

NATURAL DISASTERS IN SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

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PREHISTORIC DISASTERS IN SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

Because of climate and geography, the area encompassed by today's San Bernardino County has a long history of natural disasters.

Perhaps the most striking is the birth of the San Bernardino and San Gabriel mountain ranges along the San Andreas Fault. Uplift and strike-slip faulting started only about 2 million years ago and created the elevated and eroding landscape familiar to us today.

Geologic evidence reveals many large seismic events produced by slip on the San Andreas Fault since the sixth century A.D. Six of the eight prehistoric events are comparable to those of the great ($M_s=8-1/4+$) 1857 event. Radiocarbon dates indicate that the events occurred in the nineteenth, eighteenth, fifteenth, thirteenth, late twelfth, tenth, ninth, seventh, and sixth centuries A.D. Recurrence intervals average 160 years but vary from a half-century to about three centuries. The dates may indicate a fairly systematic pattern of occurrence of large earthquakes.

Volcanoes in San Bernardino County? Amboy Crater in the Mojave Desert erupted just 10,000 years ago; its lava field covers about 70 square kilometers.

A five-mile-long, 2-mile-wide landslide flew from the northern San Bernardino Mountains into today's Lucerne Valley 17,000 years ago. The Blackhawk Landslide was a stream of rubble 2000 feet wide and 400 feet deep that collapsed into Blackhawk Canyon. The rubble launched itself into the air at 170 miles per hour and, moving on a cushion of compressed air, gained speeds up to 270 miles per hour before being deposited 4000 feet from its source – all in about 80 seconds.

