



VIOLENT VOLCANO

May 19th 1980.

The most destructive volcanic activity in American history rocked the state of Washington yesterday. Fifty-seven people lost their lives, and tens of thousands more have been impacted by the devastating eruption of Mount St. Helens. Located in the south-west of the state, there have been warnings of seismic activity for the past few months.

Scientists at the University of Washington have been monitoring earthquake activity near to the site since March. An earthquake measuring 4.2 was logged below the volcano on 20th March. Another was recorded three days later. This was the start of a series of continuous tremors. These continued until 27th March. Then, a large explosion at the peak of the volcano released steam nearly 2,000 metres into the air. More eruptions were observed over the following weeks until they stopped abruptly on 22nd April.

Two days ago, scientists noticed that the north side of the volcano had bulged out by nearly 140 metres. A scientist at the university told us that this indicated magma was rising towards the summit.

Volcanologist, David Johnston, had been stationed on the side of the mountain to check for any changes. He woke up just before dawn yesterday and radioed in his daily report. There was no new information to report.

Less than two hours later, a magnitude-5.1 earthquake shook the volcano. Mr Johnston radioed through a final message saying, "This is it!" The earthquake caused a crack in the rock within minutes and Mount St. Helens exploded. Mr Johnston was one of the first casualties.

It is our understanding that the build-up of pressure led to a more powerful explosion. The eruption caused a glowing cloud of superheated gas to blow out of the mountain face at supersonic speed. According to our contacts at the United States Geological Survey, everything within 8 miles of the blast would have been killed immediately. Anything within 19 miles would have been flattened by the shock-wave that followed. In total, an area of roughly 230 square miles was devastated by the initial blast.

Even as people were coming to terms with the initial eruption, a second was occurring at the summit. This explosion sent a cloud of ash 10 miles into the atmosphere. It is predicted to travel over a considerable distance in the coming days. Members of the public have been urged to avoid the ash wherever possible. It is estimated that hundreds of tons of ash could be produced in total.

It is unlikely that scientists will be able to determine the full extent of the damage to the local area until the aftermath of the eruption passes. Early reports indicate that a large portion of the mountain has been removed by the explosions.

Volcanologists are currently monitoring the area but do not expect any further activity from the volcano.



Photo credit: USGS/Robert Krimmel

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What does the word “impacted” mean in the first paragraph?
2. Which word tells you that tremors happened over and over again?
3. Why has the author described it as a “devastating eruption”?
4. If you were a member of the public, what impact would the use of the word “urged” have?
5. Find a word closest in meaning to “work out” or “find out information”.

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

Where in Washington is Mount St. Helens?

V

Which word was important in finding the previous answer?

P

Why hasn't the author given a precise measurement for how high the steam was released?

R

What was the job of the first person killed by the eruption?

E

The author has used lots of scientific language. What effect does this have on the reader?

Answers:

1. Something has happened to them as a result of the eruption
2. Continuous
3. It explains the impact clearly and adds drama for the newspaper
4. It makes it seem more urgent and important that I follow the advice
5. Determine

R: The south-west

V: Located

P: It would be impossible to measure accurately from a distance/it happened too quickly to measure

R: Volcanologist

E: It might make it harder to understand/it gives you more information and makes it feel more important