





A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

It is a source of great pride for me that *Prisoners of Geography* has now been adapted for younger readers. The original was based on 30 years of news reporting from around the world, during which time I increasingly realised that the whole story could not be told without understanding the physical landscape where events were unfolding. Showing how geography affects international relations, the book reached an adult audience keen to better understand a complex world.

This new book takes the main points from the original, distils them and – most importantly – brings them to life using beautiful artwork by Grace Easton and Jessica Smith, helping younger readers gain a new perspective on the world around them. Please note that the maps in this book have not always been drawn to scale, but have been designed to tell a story.

The greatest reward I received for *Prisoners of Geography* did not come from the positive reviews, or from the fact that it became an international bestseller (welcome though that was!); rather, it came from young students who told me the book had inspired them to go on to university to study related subjects such as international relations, politics and, yes, geography. If this colourful edition creates similar sparks in younger minds then that too will be the highest possible reward.

TIM MARSHALL









WHAT DOES ‘PRISONERS OF GEOGRAPHY’ MEAN?

The land on which we live has always shaped us. It has affected wars, politics and societies all around the world. This fact is just as true today as it was long ago, when the leaders of ancient tribes sought out high ground from which to defend themselves. The choices of governments, leaders and societies are sometimes limited by rivers, mountains, deserts and oceans. You could say that, often, nations are the prisoners of their geography, bound by the location of mountain ranges, or their access to rivers for trade.

And it’s not just the physical landscape – such as rivers and mountains – that’s important, but also the climate and natural resources: all of these things have affected how human cultures have developed over time.

Today, technology does help us overcome some of the barriers of geography. The internet means we can stay connected; air travel allows us to fly over mountains. But, even with all these advances, the physical landscape remains important: understand the earth’s geography, and you’re well on the way to understanding the events taking place in the world around us.





RUSSIA: THE GEOGRAPHY

Covering 17 million square kilometres, Russia is the largest country in the world. It is 70 times the size of the UK and twice the size of the USA, spanning 11 different time zones and bordering 14 nations.

The climate in Russia is very cold during winter. Some Russian ports in the Arctic Circle are frozen for several months each year, so ships can't go in or out.

Arctic Ocean

In summer, when the sea ice melts, ships can make the journey through these northern waters, carrying goods to and from Russia.

Siberia and the Russian Far East have lots of natural resources, such as oil and gas, but not many people. The landscape is harsh and cold, with many forests and swamps.

NORWAY
DENMARK
SWEDEN
FINLAND
Baltic Sea
ESTONIA
LITHUANIA
LATVIA
POLAND
BELARUS
ST PETERSBURG
MURMANSK
ARCHANGEL

The Ural Mountains mark the boundary between Europe and Asia. The European side makes up a quarter of Russia's land, but more than three quarters of the population live here.

Ural Mountains
EUROPE ASIA
Taiga Forest
Verkhoyansk Mountains
Russian Far East
Bering Sea
OILFIELD
Siberia
RUSSIA
YAKUTSK

Yakutsk is one of the world's coldest cities: in winter the temperature is about -40°C, although it has dropped as low as -64°C.

Ivan IV (1530–1584), known as Ivan the Terrible, ruled from Moscow in the 1500s. He conquered many lands, so Russia grew much larger.

MOSCOW
Volga River
Great Vasyugan Swamp
Pacific Ocean
UKRAINE
Caucasus Mountains
Trans-Siberian Railway
Lake Baikal

In winter Lake Baikal, the world's deepest lake, freezes over. The ice can be over a metre thick – solid enough to drive across!

The longest river in Europe, the Volga, is very important to Russia. It is 3,530 kilometres long and nearly half of Russia's largest cities are found along its route.

Russia is so huge that it's hard to move people, food and supplies around the country. It takes about six nights and seven days to travel the 9,258 kilometres from Vladivostok to Moscow on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Bad weather and poor soil make farming difficult in large parts of the country. Winter crops often have to be abandoned.

