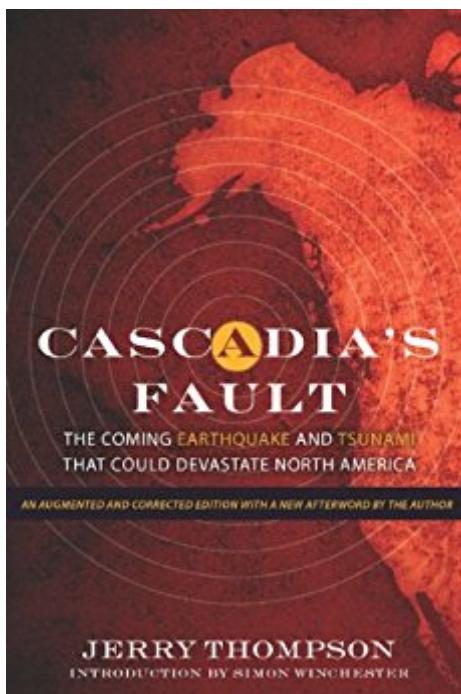


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Cascadia's Fault: The Coming Earthquake And Tsunami That Could Devastate North America



Synopsis

There is a crack in the earth's crust that runs roughly 31 miles offshore, approximately 683 miles from Northern California up through Vancouver Island off the coast of British Columbia. The Cascadia Subduction Zone has generated massive earthquakes over and over again throughout geologic time; at least thirty-six major events in the last 10,000 years. This fault generates a monster earthquake about every 500 years. And the monster is due to return at any time. It could happen 200 years from now, or it could be tonight. The Cascadia Subduction Zone is virtually identical to the offshore fault that wrecked Sumatra in 2004. It will generate the same earthquake we saw in Sumatra, at magnitude nine or higher, sending crippling shockwaves across a far wider area than any California quake. Slamming into Sacramento, Portland, Seattle, Victoria, and Vancouver, it will send tidal waves to the shores of Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, damaging the economies of the Pacific Rim countries and their trading partners for years to come. In light of recent massive quakes in Haiti, Chile, and Mexico, Cascadia's Fault not only tells the story of this potentially devastating earthquake and the tsunamis it will spawn, it also warns us about an impending crisis almost unprecedented in modern history.

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Customer Reviews

The story Jerry Thompson has to tell is critically important, intriguing for anyone interested in science and as current as the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northeast Japan. I just wish Thompson had told the story better. While the San Andreas fault gets all the publicity, it's not the most dangerous earthquake fault in America, or even on the west coast. That dubious honor goes to the Cascadia fault, where the easterly edge of the Juan de Fuca Plate is being stuffed under the northwest coast of North America. Extending from northern Vancouver Island to northern California, the plate is jammed. Locked up tight. At the rate of about 4mm a year, pressure is building. It doesn't sound like much, but the last major quake was in 1700, and based upon field work measured ML8.7-9.0, about the same magnitude (and for about the same reasons) as the disastrous 2011 quake off northeastern Japan. Geologists estimate a 37% chance of a major ML 9 quake in the next 50 years. Such a quake and attendant tsunamis would be disastrous, if anything worse than those videos of what happened in Japan. Thompson tells the story of how the new science of plate tectonics developed, and specifically how those developments helped create an understanding of the geology and the risk the Cascadia fault presents. It's approximately what John McPhee did in *By a River Dark as Death: Annals of the Former World*, but focused on the Juan de Fuca Plate. And Thompson isn't the writer that John McPhee is. Thompson very nearly makes an interesting story tedious.

"Cascadia's Fault" is at some level two books. The better of the two is the story of how geologists around the world discovered how sea floors subside between floating continents to create "subduction zones" where volcanoes and earthquakes are common and often deadly. The famous "Ring of Fire" around the Pacific Ocean, for example, is the surface manifestation of several interrelated subduction zones. Bound up in this historical narrative is the detective story of how scientists learned that the Cascadia Subduction Zone lies offshore and beneath the Pacific Northwest. They even know, to a high degree of certainty, that the last major earthquake along this fault occurred at about 9:00 pm on January 26, 1700--it may have exceeded 9.0 on the Richter Scale, and it sent an "orphan tsunami" across the Pacific that heavily damaged Japan. Native American legends and careful study of land subsidence along the West Coast show that the tsunami waves were even more devastating on this side of the ocean. Thompson is on shakier ground (so to speak) in the "other" book, in which he speculates about what the complete release of the Cascadia Subduction Zone would do to the West Coast. As a journalist and documentary film maker, Thompson can't resist the urge to make the earthquake as awful as possible. He argues that one outcome could be 15+ meter tsunamis that devastate essentially all of the coastal communities

on the West Coast from British Columbia all the way to California, as well as trans-Pacific waves that would hit Hawaii, Japan and elsewhere. The 9.0 quake itself would be widespread enough--and more to the point, long enough--to make the tall buildings in Seattle, Vancouver, Sacramento, San Francisco and Portland behave like tuning forks, with predictably catastrophic results.

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