

Algeria (People's Democratic Republic of) (Algérie)

Last updated: 30-01-2004

Location and area

Algeria is a republic in western North Africa. It is bordered to the north by the Mediterranean Sea, to the east by Tunisia and Libya, to the south by Niger, Mali, and Mauritania, and to the west by Morocco. Its total area is 2,381,741 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

From north to south, four main physical regions extend across the country:

- The Tell along the Mediterranean coast consists of a narrow (80 to 190 km) coastal plain backed by the mountainous area of the Tell Atlas Mountains. The numerous valleys contain most of Algeria's arable land, that is, however, poor in humus and has suffered from overcultivation
- The High Plateau, a highland region of level terrain
- The mountains and massifs of the Saharan Atlas
- The Algerian Sahara, comprising more than 90 per cent of the country's total area. Much of the terrain is covered by gravel, although the Great Eastern Erg and the Great Western Erg are vast regions of sand dunes. In the south are the Ahaggar Mountains, which culminate in Mount Tahat (3,003 m), the highest peak in Algeria.

The country's principal river, the Chelif (725 km), rises in the Tell Atlas and flows to the Mediterranean Sea. No permanent streams are found south of the Tell. Several basins in the High Plateau collect water during rainy periods, forming large, shallow lakes; as these dry they become salt flats, called chotts, or shotts. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

The Tell region has a typical Mediterranean climate, with warm, dry summers and mild, rainy winters. This is the most humid area of Algeria, with an annual precipitation ranging from 400 to 1,000 mm. The mean summer and winter temperatures are 25° C and 11° C, respectively. During the summer an exceedingly hot, dry wind, the sirocco (known locally as the chehili), blows north from the Sahara. To the south the climate becomes increasingly dry. Annual precipitation in the High Plateau and Saharan Atlas ranges from about 200 to 400 mm. The Sahara region experiences daily temperature extremes, wind, and great aridity; annual rainfall is less than 130 mm in all places. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

The northern sections of Algeria have suffered from centuries of deforestation and overgrazing. Remnants of forests exist in a few areas of the higher Tell and Saharan Atlas. Lower slopes are bare or covered with scrub vegetation. Much of the High Plateau is barren, but tracts of steppe vegetation are present. Plant life in the Sahara is widely scattered. Forests, which contain much brushwood, cover 0.9 per cent of Algeria's land area (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

According to Britton & Crivelli (1993), Algeria has 290 km² of freshwater marshes.

Peatlands

On the soil map of Africa, Schokalskaja (1953) indicates soils complexes of podsollic soils, mountain meadows, and mountain peatlands for the Atlas Mountains in Algeria.

Schneider & Schneider (1990), basing on oral communications of Adam Pałczyński, mention the occurrence of peatland near the coasts and on coastal mountain slopes in Algeria. The peat deposits, that partly consist of halophilous plants, are stated to be up to 5 m thick.

Lappalainen & Żurek (1996c) only mention the Mekhada Marsh (220 km²) as a peatland area.

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols exist in Cameroon and only 193 km² of gley soils.

Still to be checked:

Renault-Miskovsky, J. 1985. L'environnement végétal des sites préhistoriques algériens données actuelles de la paléobotanique. *L'Anthropologie*, 89,3, 307-318

Salamani, M. 1991. Premières données palynologiques sur l'histoire Holocène du massif de l'Akfadou (Grande-Kabylie, Algérie). *Ecologia mediterranea* 17: 145-159. Grande Kabylie (36°48'N, 40°35'E) 1230 m, Algeria. Pollen.