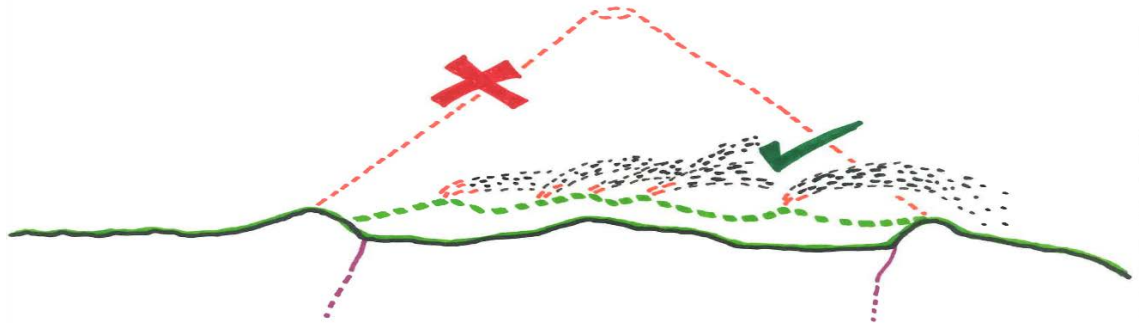


## How big was the volcano that formed the Valles Caldera?

This great question comes back from time to time. We have been asked if the volcano was the size of or higher than Mt. Everest. It was not.



Supervolcanoes, such as the Valles Caldera and Yellowstone are typically volcanic fields. These are clusters of volcanos that sit over huge magma bodies. Actually the term “supervolcano” is an informal description of an area that has experienced a supereruption. These eruptions are indeed super, involving a number of volcanos, and spewing mind-boggling quantities of material into the air and onto the surrounding landscape.

The Valles volcanos have had several cycles of eruptions, and have ejected about 140 times the amount of material of the most recent eruption of Mt. St. Helens in Washington State. At one time, ash deposits would have covered New Mexico, and have been identified in Kansas.

The Valles Caldera sits on the edge of the Rio Grande Rift, a spreading crack in America’s continental crust. The thinning of the crust brought magma close to the surface. After the eruptions, about 1.2 million years ago, the magma subsided, allowing the surface in the caldera to drop, forming the crater. The volcano is far from extinct, as evidenced by the many hot springs in the area as well as the slowly growing resurgent domes in the caldera floor.

Visitors driving along the Valle Grande are often awed by its vast size. They are seldom aware that what they can see is but a small portion of the actual caldera, which extends to the mountains one can see in the far distance beyond Redondo Peak.

5/2017