

Incident at Mount St. Helens??

Ash blackened the sky and cinders rained from a thunderous cloud. The magnitude of the volcanic eruption so far exceeded expectations that early news of the event was constructed of fragmentary, often hysterical accounts. Real knowledge of what happened that day would be years away in the learning — product of science's striving to match historic occurrence with scholarly, definitive descriptions of the process.

The event so described was not the incident at Mount St. Helens. It took place in the shadow of the San Francisco Peaks near the Grand Canyon in 1065 A.D. Archeological investigations over the decades confirm the presence of prehistoric people, who would have been struck with terror and whose total environment — including social, economic and political — would be changed by the event.

The contemporary tie-in with the Mount St. Helens eruption, already established in the minds of park visitors, has been noted and used much as set forth above, by Don Follows, team captain for the General Management/Development Concept Plan now underway at Wupatki and Sunset Crater National Monuments. These two sites were impacted by the 1065 A.D. explosions, and Supt. Henry L. Jones reports that in spite of rising fuel costs, interest is such that visitation at Sunset Crater has increased.

The 1930 act for establishing Sunset Crater NM contains language specifying that the cinder cone and its associated lavas should be preserved "to illustrate the dramatic effects of the violent eruption and aftermath upon the prehistoric people living in the area."

(For related commentary, see editorial inside front cover.)