents to see beautiful mosaics and paintings.

Letter by Pliny the Younger, eyewitness to the 79 CE eruption

"There had been noticed for many days before a trembling of the earth, which did not alarm us much, as this is quite an ordinary occurrence in Campania; but it was so particularly violent that night that it not only shook but actually overturned, as it would seem, everything about us. . . .

Though it was now morning, the light was still exceedingly faint and doubtful; the buildings all around us tottered, and though we stood upon open ground, yet as the place was narrow and confined, there was no remaining without imminent danger: we therefore resolved to quit the town.

A panic-stricken crowd followed us, and . . . pressed on us in dense array to drive us forward as we came out. Being at a convenient distance from the houses, we stood still, in the midst of a most dangerous and dreadful scene. The chariots, which we had ordered to be drawn out, were so agitated backwards and forwards, though upon the most level ground, that we could not keep them steady, even by supporting them with large stones.

The sea seemed to roll back upon itself, and to be driven from its banks by the convulsive motion of the earth; it is certain at least the shore was considerably enlarged, and several sea animals were left upon it. On the other side, a black and dreadful cloud, broken with rapid, zigzag flashes, revealed behind it variously shaped masses of flame: these last were like sheet-lightning, but much larger. . . .

The ashes now began to fall upon us, though in no great quantity. I looked back; a dense dark mist seemed to be following us, spreading itself over the country like a cloud."