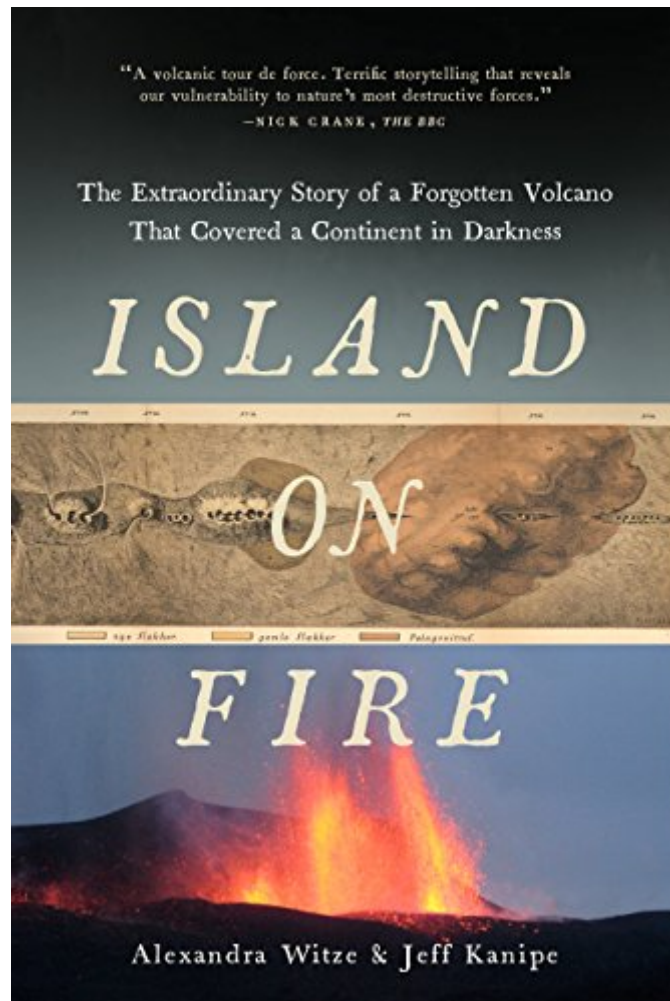


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# Island On Fire: The Extraordinary Story Of A Forgotten Volcano That Changed The World



## Synopsis

Can a single explosion change the course of history? An eruption at the end of the 18th century led to years of climate change while igniting famine, disease, even perhaps revolution. Laki is one of Iceland's most fearsome volcanoes. Laki is Iceland's largest volcano. Its eruption in 1783 is one of history's great, untold natural disasters. Spewing out sun-blocking ash and then a poisonous fog for eight long months, the effects of the eruption lingered across the world for years. It caused the deaths of people as far away as the Nile and created catastrophic conditions throughout Europe. Island on Fire is the story not only of a single eruption but the people whose lives it changed, the dawn of modern volcanology, as well as the history and potential of other super-volcanoes like Laki around the world. And perhaps most pertinently, in the wake of the eruption of another Icelandic volcano, Eyjafjallajökull, which closed European air space in 2010, acclaimed science writers Witze and Kanipe look at what might transpire should Laki erupt again in our lifetime.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this spellbinding book, the authors describe volcanic eruptions in the world with particular attention to the effects on humans, civilization and the environment. But the book's main focus is

on an Icelandic volcano called Laki and on the devastating effects of its 1783 eruption on the local inhabitants as well as in Europe and indeed the Northern Hemisphere. Other volcanic eruptions discussed include Toba, Tambora, Krakatau, Vesuvius, Etna and several others mainly in Iceland. Although the mechanics/geology of eruptions is briefly discussed, it's the actual materials/chemicals that are spewed out and their respective devastating effects that the authors devote more space to. I must say that I had a very hard time putting this book down. The prose is clear, friendly, very lively, highly accessible and immensely captivating. The descriptions of the effects of the eruptions on people and livestock are particularly heart-wrenching. This book can be enjoyed by absolutely anyone, especially those interested in the devastating effects of volcanic eruptions and what the future may hold.

I like the intersection of natural science and human history, and bought this because I'd heard of the Laki eruption from reading about the ice core data, but had never seen a good narrative of the 1783 eruption. This fit the bill perfectly. It is quite readable and well researched. It's a timely read too, because in August 2014 the Bardarbunga volcano erupted in Iceland in a long duration high out gassing eruption, termed "the largest such eruption since 1783"! I think it's still ongoing now ( Feb 2015).

A misleading title. The "Island of Fire" (Iceland) and the volcano Laki, figure little in the book after the first 50 pages or so. The book is really a compendium of volcanoes around the world with eruptions that have caused great devastation and loss of life. It's an interesting topic but has little to do with Laki, supposedly the central topic of the book, or with Iceland for that matter. Interesting, but I found it difficult to read, as it jumps around the world. "Iceland" and "Laki" have only small parts to play, and the sub-title on the cover jacket, "The Extraordinary Story of a Forgotten Volcano That Changed the World" is misleading. (I wish the authors had included a pronunciation guide, Icelandic names are difficult.)

For a natural disaster junkie, this book came as a surprise. While I was aware of the problems caused by recent Icelandic volcanos, I had never heard of this earlier one which caused problems around the world. However, I was disappointed at the amount of time spent detailing the authors' trips which felt, at best, like filler.

Something of a disappointment. Too much of the book is used in describing other volcanos (as if

this book is the only volcano book the reader would have read!), and the Lakigigar eruption is described from the viewpoint of only one person. While that person may be the best source, I cannot believe there are no others.

Well written for a first book. As a volcanologist, I tagged all the pages with first hand accounts. Witze and Kanipe did a great job making these accounts scientifically relatable and significant. I especially enjoyed the extrapolation to modern day possibilities.

I am sorry, because I hate to give a bad review but this was a terrible book. True some interesting information but it was put together in a disjointed confusing manner, hopping here and hopping there. A conglomeration of facts and figures which was bad enough but then this conglomeration was in the metric system and in Celsius and not Fahrenheit making it all the more difficult to make sense of it. Since the book was published in the US, could it not be adapted to the public buying it? Match that with most of the names unpronounceable. And then there were the illustrations. Most of the illustrations were not necessary and the ones that were, were not in the book. I mean who needs a picture of Benjamin Franklin that fills half a page just because he is mentioned once? And the illustrations that were in the book were of such poor quality that they were useless in assisting any one in understanding the book.

This book is packed with information about volcanoes. It starts and comes back to Iceland, but in the middle it explains a lot more about the various types of volcanoes and their potential for destruction. I read this book as background for a trip to Iceland to do geologic field work. I not only learned a lot about volcanoes and glaciers, but quite a lot about the history of Iceland as well. Well-written and fascinating.

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