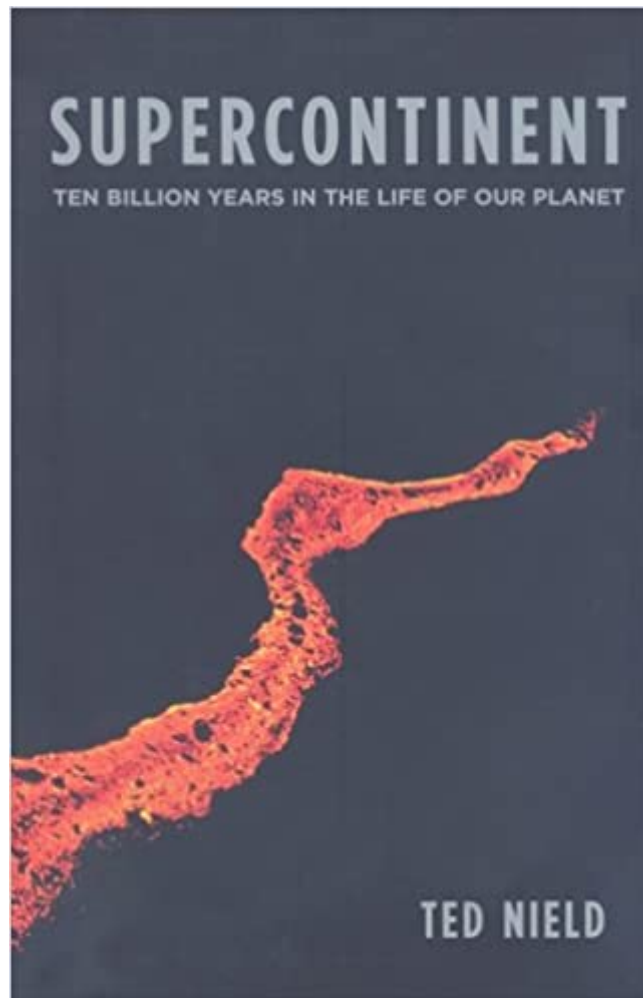




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Supercontinent: Ten Billion Years In The Life Of Our Planet



Synopsis

To understand continental drift and plate tectonics, the shifting and collisions that make and unmake continents, requires a long view. The Earth, after all, is 4.6 billion years old. This book extends our vision to take in the greatest geological cycle of all—none so vast that our species will probably be extinct long before the current one ends in about 250 million years. And yet this cycle, the grandest pattern in Nature, may well be the fundamental reason our species—or any complex life at all—exists. This book explores the Supercontinent Cycle from scientists' earliest inkling of the phenomenon to the geological discoveries of today—and from the most recent fusing of all of Earth's landmasses, Pangaea, on which dinosaurs evolved, to the next. Chronicling a 500-million-year cycle, Ted Nield introduces readers to some of the most exciting science of our time. He describes how, long before plate tectonics were understood, geologists first guessed at these vanishing landmasses and came to appreciate the significance of the fusing and fragmenting of supercontinents. He also uses the story of the supercontinents to consider how scientific ideas develop, and how they sometimes escape the confines of science. Nield takes the example of the recent Indian Ocean tsunami to explain how the whole endeavor of science is itself a supercontinent, whose usefulness in saving human lives, and life on Earth, depends crucially on a freedom to explore the unknown.

