

Compiled by JANINE DE VILLIERS

Publications and Promotions

Footage of red hot lava being blown into the atmosphere of the earth is spectacular to watch and the destruction left behind by a volcanic eruption leaves spectators in awe of the violent forces of nature. The public interest in natural disasters has never waned and in the light of this the Central Video Collection of the Western Cape Provincial Library Service continues to add titles dealing with disasters such as volcanoes to the existing collection. Coverage range from the eruption of Vesuvius in ancient Roman times to more recent eruptions such as Mount Helens and includes information on volcanoes in general.

The eruption of Mount St. Helens!; and Images of a volcano / director, George Casey.

In May 1980, Mount St Helens, a dormant volcano in the American state of Washington, erupted with enormous power. At the end of this and a number of secondary explosions, its height had been decreased by 1 300 feet and some 230 square miles of forest had been flattened. It was one of the greatest natural disasters in American history and reshaped the landscape. This film was compiled from footage shot at the time and reveals the awesome power of the eruptions. It also visits the surrounding towns that were covered in layers of ash and returns after a decade to show life has reasserted itself.

The original film was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Documentary Short in 1980 and, with the new footage, was shown in the Imax theatres. Narrated by Robert Foxworth, it is suitably spectacular.

On this video (and the DVD) it is preceded by **Images of a volcano**, which presents orchestrated atmospheric footage of an unidentified erupting volcano or volcanoes, accompanied only by music on the soundtrack.

Fire on Heimaey / directors, Osvaldur and Vilhjalmur Knudsen.

Heimaey, the largest of the Vestmann Islands, lies off the southern coast of Iceland, approximately 100 kilometres southeast of Reykjavik. On the night of 23 January 1973, a volcanic eruption opened up a 1,6 kilometre long fissure just 200 metres from the town of Vestmannaeyjar, one of the country's most important fishing centres. Within a few hours nearly 5 000 people had been evacuated, but some 300 volunteers stayed



behind to try and stem the lava flow and thus ensure the survival of the harbour. This is a record of the event and also depicts the subsequent efforts to clear the tons of tephra that covered one third of the town.

Krakatoa: the day that shook the world

On August 27, 1883, following three months of preliminary volcanic activity, the island of Krakatoa, situated between Java and Sumatra, erupted with a force that heralded one of the most catastrophic events in history. The explosions were heard hundreds of miles away and the resultant tidal waves, or tsunamis, destroyed the coastal areas of the Indonesian mainland. Especially hard hit was the region of Ulung Kulon on Java, some 25 miles across the Sunda Strait, which was never resettled. Now a national park, it has the appearance of a prehistoric jungle and this film depicts some of the unusual wildlife found there. Thereafter it pays a visit to Anak Krakatoa, a new volcano that rose from the sea that now covers the great crater formed by the explosion, and shows how, in apparently sterile conditions, life has re-established itself.

Understanding volcanoes

Volcanoes act as cooling vents for the earth's molten core and though 80% of the planet's volcanic activity takes place under the ocean, it is the other 20% that has been filmed most extensively. Basically the programme provides an introduction to how volcanoes function, presenting facts and figures, together with some spectacular footage shot on location in Hawaii, Italy, New Zealand and the United States, as well as archival material from elsewhere. Geologists, volcanologists and what are called 'lava junkies' discuss their obsession and the programme explains efforts being made to predict future eruptions. It also has a very good narrator in actress Candice Bergen.

Volcano

There are some 1 500 potentially dangerous volcanoes on earth and over the past 1 000 years, approximately

300 000 lives have been lost to eruptions. These are the statistics, but they don't begin to convey the power of the visuals of this programme from the National Geographic Society. Travelling the earth and incorporating archival material from various sources, it observes a variety of volcanoes in action, from Columbia and Hawaii to Tanzania and Japan. It also focuses on the work of volcanologists, who try to predict when volcanoes are likely to erupt. Often they succeed, but occasionally their mistakes end in tragedy for themselves and others. Two experts, Maurice and Katja Krafft, who had photographed more eruptions than anyone else, were killed when they miscalculated while filming Mount Unzen in Japan. Another volcanologist, Stanley Williams, was caught when a volcano in Colombia unexpectedly erupted, but potentially the biggest explosion, that of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991, resulted in a minimum loss of life. All these events are captured on film, resulting in a truly spectacular documentary.

Be sure not to miss
Born of fire
Hidden Hawaii
In the shadow of Vesuvius.

Draw the attention of your patrons to these documentaries. For those who enjoy fireworks, nature's fireworks will certainly enthral!

Note: Reviews by Freddy Ogterop, Film/Video/DVD Selector of the Western Cape Library Service.

2003

