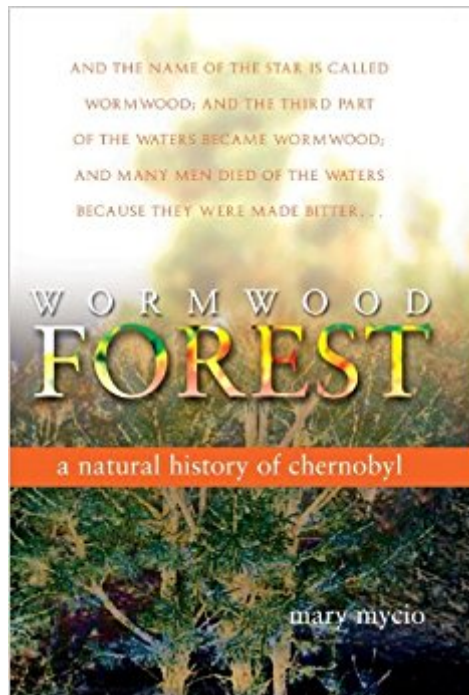


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Wormwood Forest: A Natural History Of Chernobyl



Synopsis

When a titanic explosion ripped through the Number Four reactor at the Chernobyl Nuclear Plant in 1986, spewing flames and chunks of burning, radioactive material into the atmosphere, one of our worst nightmares came true. As the news gradually seeped out of the USSR and the extent of the disaster was realized, it became clear how horribly wrong things had gone. Dozens died - two from the explosion and many more from radiation illness during the following months - while scores of additional victims came down with acute radiation sickness. Hundreds of thousands were evacuated from the most contaminated areas. The prognosis for Chernobyl and its environs - succinctly dubbed the Zone of Alienation - was grim. Today, 20 years after the worst nuclear power plant accident in history, intrepid journalist Mary Mycio dons dosimeter and camouflage protective gear to explore the world's most infamous radioactive wilderness. As she tours the Zone to report on the disaster's long-term effects on its human, faunal, and floral inhabitants, she meets pockets of defiant local residents who have remained behind to survive and make a life in the Zone. And she is shocked to discover that the area surrounding Chernobyl has become Europe's largest wildlife sanctuary, a flourishing - at times unearthly - wilderness teeming with large animals and a variety of birds, many of them members of rare and endangered species. Like the forests, fields, and swamps of their unexpectedly inviting habitat, both the people and the animals are all radioactive. Cesium-137 is packed in their muscles and strontium-90 in their bones. But quite astonishingly, they are also thriving. If fears of the Apocalypse and a lifeless, barren radioactive future have been constant companions of the nuclear age, Chernobyl now shows us a different view of the future. A vivid blend of reportage, popular science, and illuminating encounters that explode the myths of Chernobyl with facts that are at once beautiful and horrible, *Wormwood Forest* brings a remarkable land - and its people and animals - to life to tell a unique story of science, surprise and suspense.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mycio takes us on a timely tour of the eerie, surprisingly vigorous area around the Chernobyl nuclear disaster that's too radioactive for safe human habitation, yet where, 20 years after the explosion, flora and fauna are "thriving." Among abandoned towns, thousands of cormorants nest, and Przewalskis, a breed of wild horse, live seemingly unharmed on irradiated grass. A few people remain: workers decommissioning the plant, bureaucrats and scientists struggling with chronic underfunding, and samosels, elderly squatters so homesick that Ukraine finally let them stay. Mycio, former Kiev correspondent for the L.A. Times, is a good guide, clearly conveying the niceties of radionuclides; the elaborate, jerry-built structures containing the worst of the radiation; and the impossibility of cleaning the place up. She finds occasional humor and plenty of astonishment, as when a herd of red deer cross her path: "My recorder preserved my inarticulate reaction: 'Super. Wow. My God, they're beautiful!'" Mycio gives plenty of fuel for the discussion of nuclear power as an alternative to fossil fuel. Not all readers will share her cautious optimism, yet her verdict, that Chernobyl is not simply a disaster but a terrible paradox, is convincing. B&w photos, map. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"...a completely unexpected piece of natural history. ...Mycio displays only the best and most consistent journalistic instincts..." -- Providence Journal, September 25, 2005 "...tourists, (are) participating in what may be the strangest vacation... the packaged tour of the Chernobyl exclusion zone..." -- C.J. Chivers, New York Times, June, 2005 "A fascinating look at an isolated area that few will ever visit"; -- Library Journal, September 15, 2005 "Mary Mycio takes the reader on a fascinating personal journey through a contaminated landscape that paradoxically thrives with wildlife." -- David Holley, Moscow correspondent, Los Angeles Times "The new Chernobyl wilderness -- radioactive, yet greenly blooming -- has one of the strangest stories in the modern world." -- Bruce Sterling, author of Tomorrow Now: Envisioning the Next Fifty Years

This book is by far the best over view of the situation in the Chernobyl exclusion zone I have read. The author has taken great pains to review and explain the environmental impact in many different

parts of the exclusion zone and has interacted with many of the residents as well as scientists who live and work in the zone. The book will give anyone with an open mind the opportunity to learn the truth about the disaster and its lasting effects instead of just the hype pushed by advocates for or against nuclear energy and environmental issues. This book is extensively foot noted so that the interested reader can look up and verify the accuracy and completeness of the information given, but it is also written from a very personal basis, often reading like a travelogue of some daring explorer entering hazardous territory to learn what might be there. Highly recommended for young teen age readers up to the elderly.

Interesting book, but it is very technical and describes in detail (and in many pages) the science of radioactive decay. I was hoping it would be more about the flora and fauna that has survived and flourished since the Chernobyl incident and there is some of that, but not enough to suit me.

Deep and astonishing account of Chernobyl.

Mary Mycio is a 2nd generation American-Ukrainian. The disaster at Chernobyl hit her family harder than most because of their links to the region. Ms. Mycio made dozens of trips to the disaster site over a period of several years in her effort to learn both the scale of the disaster and the miraculous recovery of the natural lands around it. In addition to a wealth of facts and figures, the book is loaded with personal anecdotes and as a result, Ms. Mycio's constant sense of amazement and underlying anxiety over radiation exposure adds a very human element to what could easily have become a dry academic treatise. Her account of the explosive recovery of the natural environment inside the Chernobyl exclusion zone covers all the most important scientific developments and research on the recovery interspersed with very human tales of the people who work there full time and those who have returned to live in the midst of radiation that is certain to shorten their natural lifespans. Nature, it turns out, thrives in radioactive zones where long-term exposure is fatal to humans.

A unique, fascinating, and often entertaining look at the Chernobyl exclusion zone. The author brings a perspective not often heard or even considered in discussion of the topic, and one that is SO very important to it.

Mary Mycio keeps returning to this great irony: Out of the worst man-caused disaster of the 20th

century springs a stunning natural ecosystem. Mary knows Chernobyl like few others. She has spent a significant portion of her life studying the accident and its aftermath. She has spent many days tromping through the woods in the Exclusion Zone. Her writing is fluid and never bombastic. A readable, interesting book hands you the chance to understand Chernobyl, and catch a glimpse of the awesome recuperative powers of nature.

One reading of this will not satisfy you if you are intrigued with Chernobyl and the Zone of Alienation. I'm half way through the second time and find myself enjoying it more than the first. I would really love to take a personal tour of the place to see it for myself.

How the earth survives even after terrible consequences of human error.

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