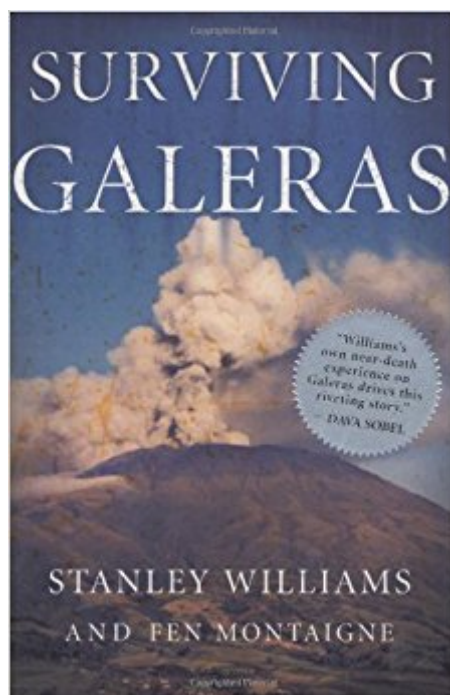


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Surviving Galeras



Synopsis

Through a harrowing first-person account of an eruption and its aftermath, *SURVIVING GALERAS* reveals the fascinating, high-risk realm of volcanology and explores the profound impact volcanoes have had on the earth's landscapes and civilizations. In 1993, Stanley Williams, an eminent volcanologist, was standing on top of a Colombian volcano called Galeras when it erupted, killing six of his colleagues instantly. As Williams tried to escape the blast, he was pelted with white-hot projectiles traveling faster than bullets. Within seconds he was cut down, his skull fractured, his right leg almost severed, his backpack aflame. Williams lay helpless and near death on Galeras's flank until two brave women -- friends and fellow volcanologists -- mounted an astonishing rescue effort to carry him safely off the mountain. The tale of how Williams survived Galeras is the framework for a groundbreaking book about volcanoes, their physical and cultural impact, and the tiny cadre of scientists who risk their own lives to gain knowledge that might one day save many others' lives. Volcanoes unleash supremely powerful, unpredictable forces, and we have paid dearly for our understanding of their behavior. Even with ever more sensitive measuring tools and protective equipment, at least one volcanologist, on average, dies each year. Yet Williams and his fellow scientist-adventurers continue to unveil the enigmatic and miraculous workings of volcanoes and to piece together methods for predicting their actions. Volcanologists often put themselves in peril, not only because the discipline attracts risk-takers but because they know that volcanoes threaten as many as 500 million people worldwide. For Seattle, Tokyo, Mexico City, Naples -- and for volcanologists -- the clock is ticking.

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Customer Reviews

On January 14, 1993, Stanley Williams led a party of fellow geologists up Galeras, a Colombian volcano that, though historically active, had been lying quiet long enough that they suspected it was due for an episode--and thus an opportunity for the volcanologists to practice their predicting skills. As they reached the lip of its great crater, Galeras obliged them with a vengeance: it erupted in a burst of fire and toxic gas, killing several members of the party and leaving Williams scorched and broken, "sprawled on my side, caked in ash and blood, wet from the rain, bones protruding from my burned clothes, my jaw hanging slackly." Rescued by two colleagues, Marta Velasco and Patty Mothes, Williams faced several challenges in the years to come--not only healing his body and exorcising the ghosts of Galeras, but also contending with other colleagues' whispered charges that he should have known the mountain was about to blow. But death, Williams and collaborator Fen Montaigne (*Reeling in Russia*) write, comes with the territory. Whenever a volcano has erupted in recent years, it seems, a volcanologist is among its victims, for, Williams notes, "the best way to understand a volcano is still, in my opinion, to climb it," and to climb it in all of its moods. And those moods, Williams and Montaigne add, are not easy to forecast, even if earth scientists have developed ever more accurate ways to predict events such as earthquakes and tsunamis. At once a study in mountains, the history of geology, and the will to endure, *Surviving Galeras* is often terrifying, and altogether memorable. --Gregory McNamee

