



THE ERUPTION OF MOUNT VESUVIUS TIMELINE

February 5, 62 A.D. – August 25, 79 A.D.

Pompeii is one of the most famous and tragic cities of antiquity.

On August 24, 79 A.D., Pompeii and surrounding area vanished under a thick layer of volcanic ash when nearby Mt. Vesuvius suddenly erupted. For the next 17 centuries, the city remained lost, forgotten and amazingly preserved as if sealed in a time capsule.

The following chronology of events is based on the historic written accounts of Pliny the Younger and modern findings of archeologists and volcanologists.

The Eruption of Mt. Vesuvius

February 5, 62 A.D.

Major earthquake hits Pompeii and region.

64 A.D.

A second earthquake damages many buildings in the city. No one connects these events with nearby mountain.

August 24, 79 A.D.

Morning

A series of small emissions from Mt. Vesuvius is seen.

1:00 P.M.

Mt. Vesuvius erupts suddenly and with force. A cloud of volcanic materials quickly rises high above the mountain and spreads out in the shape of a mushroom. A thin layer of ash begins to cover the area. Within 30 minutes the swirling dark cloud rises nearly nine miles above the mountain.

3:00 P.M.

Vesuvius continues to release volcanic materials made up of white pumice and to a lesser degree, stones, lapilli (small fragments of lava thrown from the volcano) and ash. In Pompeii, this debris begins to accumulate rapidly. Most residents try to flee the area although some decide to seek shelter in buildings and beneath porches. The debris begins to clog the Sarno River and the port rendering both impassable to ships. Seismic shocks shake the area.

5:00 - 6:00 P.M.

Pieces of pumice as large as 15 to 20 inches in diameter fall. The roofs of the city begin to collapse under the weight of deposited debris. Roads clog with volcanic material making flight more difficult. The dense eruptive cloud, now rising about 16 miles above the mountain, obliterates the sun. Darkness, punctuated by flashes of lightning, add to the obstacles facing the fleeing inhabitants.

8:00 P.M.

Almost five feet of volcanic material cover Pompeii and surroundings areas. The eruption changes as the size and density of emitted materials increase. The eruptive column, now denser than the surrounding air, partially collapse and the first flows of pyroclastic materials start down the mountain's slopes.

August 25, 79 A.D.

1:00 - 2:00 A.M.

Scalding flows of volcanic debris mixed with steam spill out from the volcano and move down the slopes to ground level. They hit areas to the north, south and west of the mountain, including the towns of

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Herculaneum, Oplontis and Boscoreale, but not Pompeii. All life in the path of the surges is quickly extinguished.

The eruptive column rises to an amazing height of 20 miles. In Pompeii, debris rises to more than nine feet and reaches the upper stories of buildings. It enters through windows and doors, trapping and suffocating those hiding within. Others are killed by collapsing roofs and walls.

Around 5:00 A.M.

Strong earthquakes continue to strike the area. The rain of pumice and ash abates but darkness prevails as the rising sun is still hidden by the massive ash cloud. Many seize the apparent opportunity to flee their hiding places and escape the city. Walking on the pumice deposits is difficult as is breathing in the ash-filled air.

6:30 A.M.

The first pyroclastic surge reaches Pompeii from the north but is held back by the city's wall.

7:30 A.M.

A new series of pyroclastic surges make it over the walls and bury Pompeii. They come so suddenly and unexpectedly that they engulf and suffocate not only the people still hiding in buildings but also others in the streets attempting to escape. Many are trapped at the port which is overwhelmed within minutes after the city is buried. Many, who died in Pompeii, died in this phase of the eruption.

8:00 A.M.

The most destructive of the surges hits Pompeii. Wherever the surge goes, fire and lightning precede. The tallest town structures succumb. This same surge continues its destructive path throughout the region arriving at Stabiae and reaching as far as Naples.

Volcanic activity continues for several days but on a much smaller scale. By the time the eruption comes to an end, Pompeii is buried, with only the tops of the highest walls still visible. The terrible eruption annihilates the summit and reduces Mt. Vesuvius' height by almost half.

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