

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

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VOLCANOLOGY

Sniffing for Clues to Dinosaurs' Demise

From Pompeii to Montserrat, history teaches caution in the presence of a smoking volcano. So Ken Sims's job seems a bit counterintuitive. Braving possible eruptions and choking gas, Sims, a geochemist at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, rappels into volcanoes like Nicaragua's Masaya (right) and takes samples of the exhaust emitted from magma tubes. Though the ground near the Masaya magma pit, at upper center, collapsed just days after he'd been there, Sims thinks the risks he takes are worth it: By comparing his data with sediment and ice core



JOHN CATTO, ALPENGLOW PICTURES

samples from around the world, he thinks he'll find out more about the link between volcanic eruptions and ancient climate shifts, like the one that may have contributed to the demise of the

dinosaurs. "There's a debate over volcanoes or meteorites as the cause," Sims says. His research may be useful in understanding modern climate change as well.

—Chris Carroll