

Physiography of Pakistan's Mountain Areas

Pakistan is situated in the north-western part of the South Asian sub-continent. It can be subdivided into six natural regions : the Northern Mountains, the Submontane plateau, the Indus Plains, the Baluchistan Plateau, the western bordering mountains, and the desert areas. The mountains and the Submontane regions are briefly described below.

The Northern Mountains

The Himalayan and the Trans-Himalayan mountains occupy the entire northern end of Pakistan. The mountains rise to an average height of more than 6,100 meters and include such towering

peaks as Nanga Parbat (8,126 m) and K-2, also called Godwin Austen (8,611 m). According to rough estimates, about 82,000 km² of the Himalayan Range is situated in Pakistan. Beyond the Karakoram Range, in the extreme north, lies the Chinese Province of Sinkiang, to the north-west is the Hindu Kush Range beyond which are the Pamirs - the "Roof of the World" - where only a narrow strip of Afghanistan separates Pakistan from the Soviet Union.

The Submontane Plateau

Lying below the Himalayas, the Submontane plateau has four distinct divisions - the Trans-Indus Plains, the Potwar Plateau, the Salt Range, and the Sialkot District.

The Trans-Indus Plains. The Trans-Indus Plains, west of the Indus River, consists of the high - grit plateau of the valley of Peshawar, Kohat, and Bannu which are oases in the arid, scrub-covered landscape of the North West Frontier Province.

The Potwar Plateau. The Potwar Plateau lies at a height of 400 to 600 meters and covers an area of about 12,800 km² to the east of the Indus River, in the Province of the Punjab. It is open undulating country, developed from the Siwalik Range which is mainly of sandstone and is covered by varying thicknesses of soil (loam) which erodes easily.

The Salt Range. The Salt Range lies at the southern edge of the Potwar Plateau and has an average height of 670 meters. Its highest peak is Sakesar (1,500 m). It is extremely arid territory that sharply marks the boundary between the Submontane region and the Indus Plains in the south.

The Sialkot District. This district is a narrow submontane region in the north-east. Unlike the Potwar Plateau, it is a rich agricultural region. The soil is heavy and fertile.

The Baluchistan Plateau

The Baluchistan Plateau extends westward with many ridges running across it from the north-west to the south-east. It is separated from the Indus Plains by the Sulaiman and Kirthar Ranges. This plateau can be divided into 5 zones.

The Coastal Zone: stretching over a 50 km wide coastal belt.

The Flat Plain Zone: extending from Sibi and Dhadar to Usta Mohammed.

The Low Upland Zone: consisting of the areas of Loralai and Khuzdar and Chagi and Turbat District at elevations of 700 to 1,300 meters.

Medium Upland Zone: including the areas of Quetta, Kalat, and Zohb at an elevation of from 1300 to 2000 meters.

High Upland Zone: stretching from 2,000 to 2,700 meters, with very cold, long winters and mild, short summers. It includes the Tobina Plateau, Ziarat Areas etc.

Mountains Bordering West of Pakistan

These mountains run south from the Hindu Kush in several parallel ranges, outside the path of the monsoons. Three minor ranges run south from the Hindu Kush to the Kabul River, to the south of which lies the famous Khyber Pass, bordering Afghanistan. Further south the Sulaiman Range runs southwards for about 500 km, after which the lower Kirthar Range runs down to the coast. These hills separate the Indus Plain from Baluchistan.