

The story of the Aral Sea

I read about the Aral Sea a long time ago. I think it was one of the first environmental stories I read. Since then, the story has continued. Here's a news item about it from the National Geographic news page.

In 2009 in Kazakhstan, a group of fishermen met on a Sunday afternoon. They were on the beach of the North Aral Sea. They ate food. They did some sports. Afterwards, they told stories and sang songs about the Aral Sea and fishing. It was a good party.

The fishermen were happy because there were fish in the water. For many years, there weren't many fish. At one time, the Aral Sea in Central Asia was the fourth largest lake in the world. It had an area of 67,300 square kilometres. Two of the biggest rivers in Central Asia, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, went into the Aral Sea. But the water almost Disappeared.

The Aral Sea was a busy place. Almost 20 percent of the Soviet Union's fish came from here. 40,000 people lived and worked near the lake. Then people used the water in the two rivers for agriculture, so the water didn't arrive at the Aral Sea. Also, it didn't rain for many years. Then, in 2005, the Kazakh government and the World Bank built a dam. The dam separated the north and south parts of the sea. Then the north part of the Aral Sea started to fill with water again.

Philip Micklin is a scientist. He studies the Aral Sea. In 2010 he said 'Nature can come back.' But in 2014, he saw satellite pictures of the east part of the Aral Sea. It was completely dry.

In June 2015 a scientist from Uzbekistan, Yusup Kamalov, and a National Geographic reporter visited the Aral Sea. They found a huge desert. They stood on the sand. Once it was the edge of the water. Now the water is 80 kilometres away. They drove to the water. On the way, they passed oil and natural gas rigs. Kamalov said that every year there are more oil rigs. They arrived at the edge of the Aral Sea. The water was very salty. There were no fish. Kamalov said, 'This is what the end of the world looks like'.

glossary

fishermen (n) men whose job is to catch fish

dam (n) a wall to stop water flowing

rig (n) a structure for getting oil or gas out of the ground

Activity 1: Answer the questions.

1. What country is the North Aral Sea in?
2. What activities did they do on the beach?
3. How big was the Aral Sea before?
4. Which two big rivers flowed into the Aral Sea?
5. How many people lived and worked near the lake?
6. Why did the water from the two rivers stop reaching the Aral Sea?
7. What happened to the north part of the Aral Sea after the dam was built?
8. How did Philip Micklin know part of the sea was dry?
9. How did Yusup Kamalov and the reporter go to the water?
10. How many people visited the Aral Sea in June 2015?
11. What did Kamalov say the area looked like?

Activity 2: Write True (T), False (F) and Doesn't say (DS).

1. Kazakh fishermen are good at sport. _____
2. Kazakhstan is near the North Aral Sea. _____
3. The fishermen met every Sunday. _____
4. The Amu Darya and Syr Darya are the biggest rivers in the world. _____
5. The Aral Sea is one of the biggest lakes in the world.
6. The biggest lake in the world is bigger than 67,300 square kilometres. _____
7. A dam was built in 2005 by the Kazakh government and the World Bank. _____
8. Philip Micklin said in 2010 that nature could recover. _____
9. In 2014, the west part of the Aral Sea was completely dry. _____

