

No 14 It once rained for two million years, say scientists

Farmers pray for rain in times of drought. Most of us have experience of wanting the heavens to open for our garden to be watered during an excessively dry spell. However, none of us can imagine a prolonged period of rain lasting two million years. U.K. geologist and forensic scientist Alastair Ruffell has discovered that 200-300 million years ago, before the single landmass of Pangea separated into continents, Earth did see an era during which it rained non-stop for up to two million years.

Dr Ruffell said this helped forge the development of flora and fauna all over the globe. He believes the precipitation may have been sparked by a huge rise in humidity following a series of massive volcanic eruptions.

Dr Ruffell and his team based their findings on research conducted on strata of rock in the Eastern Alps in Europe in the 1970s and 80s. The data showed unusual layers deposited in ancient rock that dated back over 200 million years. Ruffell said this led to growing evidence that the wet period may have been, "the trigger that enabled dinosaurs, and possibly the other members of our modern land-based fauna, to diversify and dominate the land".

He added: "It may have been one of the most important events in the history of life, in terms of its role in allowing not only the age of dinosaurs, but also the origins of most key classes that form the modern fauna of...turtles, crocodiles, lizards and mammals."

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