

‘The floor was moving’: 6.5 earthquake strikes in Idaho, largest in the state since 1983

McCALL, Idaho — It was a typical Tuesday evening at the Albertsons grocery store in this resort town about 100 miles north of Boise.

Until Susie Baker looked up and saw all the hanging aisle signs swinging back and forth.

“Then I thought I heard a sound ... and the floor was moving,” said Baker, a checker at the store.

It was the force of the most powerful earthquake to strike the Gem State since 1983, a magnitude 6.5 temblor that jolted people across Idaho and three neighboring states. No injuries or damage were immediately reported.

The quake was centered 73 miles northeast of Meridian, near Boise, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, and, for some, conjured up memories of the state’s worst such natural disaster, the 6.9 magnitude Borah Peak earthquake nearly four decades ago that killed two people and resulted in millions in damages, according to the Idaho Geological Survey.

“At first I thought it was thunder, weird thunder, but then the house was moving and I realized this is an earthquake — a really big earthquake,” said Melissa Hawkins, 44, who lives in northwest Boise with her family. “It felt like it was in Boise.”

The prolonged shaking, Hawkins said, brought back childhood memories of the Borah Peak quake, which also hit in a remote part of Idaho but was felt in the capital city. She remembers lights in the house swinging then and saw that same phenomenon Tuesday.

“I was yelling at the kids to get in the doorways. They didn’t know what was going on,” she said.

Elisa Bullock said she and her husband were on their back deck in Boise trying to

cut their dog's nails when the ground began shaking.

"It's probably the least-safe place in our house and we just stood there," she said. "When it stopped, I looked at Brandt and yelled, 'Get in a door jam.' We will be implementing earthquake drills starting tomorrow."

There were no initial reports of damage, the Boise Police Department said on Twitter while acknowledging, "Yep we felt it too."

"Stay safe out there Boise," the tweet said. "Call us if you need us."

There were reports that the earthquake was felt in Coeur d'Alene, Twin Falls and Hailey in Idaho; Spokane, Washington; Missoula and Bozeman, Montana; and Salt Lake City in Utah.

"It felt like the whole house was shaking," said Jim Tracy, 81, who was looking at model airplanes on his computer at a friend's house in McCall. "It lasted so long I knew that it was a big one."

Another McCall resident, Linda Humpherys, 73, was stunned by the quake.

"You know how it feels when you are sitting on a plane and someone behind you starts kicking your seat? That's what I was feeling, but I was on my bed," she said. "Then the chandelier was shaking back and forth."

Some 375 miles away in Evaro, Montana, near Missoula, Shannon Patton felt the ground shaking, too.

"I actually thought I was having a dizzy spell, to begin with due to my migraine," Patton said in an email. "Our light fixtures were shaking and one of our signs on our pantry door almost fell off."

A 4.8 magnitude aftershock, centered southwest of Challis, followed about an hour later, the USGS said on Twitter. Smaller aftershocks continued into the evening hours.

The Borah Peak earthquake is the largest ever recorded in Idaho — both in magnitude and property damage, according to the IGS. The towns of Challis and Mackay took the brunt, with 11 commercial buildings and 39 private homes suffering major damage.

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