



What happened when Vesuvius erupted in AD79?

Living in the shadow of Italy's volcanoes

1. Use the information below together with your own research on the internet to produce an information poster about the eruption in AD79. Include text boxes, sketches and other illustrations.

On August 24, AD79 Mount Vesuvius literally blew its top, spewing tons of molten ash, pumice and sulphuric gas miles into the atmosphere. A "firestorm" of poisonous vapours and molten debris engulfed the surrounding area suffocating the inhabitants of the neighbouring Roman resort cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Tons of falling debris filled the streets until nothing remained to be seen of the once thriving communities. The cities remained buried and undiscovered for almost 1700 years until excavation began in 1748. These excavations continue today and provide insight into life during the Roman Empire.

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/pompeii.htm>

On the 24 August, Pliny the Younger wrote about the eruption that he witnessed whilst staying at the home of his uncle.

"On Mount Vesuvius broad sheets of fire and leaping flames blazed at several points, their bright glare emphasized by the darkness of night. My uncle tried to allay the fears of his companions by repeatedly declaring that these were nothing but bonfires left by the peasants in their terror, or else empty houses on fire in the districts they had abandoned. Then he went to rest and certainly slept, for as he was a stout man his breathing was rather loud and heavy and could be heard by people coming and going outside his door. By this time the courtyard giving access to his room was full of ashes mixed with pumice stones, so that its level had risen, and if he had stayed in the room any longer he would never have got out.

Then the flames and smell of sulphur which gave warning of the approaching fire drove the others to take flight and roused him to stand up. He stood leaning on two slaves and then suddenly collapsed, I imagine because the dense, fumes choked his breathing by blocking his windpipe which was constitutionally weak and narrow and often inflamed. When daylight returned on the 26th - two days after the last day he had been seen - his body was found intact and uninjured, still fully clothed and looking more like sleep than death."

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Image source: http://www.bible-history.com/resource/ff_vesu.htm



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