

Charles Francis Richter Encyclopedia Article

Charles Francis Richter

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Charles Francis Richter

1900-1985

American geophysicist who developed the earthquake magnitude scale. Earning a physics doctorate from the California Institute of Technology, Richter conducted seismology research at the Pasadena Geophysical Laboratory. Together with Beno Gutenberg, he devised a scale to gauge an earthquake's magnitude instead of using assessments of structural damage. The new scale measured an earthquake's entire power, not just its energy at specific sites. Richter wrote two books about seismology, promoting quantitative studies of the geophysical forces that cause earthquakes.