



The New Madrid Fault Finders Guide

B. Ray Knox, David M. Stewart

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The most active earthquake zone in North America, outside of the West Coast, lies along the Mississippi-Ohio River Valleys between Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, Kentucky, Illinois, and Indiana. Even now, more than 300 little earthquakes occur there every year--some felt, most only recorded on seismographs, and an occasional tremor that causes damage. This seismic zone is known as "The New Madrid Fault." The actual fault zone stretches from Marked tree, Arkansas, to Evansville, Indiana, but actually extends through Indiana, Ohio, Lake Ontario, and northeastward up the St. Lawrence Seaway. The most active portion of the New Madrid Fault is named for a town in Missouri that was obliterated by the earthquakes of 1811-12. It is a zone about 50 miles wide and 150 miles long within which more than 2,000 earthquakes occurred between December 16, 1811, and May 25, 1812. The New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811-12 were the greatest burst of seismic energy released in the history of the United States. Felt throughout all of the States east of the Rocky Mountains, these cataclysms damaged wine vats in Virginia, rang church bells in Boston, rattled dishes and windows in Quebec, Canada, and were felt from Cuba to Mexico. The region surrounding New Madrid in southeast Missouri was devastated. People were swallowed alive while houses, barns and silos sank into the ground. Rivers changed their courses and 12 new lakes were formed, two of which are still present to this day. Five whole towns disappeared while thousands of Native Americans were drowned in their villages as the land sank and river banks caved in. The earthquakes destroyed the landscape, itself, leaving permanent scars in the fields and hills still visible today, 200 years after the shaking stopped. Streams were rerouted, lakes and swamps were formed, huge crevasses opened, landslides rolled down hillsides, huge craters were formed as groundwater and air exploded from beneath, while vast areas turned into quicksand during the shaking while tons of sand and water boiled to the surface. Hundreds of these earthquake features are still visible in the landscape today. This book is a set of seven field trips you can take to experience the turbulence of the land of that tumultuous time. The book contains a geologic history of the area along with many photographs, plus maps and detailed road logs of each trip. Each trip includes commentary by the authors, Dr. Ray Knox, and Dr. David Stewart, who are your personal field guides on the tours. The book, itself, provides a vicarious visit to the area even if you never get to physically be there. For those who take the actual tours, by a visit to the New Madrid Historical Museum you may obtain signatures validating your travels. This earns you an impressive certificate validating your status as a "Certified Fault Finder." If you are really fortunate, you may even experience a mild shake during your visit. There has never been a natural cataclysm in North America like the New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811-12. Through this book you will see where the Mississippi River ran backwards and where, for a time, the land surface rippled like the waves of an ocean, changing the face of the earth forever.

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