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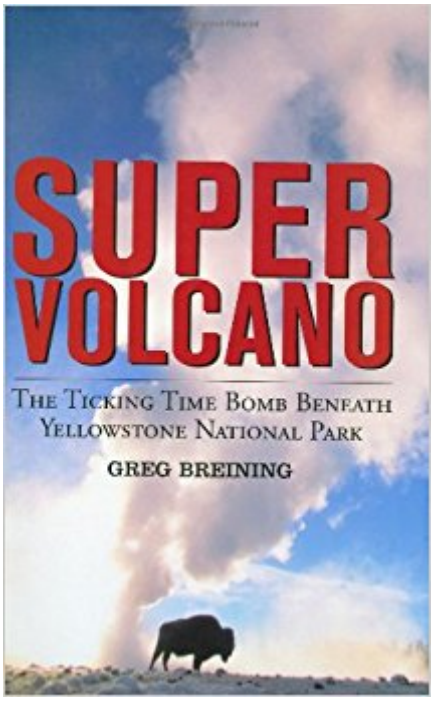
Super Volcano: The Ticking Time Bomb Beneath Yellowstone National Park



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Synopsis

Despite growing evidence of geothermic activity under America's first and foremost national park, it took geologists a long time to realize that there was actually a volcano beneath Yellowstone. And then, why couldn't they find the caldera or crater? Because, as an aerial photograph finally revealed, the caldera is 45 miles wide, encompassing all of Yellowstone. What will happen, in human terms, when it erupts? Greg Breining explores the shocking answer to this question and others in a scientific yet accessible look at the enormous natural disaster brewing beneath the surface of the United States. Yellowstone is one of the world's five "super volcanoes." When it erupts, much of the nation will be hit hard. Though historically Yellowstone has erupted about every 600,000 years, it has not done so for 630,000, meaning it is 30,000 years overdue. Starting with a scenario of what will happen when Yellowstone blows, this fascinating study describes how volcanoes function and includes a timeline of famous volcanic eruptions throughout history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Super VolcanoThe Ticking Bomb Beneath Yellowstone National ParkIf you know nothing about volcanoes, plate tectonics, or geologic history, then this book is a reasonable, basic, and accessible introduction. The author leans toward verbosity and is a bit florid, but not excessively so. But if you are interested in the geology of Yellowstone Park then there are better places to look.The sub-title is "The Ticking Time Bomb Beneath Yellowstone National Park". This is why I bought this book and why I was disappointed. Only one chapter (less than 25%) deals with the relevant geology and that at a very low level. One chapter concentrates on the human history of Yellowstone where the

geology is incidental. There is an overlong chapter on the history of plate tectonics and the rest of the book, by far the majority, is simply a catalog of volcanic eruptions through history (and even at that he misses Novarupta, AK in 1912, the biggest of the 20th century and Mt. Etna, Sicily, in eruption since 2001). The volume of ash and magma, the number of casualties, and social affects are reported in great detail. This is not uninteresting in itself, but is hardly geology. The attitude throughout is rather 'Gee Whiz' than scientific. In fact there is very little science in the book at all. There is not a diagram of a typical volcano let alone a super volcano. There is little about the mechanism of geysers and even less on fumaroles. And, in fact, he uses a rather limited definition for 'caldera'. This makes for a nice campfire story but is not very enlightening.On top of that the book loses a star for design. It has a plethora of the annoying insertions so prevalent in magazines; a sentence of two from the text is enclosed in a box and scattered at random throughout.

Review by Rik Lantz, R.G. on Ann Logue's account: This was a very interesting book and a nice, thorough discussion of hot spot volcanism. The book gave me a good appreciation that the hot spot that created the Snake River Basalt flows and Yellowstone is still down there cooking away and could cause another major volcanic event with profound consequences for the area, North America, and the world.Mr. Breining does a nice job of describing some complex phenomena in plain English and making them accessible to the layman. I thought he did a very good job of describing what happens during an eruption and the hazards of ash falls and climate alteration in addition to the more immediately obvious effects of pyroclastic eruptions and lava flows. I felt that he didn't do as good a job of describing why these hot spots would remain stationary in the mantle, which by all accounts is moving around as much as the crust, but perhaps that's because it's not very well understood in the first place. Explanations of other phenomena were direct, concise, and understandable, but the discussion of hot spots stood out to me because it was not very cogent or convincing in comparison. I would have liked to see him explore the link between volcanism and climate more thoroughly.I enjoyed his description of the Ashfall Fossil Beds in Nebraska, and how they demonstrate that volcanic events can have far-reaching consequences for animals half a continent away. The description of how fine ash affects a faunal assemblage and helps explain the sequence in which they die, and thus which ones are on top, was fascinating. I'm going to have to stop and check the place out next time I drive through Nebraska.

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