



Victor Conrad — First Head of the Seismological Service of Austria at ZAMG

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In 1904 Victor Conrad became the first head of the Seismological Service of Austria. He was born on August 25, 1876. In 1896 he inscribed at the University of Vienna to study Biology – and later on under the guidance of Franz Exner, Viktor Land and Ludwig Boltzmann – he studied Physics and completed his studies in 1900. Shortly afterwards, in 1901, he became employed as University Assistant at the ZAMG where he found himself confronted with research tasks of Physical Meteorology.

In 1904 the ZAMG became responsible for the seismic monitoring of the Austrian-Hungarian territory, and Victor Conrad was appointed Head of Department. During this time Conrad developed an own small version of a seismograph - the Conrad-pendulum, capable of recording stronger ground motions.

From 1910 until the fall of the monarchy in 1918 he was appointed as Professor for Cosmic Physics at the University of Czernowitz and served afterwards again at the ZAMG. During the following years Conrad concentrated on seismological research, which culminated in his paper “Laufzeitkurven des Tauernbebens vom 28. November 1923” where he detected P*-waves leading him to suggest that the Earth’s crust consists of two layers. The separation of these layers became world wide known as the “Conrad discontinuity”.

On 30 April 1934 he was put on leave due to his social-democratic engagement. The “Anschluss” of Austria to the German Reich in 1938 caused Conrad to leave Europe. Beno Gutenberg – a student of Emil Wiechert – assisted him when settling down in the U.S.A.

From 1939 to 1940 Conrad worked at the Pennsylvania State University, Department

of Meteorology. The history of this department shows that Conrad's research was highly appreciated. From 1940 to 1942 he joined the New York University, the California Institute of Technology, the University of Chicago and finally the Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., where he worked as well as teacher and researcher until the age of 80.

Conrad's scientific lifework comprises more than 240 papers concerning Meteorology, Climatology and Seismology. Conrad's achievements live on in the "Conrad-Observatory" – one of the most modern Geophysical Observatories world wide – situated 50 km to the SW of Vienna in the Eastern Alps. The observatory serves now as a base for scientific and technical developments regarding seismology and gravimetry as well as a centre for training courses too.