

The Year There was no Summer

In April 1815, the world's largest volcanic eruption occurred on the island of Sumbawa, near Bali, Indonesia. Clouds of volcanic ash filled the air and blocked out the sun. The ash in the upper atmosphere was carried around the world, pushed by the winds. By the spring of 1816, colonists living in New England noticed that the sunrise and sunsets were a beautiful red color. By June, the sun was so dim from heavy fog that the heat from the sun could not reach the earth, and temperatures plummeted.



Many diary entries tell of this historic event. James Winchester left home to gather his sheep, and jokingly told his wife to send the neighbors out to look for him because the snow fall in June could be treacherous. Days later, after a snowstorm that dropped 28 inches, he was found frozen in a snowbank. Other stories mention that wells were completely frozen over in July and throw snow and ice had to be boiled for water. During this strange event, colonists were unable to plant crops and hunger prevailed throughout the year – all because of a volcanic eruption a half a world away.



How fascinating (and devastating) that a volcano in Bali could play havoc with lives around the world. Volcanic ash is a mixture of miniscule rocks, minerals, and glass particles that are spewed when a volcano erupts. These particles have jagged edges which can causes issues with peoples, eyes, lungs, and sinuses. Because the ash is lightweight, it is easily blown about by the wind. When ash is blown through the atmosphere, it is called a *plume*. Eventually, the airborne ash falls to the ground covering plants and animals, as well as contaminating the water supply. In today's world, volcanic ash is dangerous for air traffic, so air travel is halted until the skies clear.