



Weird Earth: Debunking Strange Ideas about Our Planet

Donald R. Prothero

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In addition to teaching college-level geology and paleontology, Donald R. Prothero is committed to debunking fallacies and conspiracy theories, and his book *Weird Earth* uses logic to refute fringe beliefs about the way the world works.

Science and critical thinking are the twin keys to overcoming half-baked hypotheses, from the hollow Earth myth to crystal healing. Laypeople sometimes misuse the word “theory,” the book notes, assuming that, especially with reference to evolution, it means a guess, and so can be ignored. The book emphasizes that theories are schemes that have been subjected to rigorous testing and that fit the existing data. The scientific method is reliable, it insists, because it involves the burden of proof and peer review.

The book takes a methodical approach, explaining and unpacking false belief systems via the detailed “How Do We Know?” sections that end most chapters. Prothero combats the recent resurgence in flat Earth thinking with a list of twelve ways that people can see for themselves that the Earth is round, including flying in a plane (seen from 35,000 feet or above, the curvature is clear) and climbing a mountain (anything beyond a certain distance disappears into the horizon; that wouldn’t be the case on a flat Earth).

Likewise, tree rings and ice cores are physical proof that the planet is much older than Young Earth creationists maintain. Elsewhere, the book dismisses the claims of moon landing conspiracy theorists one by one, and points to a lack of evidence for dowsing.

As Carl Sagan said, science is a “candle in the darkness,” solving apparent mysteries and countering bogus assertions. Pairing convincing arguments with photographs and helpful diagrams, *Weird Earth* is lucid in applying common sense to everyday geological questions and passionate as it calls for scientific literacy.

REBECCA FOSTER (September / October 2020)

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