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Customer Reviews

Ted Nield tells the fascinating story of how the world has been made—and re-made

through billions of years of geological time. Geology underpins everything, yet the history of the continents on which we live has remained almost neglected. Nield has put this right with his imaginative and dynamic account of the movements of plates, and the assembly of the familiar world from an unfamiliar past. (Richard Fortey, author of *Earth: An Intimate History*) The four dimensional complexities of our happy little planet - "earth's immeasurable surprise" - are made elegantly accessible by Ted Nield in this truly exceptional book. At least until the next major discovery it deserves to become the standard work, ideal for students of the subject, and hugely enjoyable to those for whom the world remains an unfathomable enigma. (Simon Winchester) For centuries, people have dreamed of lost continents. Today, the author of this fascinating book shows, geologists can detect evidence of a continuing cycle of formation, breakup and reformation of one giant landmass--a supercontinent--over billions of years. Nield, editor of *Geoscientist* magazine, imagines what these supercontinents might have looked like and tells the stories of the scientists who have discovered and studied them... Making highly technical material understandable, Nield explains why "the Earth's Supercontinent Cycle matters to everyone, everywhere." (Publishers Weekly 2007-10-01) Both informative and entertaining. [Nield] has thought well outside any academic box, touching on a huge diversity of topics... Nield relates many subjects that are currently major foci of research in Earth history to his theme. (Kevin Burke *Science* 2007-11-30) One of the best popularizations of geology... Giv[es] us a sense of the ancient yet powerful forces underneath us. (P. D. Smith *The Guardian* 2007-10-06) A fascinating and eye-opening book... In a most engaging way, Nield reveals how science has unraveled the complex evolution of our planet's surface, and presents the reader with a tantalizing glimpse of the Earth of the distant future. (BBC Focus) A book that examines the romance of its subject alongside its hard science... If you don't know much about how the planet's crust works, Nield's book will teach you the basics... He rocks. (Helen Brown *Daily Telegraph* 2007-12-01) An accessible account of how the Earth has several times consisted of a single island landmass and will again, in about 250 million years. (Peter Calamai *Toronto Star* 2007-12-30) As a geologist turned science journalist, editor and provocative blogger, Ted Nield has a complex view of life and science. His skills as a writer successfully convey in *Supercontinent* the recent exciting work in grand-scale geoscience to a wide scientific audience... The attempted reconstructions of past and future continents and oceans is a major field of activity in contemporary geoscience. To handle it without oversimplification or getting lost in a maze of detail is no small accomplishment. (David Oldroyd *Nature* 2007-10-04)

Ted Nield is Editor of *Geoscientist* magazine, and Science and Communications Officer, Geological

Society of London.

Ted Nield does an excellent job of bringing a rather esoteric topic in geology to life. He discusses the geologically slow process of continental breakup and coalescence in the light of major events in the history of life: The end Permian mega extinction when Pangaea existed, for example, and the beginnings of complex life that roughly coincided with the existence of the prior supercontinent, Rodinia. He highlights the careers of the various scientists who unraveled these geological stories and nicely fleshes out the complexities of how the validity of scientific truths usually overcome short term politics and animosities. He likens science-derived discoveries to a kind of Supercontinent of knowledge that allows human beings to reconstruct both lost and future worlds that we will never see directly. The fruits of this rather abstract knowledge, however, results in real benefits to people today--like earthquake warning networks that alert hundreds of thousands of people to tsunami dangers along the Ring of Fire. Although I'm pretty well read in paleontology and geology, I found Nield's treatment of this topic accurate and fresh. I also learned more about certain scientists--John Joly, in particular--that will lead me to further reading.

The continents of today's Earth are the wreckage of that supercontinent, Pangaea, which began to break up about 250 million years ago. That name was given to the last supercontinent to have formed on Earth by German geophysicist Alfred Lothar Wegener. Pangaea's appearance was the first serious attempt by a modern Earth scientist to convince the world that continents drift. SUPERCONTINENT shows how it works and how it may work millions of years into the future. Highly recommended... - lc

This geologic history was much more about the characters involved than I expected. There was a good discussion of the actual physicalities that occurred, but the in-depth discussion of the geologists seemed to interrupt the flow of the book. It was still worth the read, though. David Stewart

I won't repeat the many accolades for the book. It was a good adjunct to my understanding of present-day tectonics. I studied geology in the early 60's where a professor gave me hell for a paper on "continental drift", which he didn't believe in. I would give it 5 stars for content. It kept my interest continually, but how a geologist, especially, can write a book with such a dearth of maps is beyond me. I found myself having to go to the internet and other books over and over to look for relevant maps, and the reader shouldn't have to do that!

This is just another review of the history of Geology over the last 200 years. The author comes across as a snobbish Brit with what appears to be a strong dislike of former American Geologists. This attitude is pervasive throughout much of the text. What good does it do to bash people that have long since disappeared? They operated in the context of what they knew and when they knew it.

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