

Earthquakes at home and abroad

By Alice Walker



Image Courtesy of FEMA

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Earthquakes occur everywhere in the world, although most are along the edges of the great plates that make up the Earth's outer skin, and which move at about the speed our fingernails grow. Each year, the globe is shaken by thousands of earthquakes but many go unnoticed except by the seismologists who study them. Large earthquakes can cause landslides and tsunamis, and can rupture gas or water mains, causing raging fires and flooding.

The UK is not immune from earthquakes – it has over 100 each year. The largest onshore earthquake in the last 140 years occurred in North Wales on 19 July 1984 with a magnitude of 5.4. It was felt over most of England, throughout Wales and even into Scotland and Ireland, and caused damage as far away as Liverpool, 120km from its epicentre. Our biggest earthquake in Scotland was smaller, at magnitude 5.2, and was centred in Argyle, near Loch Awe in 1880. Scottish earthquakes are still continuing; with a recent one near Fort William on 10 October 2008, which was felt widely causing furniture to shake and windows and crockery to rattle but no damage was caused. Two recent earthquakes which have caused damage occurred in England at Folkestone (M4.2) on 28 April 2007 and at Market Rasen (M5.2) on 27 February 2008. Among all these earthquakes, BGS also detects explosions, sonic booms and mining collapses which it must identify.

In this talk, suitable for all ages, Alice Walker of the British Geological Survey, will discuss the cause and impact of earthquakes at home and abroad, including the Boxing Day Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004.

Curriculum Links

- 5-14 Science: Earth and Space
- Standard Geography: The Physical Environment
- This topic will also be of interest to many physics and maths students as many aspects of both these subjects are utilised in seismology.