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AUCKLAND EDITION

Huge quake rocks south

Diners flee restaurants, shocks felt in North Island

by Stuart Dye and Isaac Davison

The most powerful earthquake in 78 years rocked parts of the South Island last night.

It was followed by violent aftershocks that were felt as far north as Wellington.

People ran from restaurants in Queenstown as buildings shook and lights went out.

Phonelines went down as people overloaded the network.

GNS, the geological research institute, recorded the 9.22pm quake as 7.8 magnitude.

It was followed 20 minutes later by another, of 6.1 magnitude.

The first of the quakes was 12km deep and was centred 90km northwest of the Southland town of Tuatapere, 87km northwest of Invercargill.

GNS seismologist Bill Fry said the first quake would have been felt as far away as Christchurch, and perhaps up to the Lewis Pass.

Peter Molloy, who was drinking in a hotel in Tuatapere, close to the epicentre, said the quake put the entire town into a slow, gentle motion.

"We walked out onto the street and everything was just moving gradually. A ute near the pub was squeaking and bouncing and the powerlines were swaying."

Te Anau resident Carolyn Porteous said she and her husband were in bed and were woken by what sounded like thunder as framed photos fell off their walls and smashed.

"It felt like it was right underneath us. It woke us up — we felt like the whole house was moving."

In Wanaka, Simon Darby said he ran out of his house after feeling a rumbling in the ground.

"It must have lasted about two and half minutes. I lived in Tokyo for three years so I know what large quakes are like. This was easily the longest and biggest I have felt in New Zealand."

"It wasn't very violent, more of a rolling feel. But it had a power about it — I ran straight outside into the carpark."

No major damage had been reported late last night, but "loud bangs" thought to be landslides were heard by residents of Doubtful Sound in Fiordland.

Invercargill pharmacy owner Greg Roberts said "it shook like hell".

"I've lived here nine years and that was one of the better ones. The house was creaking. You just have to sit tight

and hope the builders have done their job."

Mr Roberts said he had spoken to staff at one of his pharmacies, in Te Anau, and things had fallen from shelves on to the floor, but there was no apparent damage to the building.

Another Invercargill resident, Laura Boulton, said her cat was running round the house, but suddenly stopped.

"Then you could hear a roaring and then everything started rocking. It was very frightening."

Ms Boulton and her flatmate stayed under a door frame for about four minutes.

"The whole house was moving ... I felt seasick."

Civil Defence spokesman Vince Cholewa said officials were issuing a precautionary "potential tsunami" warning in Southland.

In Hawaii, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre also issued a warning. It was retracted an hour later, but the centre said water levels had swelled by 17cm.

Central Southland man Warren MacPherson said a light in his house swayed "a good six inches each way".

He was on the phone when the quake struck and rushed outside.

"By geez, there was a fair bit of movement," he said.

Invercargill police Inspector Olaf Jensen said there were no immediate reports of damage, but the quake sent staff into doorways.

He described it as a strong, rolling quake rather than a sharp jolt.

New Zealand has between 10,000 and 15,000 earthquakes each year.

The biggest known was the magnitude 8.2 Wairarapa earthquake of 1855.

The biggest since instrumental recording began was the 1931 magnitude 7.8 Hawkes Bay earthquake.

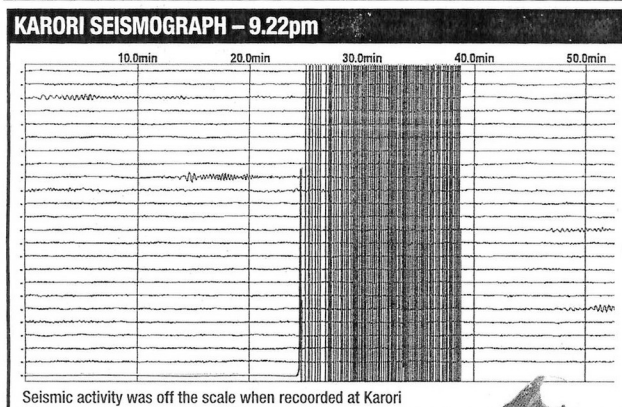
A magnitude 6.7 earthquake which struck Fiordland at 1.29am on October 16, 2007, was the most recent previous big shake in the area.

But one of New Zealand's biggest quakes — a magnitude 7.2 tremor — hit Fiordland near Secretary Island off the coast on August 22, 2003, causing large landslides in parts of the region.

Scientists recorded about 5000 aftershocks over several months after the 2003 quake.

Aftershocks occur as the earth's crust adjusts to stresses caused by the main shock.

— additional reporting:
Otago Daily Times, NZPA



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— Simon Darby, Wanaka

"It woke us up, we felt like the whole house was moving."

— Carolyn Porteous, Te Anau

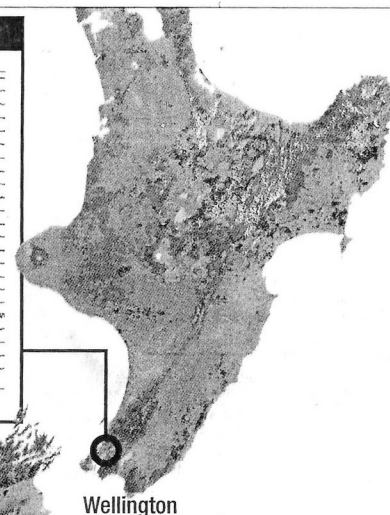
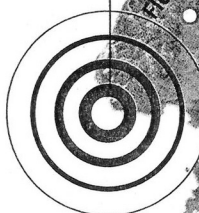
"(It) came in a big gush like a wind. I'm glad all our lights are fixed... and that our house is built on rock."

— Margaret McLellan, Riverton

"It shook like hell. You just have to sit tight and hope the builders have done their job."

— Greg Roberts, Invercargill

EARTHQUAKE CENTRE



Masons held over sorcery allegation

by Andrew Koubaridis

A New Zealand man spent a "wretched" night in a Fiji prison cell after frightened residents and police raided his Freemasons meeting, suspecting witchcraft and sorcery.

The man, who didn't want to be named, blamed "dopey village people" for the raid, in which 14 members of the Freemasons Lodge of Lautoka were herded into police cars and jailed for the night.

Police also seized lodge paraphernalia, including wands, compasses and a skull.

Yesterday, the man told the *Herald* that Tuesday night's meeting was "interrupted by a banging on the door and there were these village people and the police demanding to be let in".

Nothing sinister had been going on, but "such is the nature of life in Fiji" they were taken to a nearby police station.

The Masons were told nothing of the allegations against them, but were warned that under Fiji's emergency decree, they could be jailed for 48 hours without charge.

The lodge secretary showed police a copy of the permit allowing the meeting, but was told the permit was not the problem.

The commanding officer then disappeared, leaving the 14 to spend the night in the cells.

"It was hot and wasn't very comfortable, because there was nowhere to lie down," the man said.

At 6.30am yesterday, an officer let them go, saying the Prime Minister's office had ordered they be released.

The man said he was outraged that overly suspicious villagers had been able to convince police to "totally abuse their power".

He said the police should have told

ORIGINS



■ Freemason societies began in Europe in the late 16th to early 17th centuries. They were formed out of builders' and associated trades' guilds.

■ Membership is estimated at 5 million worldwide.

■ Freemason "lodges" hold meetings once a month, and their rituals are kept secret.