

South Korea (Republic of Korea) (Taehan Min'guk / Dachan)

Last updated: 31-01-2004

Location and area

South Korea is a country in northeastern Asia that occupies the southern portion of the Korean Peninsula. South Korea is bounded on the north by North Korea, on the east by the Sea of Japan, on the southeast and south by the Korea Strait, which separates it from Japan, and on the west by the Yellow Sea. South Korea has a total area of 99,268 km², including numerous offshore islands in the south and west, the largest of which is Cheju (1,829 km²). (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

South Korea has a predominantly rugged, mountainous terrain. The principal range is the Taebaek-San Maek, which extends in a generally north-south direction parallel to the eastern coast. The country's highest peak, located on the island of Cheju, is the extinct volcano Mount Halla at 1,950 m. Low-lying lands constitute less than one fifth of the total area and are concentrated in the west along the coast; the coastal plains in the east and south are very narrow.

The country's two longest rivers, the Naktong and Han, rise in the Taebaek-San Maek, the former flowing south to the Korea Strait, the latter north-west to the Yellow Sea. Other major streams include the Kum, Yongsan, and Tongjin rivers. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

South Korea has a basically continental climate, with cold, dry winters and hot, rainy summers. At Seoul the average January temperature is -5° C, and the average July temperature is 25° C. Winter temperatures are higher along the southern coast and considerably lower in the mountainous interior. The average annual precipitation is about 1,400 mm in Seoul and about 1,250 mm in Pusan. Rainfall is concentrated in the summer months (June to August). (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

Mixed deciduous and coniferous forests cover about two thirds of the land area, but have been thinned for use as fuel. About 17 % of the land is arable. The chief crop in 2000 was rice (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

Lappalainen & Żurek (1996b) mention 6,300 km² of „mud-flats“ that occur at the west- and southcoast.

Peatlands

Schneider (1958) reports the presence of peatlands in “Korea” to where Danish briquet presses were delivered. The geopolitical situation of that time implies that this must have concerned South Korea.

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

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) no histosols exist in South-Korea and 6,116 km² of gley soils.