



Stalin's Legacy: The Soviet War on Nature

Struan Stevenson

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As undisputed leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin was directly responsible for the deaths of up to 60 million of his fellow citizens, a truly horrific figure which confirms him as one of the most notorious mass murderers in history. But Stalin not only waged war against his own people he and his successors regarded nature as an enemy that could be overcome by the might of Soviet technology and the brute force of slave labour. The building of vast networks of canals and the diversion of major rivers has created untold environmental damage, whilst Soviet nuclear and biological weapons programmes contaminated vast areas and caused unimaginable agony for human and animal life. In this book Struan Stevenson travels to the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgystan and Tajikistan. From the Semipalatinsk region of east Kazakhstan, where over 600 nuclear tests were carried out between 1949 and 1990, to the Aral Sea, the desiccation of which has reduced what was the world's fourth largest inland body of water to half the size it was just 50 years ago, he presents a grim catalogue of environmental catastrophe. As well as talking with those whose lives continue to be cruelly affected by this terrible legacy, he also meets those who are trying to deal with its wider consequences as it threatens to impact far beyond the steppes of Central Asia. Despite almost insurmountable challenges, however, there ultimately is a strong message of hope as both local and international organizations face up to the effects of disastrous and inhuman Soviet policies.

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