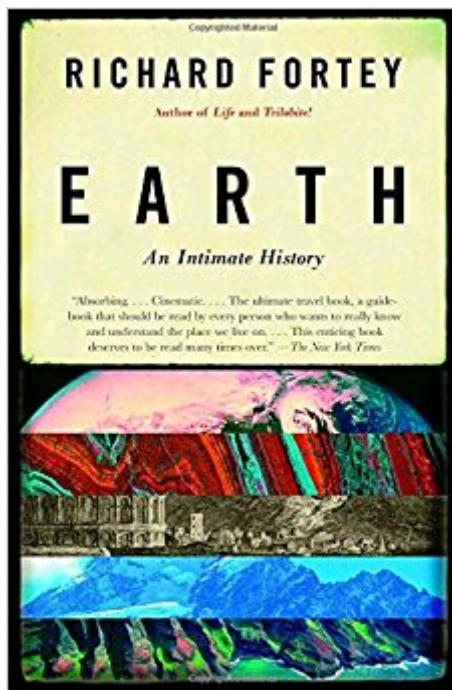


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# Earth: An Intimate History



## Synopsis

In *Earth*, the acclaimed author of *Trilobite!* and *Life* takes us on a grand tour of the earth's physical past, showing how the history of plate tectonics is etched in the landscape around us. Beginning with Mt. Vesuvius, whose eruption in Roman times helped spark the science of geology, and ending in a lab in the West of England where mathematical models and lab experiments replace direct observation, Richard Fortey tells us what the present says about ancient geologic processes. He shows how plate tectonics came to rule the geophysical landscape and how the evidence is written in the hills and in the stones. And in the process, he takes us on a wonderful journey around the globe to visit some of the most fascinating and intriguing spots on the planet.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Though few of the leaf peepers driving through the Smokies this fall will know it, the Appalachians used to extend all the way to Scotland. In this sprawling geological survey, British paleontologist Fortey (*Trilobite! Eyewitness to Evolution*) tells readers that millions of years ago, before the land masses broke apart, the Caledonide Mountains formed the northernmost end of an enormous mountain range. Starting in the shadow of Vesuvius, Fortey's global tour moves to the Hawaiian islands, which, he explains, are falling back into the sea from northwest to southeast. Readers trek with him through the Alps and learn how rock folds and stretches. Fortey doesn't restrict himself to current geological time: he says the continents have broken apart and reformed more than once and will likely crunch together again in a few million years; the Pacific Ocean is gradually closing up because the lighter-weight continents are slowly drifting over the underlying basalt. Some readers

may wish for more discussion of desert areas, though there is a beautiful account of a descent through Earth's history via burro into the Grand Canyon. Fortey's writing is wonderfully descriptive, but once in a while one wishes he'd kept to his main path and not wandered off into tangential topics. Geology and earth sciences buffs will eat this up. 32 pages of color illus. not seen by PW; 58 b&w illus. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Geology underlies everything: it founds the landscape, dictates the agriculture, determines the character of villages." Fortey, senior paleontologist at the Natural History Museum in London, set out to explore those connections. "My solution has been to visit particular places, to explore their natural and human history in an intimate way, thence to move to the deeper motor of the earth--to show how the lie of the land responds to a deeper beat, a slow and fundamental pulse." His stops as he takes the reader on a journey around the world include Mount Vesuvius, the Alps, Newfoundland, Los Angeles and the Deccan Traps in India. He is an eloquent guide Editors of Scientific American --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I recently read Bill Bryson's excellent "A Short History of Nearly Everything". One name kept popping up - Richard Fortey. Curious, I searched him on and bought one of his books. Then another. Then another. Fortey is an expert in his field but he knows how to explain things and he does not lecture. Unlike some science writers, you never get the feeling that you are in an audience watching someone delivering a PowerPoint presentation. Instead of saying, "The area surrounding Naples played a key role in the birth of modern Geology", Fortey is more like, "Come with me to Naples. I want to show you something really interesting!" Then he does, and you are there, and you are drawn in. You don't just learn the point he is trying to make "you see it in front of you because he takes you there!" That's what I love about this book.

