

North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (Choson)

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Location and area

North Korea is a country in north-eastern Asia that occupies the northern portion of the Korean Peninsula. North Korea is bordered on the north by China, on the northeast by Russia, on the east by the Sea of Japan, on the south by South Korea, and on the west by the Yellow Sea. It has an area of 120,538 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

North Korea is extremely mountainous and marked by deep, narrow valleys. A complex system of ranges and spurs extends across the country in a generally northeastern to southwestern direction. The most prominent mountain range is the Nangnim, in the north-central region with Mount Paektu (2,744 m), on the Chinese border, as the highest peak. Lowland plains comprise only about one fifth of the total area and are largely confined to the country's western coast and to the several broad river valleys of the west. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

North Korea has a continental climate, with hot summers and cold winters. The average July temperature at P'yongyang is 24° C. Winter temperatures at Wonsan, in the south, average -4 C but are considerably lower in the north. Annual precipitation in most parts of the country is about 1,000 mm and is concentrated in the summer months. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Water

Nearly all the major rivers of North Korea rise in the mountains and flow west to the Yellow Sea. The longest river, the Yalu (Amnok), forms part of the border with China. Other streams include the Taedong, Ch'ong-ch'on, and Chaeryong. Of the major rivers, only the Tumen flows to the eastern coast to empty into the Sea of Japan. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

Extensive coniferous forests are found in the country's mountainous interior. The lowland areas of the west have been deforested and are under cultivation. Agriculture in North Korea is collectively organized, though some smallholdings exist. Large-scale mechanization, irrigation, and land reclamation have increased crop yields. The principal crops include rice, maize, and potatoes (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Peatlands

Kivinen & Pakarinen (1981) mention the presence of peatland in Korea (not indicated North- or South-) but present no estimates for its area.

Bord na Mona (1985) and Shrier (1985), referring to the area of histosols on the FAO/UNESCO 1971-1981 Soil Map of the World 1:5,000,000, mention a “peatland” resp. a “mire area” of 1,360 km² in the east of the country, with a major deposit northwest of Kilchu and several smaller deposits northwest of the Hamhung, near the the Changjin Reservoir. Andriess (1988) uses this figure for the extent of organic soils to be 1,360 km². Lappalainen & Urek (1996b) use the figure for the recent “peatland” area. Most peatlands and coastal swamps are scattered in the northern part of country. Interestingly Schneider & Schneider (1990) and Pfadenhauer et al. (1993) mention a peatland area for „Korea“ of 360 km². Markow et al. (1988) record 75 peatland sites with peat thicknesses of 1-2 m. Kobayashi (1931) refers to peat layers in the coastal regions of the Yellow Sea and regards these peat layers as proof of the submergence of the Korean Peninsula. According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) 1,144 km² of histosols exist in North-Korea and 1,559 km² of gley soils.