

**Eduard Suess** ([August 20, 1831 London](#) – [April 26, 1914 Vienna](#)) was a [geologist](#) who was an expert on the [geography](#) of the [Alps](#). He is responsible for hypothesising two major former geographical features, the [supercontinent Gondwana](#) (proposed 1861) and the [Tethys Ocean](#).

Born in [London](#) to a [Saxon](#) merchant, when he was three his family relocated to [Prague](#), then to [Vienna](#) when he was 14. Interested in [geology](#) at a young age, he published his first paper (on the geology of [Carlsbad](#), now in the [Czech Republic](#)) when he was 19.

By 1857 he was a professor of geology at the [University of Vienna](#), and from there he gradually developed views on the connection between [Africa](#) and [Europe](#); eventually he came to the conclusion that the Alps to the north were once at the bottom of an ocean, of which the Mediterranean was a remnant. While not quite correct (mostly because [plate tectonics](#) had not yet been discovered — he used the earlier [geosyncline theory](#)), this is close enough to the truth that he is credited with postulating the earlier existence of the [Tethys Ocean](#), which he named in 1893.

His other major theory involved [glossopteris fern](#) fossils occurring in [South America](#), [Africa](#), and [India](#) (as well as [Antarctica](#), though Suess did not know this). His explanation was that the three lands were once connected in a supercontinent, which he named [Gondwanaland](#). Again, this is not quite correct: Suess believed that the oceans flooded the spaces currently between those lands, when in fact the lands drifted apart. Still, it is so similar to what is currently believed that his naming has stuck.

Suess is considered one of the early practitioners of [ecology](#). He published a comprehensive synthesis of his ideas in 1885-1901, entitled *Das Antlitz der Erde* (translated as "The Face of the Earth"), which was a popular textbook for many years. In this work Suess also introduced the concept of the [biosphere](#), which was later extended by [Vladimir I. Vernadsky](#) in 1926. <sup>[1]</sup>

*"... one thing seems to be foreign on this large celestial body consisting of spheres, namely, organic life. But this life is limited to a determined zone at the surface of the [lithosphere](#). The plant, whose deep roots plunge into the soil to feed, and which at the same time rises into the air to breathe, is a good illustration of organic life in the region of interaction between the upper sphere and the lithosphere, and on the surface of continents it is possible to single out an independent biosphere"* - Eduard Suess

He was elected a member of the [Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences](#) in 1895 and he won the [Copley Medal](#) of the [Royal Society](#) in 1903.

The crater [Suess](#) on the [Moon](#) and a [crater](#) on [Mars](#) are named after him. His son, Franz Eduard Suess (1867-1942), was superintendent and geologist at the *Imperial Geological Institute* in Vienna. <sup>[2]</sup>

## References

1. <sup>^</sup> Smil, Vaclav. 2002. The earth's biosphere : evolution, dynamics, and change. MIT.
  2. <sup>^</sup> [Geological Maps of Europe](#)
- Schuchert (June 1914). "EDUARD SUESS". *Science* **39** (1017): 933–935. doi:10.1126/science.39.1017.933. PMID 17812397.
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