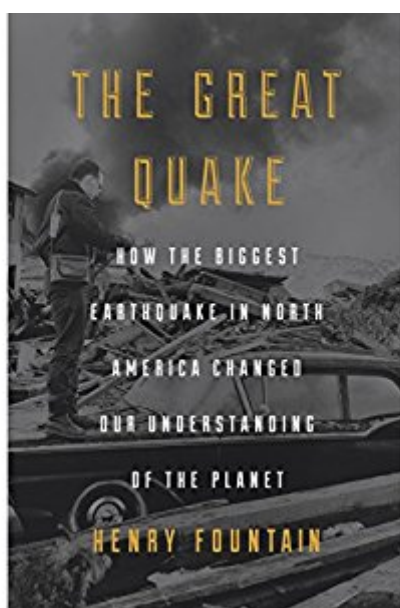


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# The Great Quake: How The Biggest Earthquake In North America Changed Our Understanding Of The Planet



## Synopsis

In the best-selling tradition of Erik Larson's *Isaac's Storm*, *The Great Quake* is a riveting narrative about the biggest earthquake in North American recorded history - the 1964 Alaska earthquake that demolished the city of Valdez and swept away the island village of Chenega - and the geologist who hunted for clues to explain how and why it took place. At 5:36 p.m. on March 27, 1964, a magnitude 9.2 earthquake - the second most powerful in world history - struck the young state of Alaska. The violent shaking, followed by massive tsunamis, devastated the southern half of the state and killed more than 130 people. A day later George Plafker, a geologist with the US Geological Survey, arrived to investigate. His fascinating scientific detective work in the months that followed helped confirm the then-controversial theory of plate tectonics. In a compelling tale about the almost unimaginable brute force of nature, New York Times science journalist Henry Fountain combines history and science to bring the quake and its aftermath to life in vivid detail. With deep on-the-ground reporting from Alaska, often in the company of George Plafker, Fountain shows how the earthquake left its mark on the land and its people - and on science.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Henry Fountain has written an insightful account of the massive earthquake that hit Alaska in 1964. It's an event in our nation's history that I had never heard of. In addition to the scientific information surrounding the event, Mr. Fountain has interviewed survivors who are living today. I always appreciate primary sources in a work of nonfiction. The story is fashioned around geologist George

Plafker, an old Alaska hand. (I would have appreciated a pronunciation guide for his last name!) Another main character is Kris Madsen, the teacher in a one-room schoolhouse in Chenega, a village that was hard hit by the earthquake. The author hints early on that much of the damage -- and most of the casualties -- were not due to the roiling landscape of the earthquake, but of the tsunamis that followed. Most readers will recognize that difference right away, having a knowledge of the 2004 earthquake and tsunami that decimated coastal areas in Indonesia. As the ultimate lay reader, I found the personal stories more compelling. The author recreates almost minute-by-minute where villagers in Chenega and other Alaskan coastal villages were when the earthquake hit, and what their ultimate fates were. I admit I skipped to the middle of the book to read about the disaster itself, and then went back to learn more about geology and seismology. The book's closing chapters examine what happened to the villages themselves, whether they were restored, abandoned or re-created elsewhere. This book is a fine example of narrative nonfiction. You have to have quite a bit of curiosity about geology to read all of the book with equal interest, but there are no reading police in sight, so skip around or skim some sections if you must. I continue to appreciate authors who can re-create the past with such intimacy and accuracy. These books are a boon for our collective history and memory.

The book includes everything I could have wanted. Scientific information and how it was discovered/developed, interesting information about the geologists, etc. who lead the charge as well as personal stories of the people who lived in the areas affected, I found it to be one of the best books I've read.

I stayed up all night reading this. There is so much information and detail, I will read it at least twice more, I'm sure. I was living in NH and had a 5 month old child and didn't pay a lot of attention to something that happened in Alaska at the time. I certainly should have! Buy the book, read it and keep it for reference.

There are informative non-fiction books and then there are entertaining informative non-fiction books, and *The Great Quake* is very much the latter. Fountain has created a narrative for a tragic event that is both fascinating and engrossing. Fountain builds the tension by introducing us to all the "characters" - scientists and citizens who witness or investigated the largest earthquake in modern history. Then comes the earthquake - shocking, tragic and exquisitely described. Finally, Fountain discusses the aftermath. *The Great Quake* is a fascinating mix of geology lesson and human

interest, and the reader learns about not only the event, which is an earthquake so massive that it was felt across the globe, but about what it means for us and the world we live in. I'm not particularly interested in tragedies nor geology, but this book is gripping, entertaining and full of interesting information. The story centers on geologist George Plafker and how the earthquake changed the way scientists understand our planet. It is hard to remember that until very recently, we didn't know how plates and earthquakes worked, and it is fascinating to find out how that knowledge developed over the past century. That's on top of the narrative of the earthquake itself, which is absolutely mind-blowing. I can't believe I've never heard of this earthquake before. The San Fran quakes stick out my mind, probably because they were so devastating to a large city, but I've never heard of the Alaska quake, even though it was bigger. Packed full of Alaska's history, geology, human interest stories and one big earthquake, this narrative non-fiction at its finest.

Review of: "The Great Quake: How the Biggest Earthquake in North America Changed Our Understanding of the Planet," Hardcover August 8, 2017 by Henry Fountain (Author). This book represents an incredible narrative of one of the greatest natural disasters of the Twentieth Century. The publisher's excerpt states: "The Great Quake is a riveting narrative about the biggest earthquake in North American recorded history -- the 1964 Alaska earthquake that demolished the city of Valdez and swept away the island village of Chenega -- and the geologist who hunted for clues to explain how and why it took place." The book is 278 pages in length and is comprised of contents to include fifteen chapters enumerated as such: Map of Alaska. Map of the Alaska earthquake of 1964. Chapter 1: Altered State. Chapter 2: Under the Mountain. Chapter 3: An Accident of Geography. Chapter 4: Clam Broth and Beer. Chapter 5: The Floating World. Chapter 6: Spiking Out. Chapter 7: Before the Storm. Chapter 8: Faults. Chapter 9: Shaken. Chapter 10: Stunned. Chapter 11: The Barnacle Line. Chapter 12: Rebuilding. Chapter 13: Deep Thinking. Chapter 14: Acceptance. Chapter 15: Epilogue. Acknowledgements. Notes and Suggestions for Further Reading. Bibliography. This is a great breakdown of the events and aftermath of an incredible act of nature. It recounts the work of George Plafker who as a geologist for the U.S. Geological Survey was tasked with investigating the Prince William Sound region in the aftermath of the earthquake. His work during this period subsequently confirmed the theory of plate tectonics. This is a great read. Five stars!

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