

A Brief History of Mount Rainier

21 January 2015

Mount Rainier is a volcano located in eastern Washington in the United States. It was discovered by George Vancouver in 1792. After a long and turbulent history, the mount is now protected as Mount Rainier National Park.

Mount Rainier began forming about 500,000 years ago, approximately 490k BCE, atop the eroded remains of a much older volcano. This occurred over 6 major stages. During these stages erupted lava built up the volcano, and erosion tore parts of it down, shaping it into what it is today.

The first of these stages was about 180,000 years long and consisted of the rapid release of pent up magma, which began to form a new hill on the eroded mountain. The second period lasted about 120,000 years. During this time the rate of eruption decreased significantly, and are harder to track. The next two periods can be merged and took place over about 220,000 years, and saw an increase in eruptions for about 100,000 years, then they virtually stopped, until a huge section of the mountain eroded away, where new vents opened and lava flow increased.

The next to last period was relatively short, only 30,000 years. During this time, the increased lava flows rebuild the eroded part of the mountain as well as the upper walls. Finally, history catches up with us, and we reach the last period, in which eruptions are significantly reduced, and easily preserved by the ice age.

Perhaps the most famous eruption of Mount Rainier occurred in 1894 when small summit flows of lava began running down the volcano, as reported by observers from a nearby village. Soon after, a huge flow hit the small town of Armero, killing 20,000.

Today, citizens in surrounding areas have safety codes and evacuation procedures. These are crucial as there are as many as 1000 citizens who would have less than an hour to get out of the path of the volcano. Every year, schools in surrounding towns have volcano drills, where they load into busses and cars and are driven to higher ground.

The volcano provides a huge benefit to the surrounding towns and the National Park, through tourism. For example, in 2011 there were about 279 million visitors to the park, which equates to about 30 billion dollars dumped into the economies of local towns such as Tacoma, Washington and Armero, Columbia.

As we can see, Mount Rainier is an asset with good aspects and bad ones, providing huge financial benefits and local sport, however it is a gamble, as it is a sleeping giant, waiting to awake.

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