Volcanoes: Fire From The Earth (New Horizons)

Synopsis

Rivers of molten rock obliterating all in their path, earth tremors, toxic gases and a pall of smoke spreading across the skies - volcanoes and their devastating effects have been shrouded in legend since the dawn of time. Once thought to be outpourings from Hell or the work of other supernatural forces, these extraordinary geological phenomena are now more clearly understood, thanks to vulcanologists who have dared to approach Vesuvius, Etna, Stromboli, Mount St Helens or Cotopaxi. Maurice Krait, a world expert on volcanoes, completed this study shortly before his death in the eruption of Mount Unzen in Japan.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Only like this book because it was written by Maurice Krafft. His knowledge is great but just not an interesting book to kids.

VOLCANOES: REVIEWING A BOOK, TWO LIVES AND THE WEBMany years ago I purchased an excellent small book by Maurice Krafft (1991) and it is this book that I am about to review, though in this case the author’s life is as interesting as the book itself. I personally have always found volcanoes and volcanic phenomena fascinating and have visited a number of the volcanoes mentioned. I also feel that there can be more relevance to book reviews than just the book, so here I have tried to triangulate my sources.THE BOOKThe book is in a pocket-sized paperback format on glossy paper in colour and is a very attractive little book. The pictures are magnificent: some of

these are historic reproductions whilst others were taken by Maurice Krafft or by his wife Katia. They worked as a husband and wife team with a shared but consuming interest in volcanoes. About two thirds of the book is taken up with the history of volcanic activity and the rival explanatory theories: the final one third of the book consists of documents relating to volcanoes.The history appears accurate and carefully explained. The book starts with myths and legends about volcanoes from a number of different cultures. The next chapter was about various early theories of vulcanism. For work that I was doing in writing a history of the iron filings and sulphur experiment in elementary chemistry, I found this section very useful as it was stated (Krafft, 1993: 47) that Lemery (1645-1715) thought that there were underground fires of iron filings and sulphur caused by dampening with water. This incorrect theory tied in with the historical chemistry in which I was interested very well. This was followed by the ideas of the Neptunists and the Plutonists, leading into the ideas of those Krafft describes as the first vulcanologists. The final chapter is a brief introduction to the history of modern vulcanology.TWO LIVESIn my view the book is a very worthwhile buy: at the back of the book there is a brief history of the author and his wife, which reads:" Maurice Krafft was born on 25 March 1946. A Vulcanologist and a geologist by training, in 1968 he founded with his geochemist wife Katia, the Centre de Volcainologie Vulcain, which specialised in the phenomenology of volcanic eruptions. Over nearly quarter of a century they visited hundreds of volcanoes and observed almost one hundred and fifty eruptions throughout the world. They were the authors of a score of books and five films on vulcanism and also assembled the biggest vulcanological library in the world and an important collection of picture material. Never ceasing to pursue their life's work, both Maurice and Katia Krafft died photographing the eruption of Unzen in Japan on 3 June 1991."It may be noted that 1996 was the 50th anniversary of Maurice Krafft's birth and the 5th anniversary of Maurice and Katia Krafft's death. The obituary of Maurice and Katia Krafft who died in a pyroclastic flow on Mount Unzen in Japan on June 3, 1991 can be found in the Bulletin of Vulcanology (v. 54, p. 613-614).I also came across an article about Maurice Krafft and his wife in the Reader's Digest (Sanchez, 1996). This article consists largely of a series of stories about the couple and their continuing quest to come closer to and know more about active volcanoes. It is of the popular science genre, but contains information that I have not found elsewhere. There is story about his plan to kayak down a stream of molten lava in a titanium alloy craft lined with heat-resistant bricks and his actual voyage in a lake of sulphuric acid in a cheap inflatable boat at Kawah Ijen Crater. Sanchez in writing the article quotes from interviews with various friends of the Krafft's. They indicate that Maurice Krafft was very excitable and frequently lost his temper, whereas his wife Katia was much quieter, but equally determined.Of the eruption of

Mount Unzen that caused Maurice and Katia's death Sanchez writes:"In the end, the Krafft's paid the ultimate price for their passion. On June 3, 1991, Maurice Krafft, 45, and his wife Katia, 49, were swept away in a flow of Mount Unzen's burning volcanic ash and rocks, propelled by a cloud of extremely hot gas. As the river plunged down the mountainside at a speed of over 100km/h, it also swallowed up Harry Glicken, an American vulcanologist and 14 Japanese reporters."For comparison I found an article in a scientific journal describing the same incident."Suddenly on June 3, a much larger dome collapse and explosion produced a pyroclastic flow and ash-cloud surge that raced 4.5 km from the crater, burning about 180 houses and killing 43 people who had ventured into a previously designated hazard zone." Brantley and Scott, 1993 , p.250I won't dwell on the interesting variation of emphasis between the two accounts, except to note the greater value attached to the lives of Americans and reporters in the first account. There is also the question of safety, where the second account indicates that those who lost their lives were in an area known to be hazardous.Sanchez does evaluate the contribution that the Krafft's made to the study of volcanoes. It is concluded that it was "a decisive contribution to understanding the phenomena that regulate volcanic activity". They took photographs, shot hours of videotape, wrote books (some are listed in Volcanoes: Fire from the earth , p. 197), wrote numerous articles (eg Krafft and Chaigneau, 1980: Keller J. and Krafft, M. 1990) and gave many lectures.To the end Krafft was a scientist seeking a general theory of vulcanology, which eluded him, for he concludes his book with the thought that:"But we still have no general theory of volcanism which might allow us at last to know precisely why a volcano erupts. A formidable task awaiting future generations of vulcanologists."THE WEBThe WWW has some pages specifically dedicated to the Krafft's. The URL of these pages is:[...]The Centre for the Study of Active Volcanoes at the University of Hawaii at Hilo has set up these pages to seek donations for a fund in memory of the Krafft's (The Maurice and Katia Krafft Memorial Fund). These donations will be used to educate people in countries of high volcanic risk about the hazards that potentially active volcanoes pose. A major source of interest and revenue is a remarkable photo called "Pele Dancing". This can be seen on the web and is produced as a poster advertised as:"'Pele Dancing' was captured by Katia Krafft while she was photographing the lava streams flowing down Mauna Loa Volcano during its 1984 eruption. Pele is the Hawaiian Goddess of Volcanoes, and this dramatic night-time photograph shows her exulting in her awesome volcanic power."CONCLUSIONI would conclude by pointing out that educators now have a variety of easily available information sources and sometimes these can be triangulated. Such sources can provide information of a scientific kind, which may be combined with information from more popular sources about the authors of books or the scientists making the discoveries, to

produce new materials of interest in today's classrooms.REFERENCESBrantley , S. R. and Scott, W. E. 1993 The dangers of collapsing lava domes: Lessons from Mount Hood, Oregon, Earthquakes and Volcanoes 24(6)244-269.Keller J and M Krafft: Effusive natrocarbonatite activity of Oldoinyo Lengai, June, Bulletin of Vulcanology, 52, 629-645, l990. [Tanzania]Krafft, M. (Translated by Paul G. Bahn) 1993 Volcanoes: Fire from the earth. London: Thames and Hudson.Krafft M. and Chaigneau, M. 1980 Les gaz occlus dans les bombes volcaniques de l'activite du Piton de la Fournaise en 1975-1976 (Ile de la Reunion), Bulletin of Vulcanology, 43, 225-232.Sanchez, L. 1996 A passion for volcanoes, Reader's Digest, August, 149(892) 98-106