

Vesuvius & Pompeii

The 79 CE eruption of Vesuvius destroyed the nearby town of Pompeii. Excavations of the buried Roman city show just how dangerous volcanoes can be.

Poster © Jeannie Scott / NERC



The destruction of Pompeii has inspired artists for centuries.



Pompeii was preserved because much of it was buried by falling ash, pumice, and rocks. This deluge lasted for hours, so many people had time to leave the city.



The day after the eruption began, violent pyroclastic flows ripped through Pompeii, destroying the parts of the city which hadn't yet been buried and killing anyone left behind. Unfortunately, these flows travelled beyond Pompeii, catching up with many who had evacuated.



Another city, Herculaneum, was even closer to Vesuvius than Pompeii; it too was completely buried.



We have a written record of what happened at Vesuvius thanks to Pliny the Elder, who died trying to rescue people from the volcano, and his nephew, Pliny the Younger. Today, we call the big eruption columns from exploding volcanoes "Plinian".



3 million people live near Vesuvius today.