Williams, a geology professor at Arizona State University, headed the team on the cone of Colombia's Galeras volcano when it erupted in 1993. Nine people were killed. Severely injured, Williams gained celebrity before he left the hospital, and his roles as expedition leader and media personality generated significant controversy. Williams sustained enough brain damage, he asserts, that he initially believed himself to be the sole survivor, which he promptly told reporters. Actually, several scientists survived, and Williams here acknowledges his slight. Though he insists either because of his injuries or for more nefarious reasons that the others are mistaken about critical elements to the story, his account appears flawed. He alleges that his personal conflict with seismologist Chouet (in 1991, with Williams present, Chouet introduced a method of predicting eruptions) kept him ignorant of Galeras's danger. In fact, Williams submitted a grant proposal to research prediction of eruptions just one month after Chouet's presentation. As to his claim that he merely let reporters state that he alone survived, readers only have to watch the February 12, 1993, broadcast of NBC's *Nightly News* to hear Williams himself make this pronouncement. The volcanic histories seem a vain attempt to substantiate a porous memoir. Though artfully written (with

Montaigne, author of *Reeling in Russia*), this antagonistic telling so contradicts other survivors' accounts as to seem ludicrous. Illus. not seen by PW. (Apr. 17) Forecast: With a \$150,000 marketing campaign, 15-city author tour and a generous floor display, Houghton Mifflin is taking a gamble on a book whose sales will most likely be cut into by its competitor, *No Apparent Danger*. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This volume describes tense situations at two Columbian volcanoes. One ended in a large disaster and the other in nine deaths -- including six scientists and three sightseers. I love books about scientists doing science, and this book falls into that genre. This book convincingly corrects the record with respect to a scientist who has apparently claimed credit for work done others and avoided responsibility for errors that led to the deaths of several scientists. The book could have been better organized -- it wasn't always clear where the author wanted to go with this book. I wish the author would have explained a bit more about volcanoes and the work volcanologists do. But over all, both a good read and educational.

The story of Nevado del Ruiz and Galeras have long been of interest to me. I am an amateur geologist with a particular interest in volcanology and have visited most of America's volcanoes and am actually on my way to visit Ruiz in 2 weeks. I thought I knew the story of Galeras. I thought wrong. Mrs. Bruce tells the story of both disasters in vivid, at times horrific detail as it was witnessed through the eyes of the survivors. I found particularly disturbing the method in which Bernard Chouet was literally robbed of his legacy. It is fortunate that Bruce took the initiative to set the record straight and expose the truth in who was really at fault in the tour's tragic results. I myself being a scientist and amateur geologist, am very familiar with Long Period Events and their implications in pending eruptions. I was unaware of the problems at Ruiz with getting the necessary equipment and personnel on the scene to make a difference for Armero. I knew they town had been poorly advised of the coming lahars, but not all the details. The details of the Galeras eruption are particularly heartbreaking. The tragedy was completely avoidable and the details of the deaths and injuries are very graphic. Overall, Bruce does a fantastic job of telling two stories that need to be told and exposing the truth. I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in geology, volcanoes, and anyone else.

I have always been fascinated by volcanoes having been to Mount St. Helens not long after it

erupted so when I saw this book I was very interested. I found this to be well written in such a way that grabs you immediately. It is a story of tragic eruptions and the scientists who study them. One particular scientist whose arrogance caused deaths. His hunger for fame made him distort the facts to make himself a hero. My only complaint is that this scientist is never proven to be the liar that he is to the public.....unless you read this book. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and highly recommend it to anyone fascinated by volcanoes.

This was an amazing story of two volcanoes and how myth and local culture clashed with scientific research resulting in human loss and tragedy to preserve the local economies reputation and how ego came into play to distort the reports of what happened to further (incorrectly) the reputation of one of the scientists present at an eruption scene

I don't know a lot about volcanoes but this book is a real eye opener. It is also a story about lives lost because one person convinced his team it was safe to go into the volcano. Then to make matters worse he began to tell the story of the eruption as though there were no warnings and he alone came out alive. A sad story of human life lost.

This book presents two tragedies caused by volcanoes in Colombia and how failure to act on best information available led to human tragedy. This book is easy to read and the author keeps your attention throughout the book without getting bogged down in technical jargon.

A well told story of human error, unpredictability of nature, political failure and incompetence, vanity and stupidity, as well as courageous effort of some in the face of such opposition. Very interesting account of events that would often be overlooked or ignored, or blamed on "fate". A reminder of human limitations.

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