Black Sea
GEORGIA
Caspian Sea
TURKEY
ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
IRAQ
IRAN
TURKMENISTAN
UZBEKISTAN
KAZAKHSTAN
Altai Mountains
MONGOLIA
CHINA
VLADIVOSTOK
JAPAN
Sea of Japan
NORTH KOREA



RUSSIA'S SIZE

In terms of land, Russia is nearly twice the size of China. In terms of people, it is smaller (it has a population of only 144 million, while China has more than a billion).



THE ROUTE INTO RUSSIA

To the west of Russia lies a flat area called the North European Plain. It forms a narrow corridor through Poland, with mountains on one side and sea on the other. But as it reaches Russia's border the plain widens out, making a shape that looks a bit like a pizza wedge. It's harder to defend this wide expanse than the narrow gap in Poland, so throughout Russia's history its leaders have tried to control the thin end of the wedge to protect this weak point in its defences.

RUSSIA: A BRIEF HISTORY

Russia wasn't always enormous. What is now the largest country in the world began as just a small group of tribes. Over time, the country grew, expanding outwards and swallowing its neighbours. Russia's leaders have always worried about the flat lands to the west, where the country is open to attack.



1 In the ninth century, a group of tribes gathered together to form the Kievan Rus, the ancestors of today's Russians. They were based in the city of Kiev and its surrounding areas, in what is now Ukraine.



2 Over the years, Mongol warriors on horseback attacked from the south and east, trying to expand their empire. They eventually overpowered the Kievan Rus in the thirteenth century.



3 After the invasion of the Mongols, the strength of the Kievan Rus weakened and the centre of power shifted east to the Grand Principality of Muscovy, which is now Moscow. The landscape here was flat, which made it hard to defend.



4 There were no mountains and no deserts to stand as barriers against attack. Through history, many Russian leaders might have wished that there were mountains west of Moscow.

5 In 1547 Ivan the Terrible became the first tsar (emperor) of Russia. He realised that Russia needed better defences. He started to use attack as a type of defence, conquering Russia's neighbours to expand its territory.





6 Over the next century Russia spread east past the Ural Mountains into Siberia, and south to the Caspian Sea. There were now natural barriers between Russia and its enemies: it was hard to invade from across the sea or over the mountains. An attacking army would have had much more land to cover to conquer the whole country. This army would need very long supply lines, making it difficult to get food and weapons to its troops.



7 Russia continued to grow in the eighteenth century. It expanded further east towards the Pacific Ocean and west to the Carpathian Mountains, conquering Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The Russian Empire had become one of the great powers in Europe.



9 In 1708 Sweden invaded, but because Russia is so big, the Russian army was able to keep retreating, destroying crops and farm animals to stop them falling into enemy hands. The Swedes could not restock their supplies through the winter, so many died, and they were defeated.



11 The same thing happened when Germany invaded in 1941. Germany launched a surprise attack in the summer, but they couldn't fully defeat the Russian army. Once again, winter and lack of supplies eventually forced them back.





8 Lots of countries have tried to invade Russia from the west, across the flat North European Plain. Polish soldiers occupied Moscow from 1610–1612, but they were forced out after a series of uprisings.



10 The Russians used the same tactics in 1812 when the French leader Napoleon invaded. His army reached Moscow but they had to bring supplies a very long way to feed their soldiers. When winter approached, the starving French soldiers retreated.



12 When the Second World War ended in 1945, Russia expanded further still, taking control of many countries in Eastern and Central Europe. It became known as the Soviet Union, and stretched from the Pacific Ocean to Berlin, from the Arctic to Central Asia, up to the borders of Afghanistan. It was one of the most powerful countries in the world.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union dissolved. This meant that Russia lost territory in the west, so it no longer had mountains to protect it. Because the country has been attacked so many times across the flat North European Plain, Russian leaders worry about defending their western border. Today, as in the past, Russian leaders may still wish for mountains.