Probably a poem for a geologist, but not so much for a layman. Too many technical stuff, mineralogy in strength, pyrite, magnetite, tectonics, etc which can be more or less painfully swallowed and read -only with geological slowness- thanks to some morsels of more digestive prose.

Fortey's writing is a delight because it is scientifically sound and rich in literary style. He covers

about 4 billion years of the earth geologic history with verve. I have the feeling that only a classically educated Englishman could write with such a mixture of cold facts and expressive style. The folio edition I have also has beautiful and informative illustrations. For me one of the appealing aspects of the book is that I could pursue its chapters leisurely one at a time rather than treating it as a textbook to be read thru as a task. You will learn a lot of up-to-date information about geologic processes and meet some of the lesser known scientists who gave direction to our unfolding understanding of how the earth was, is, and may be in the future.

I took it to New Zealand on my Kindle. It brought greater understanding of the complicated landscape and fascinating geology enriching my experience. Accessible and enjoyable reading. Love his wit and humour and vignettes of famous and eccentric geologists. I discovered Richard Fortey by reading his "Beneath The Landscape" while I was in Great Britain earlier this year. Loved his ability to relate architecture to the geology of a place. Always so readable! I didn't want it to end and went looking for further books, hence "The Earth" When I was a child all I ever wanted to be was a geologist. At my high school in Glasgow the geography teacher had a doctorate in geology and had ended up teaching us! Her message was "Don't go there it is a man's world you will end up teaching. like me" Thank you Richard for taking me on the journeys I will never go on and helping me live the ones I have done by making the landscape come alive! Helly

This is a terrific book. Richard Fortey has a deep grasp of his subject and an ability to make it fascinating without dumbing it down. You can read this as a primer on the history of earth science and you can enjoy it as a travelogue. And he quotes Shakespeare. Who doesn't enjoy a science guy who can do that?

An outstanding book though it takes some reading. Fortey's knows his subject but unfortunately, he believes he is a good writer too. Or credit his readers with too much of intelligence. Very difficult book to read but rewarding in the end. Would I recommend it? Whole heartedly. Fortey is a master and the knowledge he imparts is worth the trouble. But spare at least a month of yours. Don't be daunted though, and that's the final word despite my cross-statement, as this book is a masterpiece. Must read.

Richard Fortney's "Earth" is a survey, in mostly layman's terms, of the geological history of the Earth and how it relates to humankind. Fortney tells the story by means of a journey around the earth,

selecting a series of locations where the earth's geology is apparent, and usually the meaning of that geology was debated by scholars to a greater understanding. Fortney starts at Mount Vesuvius in Italy, proceeds to the Hawaiian Islands, hence to the Swiss Alps and to other locations around the world. Fortney relates the geology of each chosen location to plate tectonics as a means to explain how each terrain came to be the way it is. This leads into extended and sometimes fascinating discussions of the former alignments of the continents in prior ages such as the "supercontinent" of Gondwana. For each location, Fortney also relates the effects of the terrain on the history of the humans who have lived in that location. Along the way, Fortney drives home the sheer vastness of the timescale of earth and its geological processes. The dedicated reader will view his landscape with a new perspective. Fortney is a gifted writer with a good eye for the illustrative anecdote. Large portions of this book will be fascinating to the reader with at least some schooling in the sciences. It turns out, for example, that the complicated geology of Newfoundland results from its origin as pieces of three different tectonic plates (North America, ocean bottom, and Northern Europe). The descriptions of Northwest Scotland as the remains of truly ancient mountains are put into appropriate scale in part by Fortney's historical anecdotes and by his experiences of rockhounding in the often cold rainy weather of the Scottish Highlands. The narrative runs a little long at over 400 pages, and Fortney's explanations will sometimes outrun the scientific background of the average reader. Nevertheless, this book is highly recommended to the reader with at least a casual interest in geology and its links to human history.

If you have not taken a geology class in a while, expect to google a term or two. Otherwise this story had a great flow from chapter to chapter and left me feeling more in awe of the world I'm standing on.

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