

## *Why are these ships in a field?* The Story of the Aral Sea

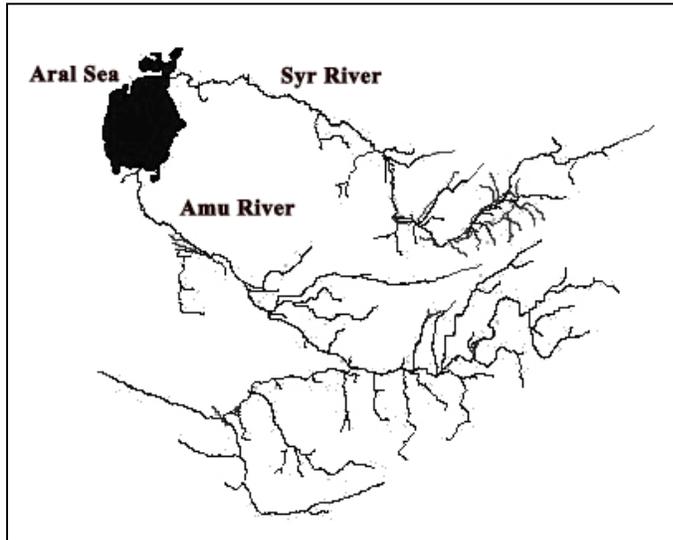
**Where is the Aral Sea?** Look for the black dot on the map below. It is in a part of the world called Central Asia.



Here is a map that shows the countries of Central Asia. The Aral Sea is inside the circle. At one time, the Aral Sea was the 4<sup>th</sup> largest *inland* body of water in the world. An inland body of water is one that is completely surrounded by land. Most inland bodies of water are called lakes or ponds, but some of the largest ones are called seas. Large ships carried cargo across the sea, and thousands of fishermen worked on the Aral Sea's fleet of fishing boats.



**Where did the Aral Sea get its water?** From rain. Some rain fell directly into the lake. Most of the water came from rain that fell on the land surrounding the sea. Rain that fell on parts of seven different countries formed streams, which formed rivers, which flowed into the Aral Sea. The map below shows the two large rivers - the Syr River and the Amu River - that flowed into the Aral Sea. It also shows the many smaller rivers and streams that provide the water for those two rivers.



<http://www.ce.utexas.edu/prof/maidment/grad/akmansoy/arak/arak3.htm>  
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**With all that rainwater, why didn't the Aral Sea just keep growing?** It did grow, but the bigger it became, the more water it lost by evaporation. It stopped growing when the amount of water that evaporated each day was the same amount as the water that flowed into it each day.

**Why did the Aral Sea get smaller?** More than 50 years ago, some people decided to create very large cotton farms in Central Asia. They needed lots of water for the cotton farms, so they dug canals to redirect water from the Syr and Amu Rivers to the cotton fields. The amount of water that came into the Aral Sea was then much less

than the amount of water that evaporated. Each year the Aral Sea became smaller and smaller. (With no water being added to your mini-lakes, they too became smaller and smaller until all of the water had disappeared.)

**Why are boats and ships still there?** Very large boats and ships are too heavy to move across land. They can only travel on water. Once there was not enough water for them to float, they became trapped. Many of them have been taken apart and the materials have been recycled, but some of them are still there. It's a strange sight to see large ships resting on dry ground.

NASA astronauts took this photograph in 2009. The black line shows the size of the Aral Sea before the canals were completed. Today, only small parts of the Aral Sea remain.

