

TWO DESERTS

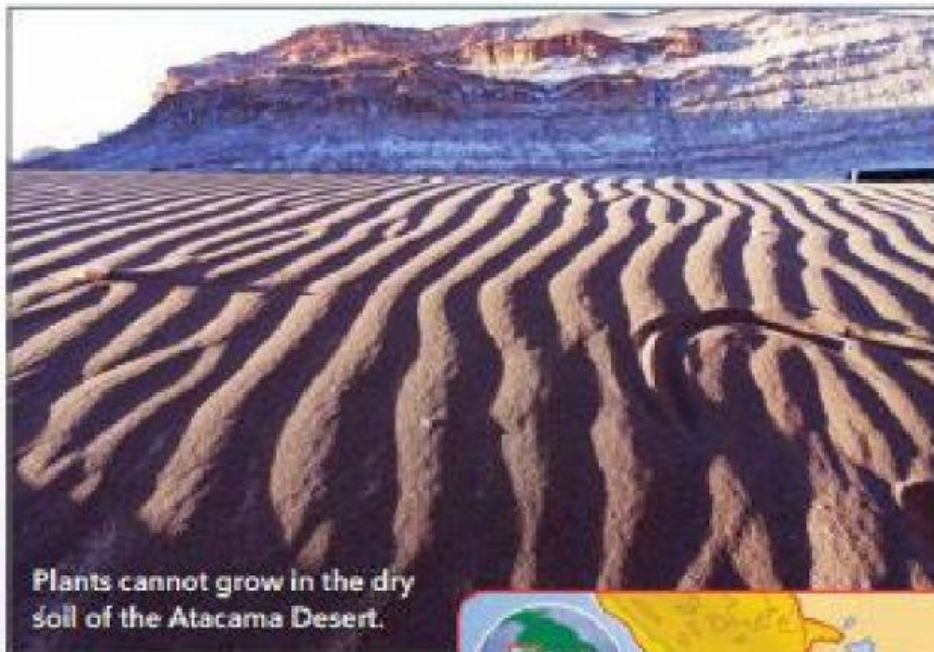
Great mounds of golden sand bake under a blazing sun. A line of camels is crossing these sand **dunes**. The people riding the camels are dressed to protect themselves from the heat and windblown sand. What is this place? It is the **Sahara** Desert, the largest desert in the world. It spreads across northern Africa.

The Sahara's dunes may seem to stretch forever, but these "sand seas" cover only part of this **vast** desert. The Sahara also has flat, stony lands as well as mountains. In places, underground water rises to form springs where trees and plants grow. In these **oases**, farmers grow crops.



The Sahara is called a hot desert, but not all of it is hot year round. Still, the summer sun can roast the air. At one spot, the **temperature** once soared to a record-breaking 136 degrees F (58 degrees C).

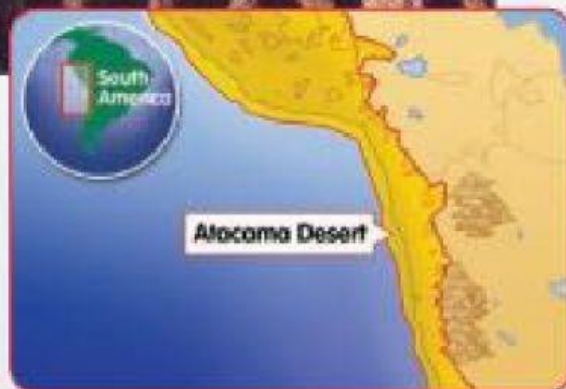
All deserts are dry lands. The yearly rainfall in the Sahara is less than 10 inches (25 **centimeters**), often, much less. Some places



Plants cannot grow in the dry soil of the Atacama Desert.

here get no rain for years. Yet the Sahara is not the driest desert in the world. That record belongs to the **Atacama** Desert of South America.

The Atacama lies between high mountains and the Pacific Ocean. The mountains stop **moist** air from reaching the desert land, and the cold ocean also acts to prevent rain. The yearly rainfall in the Atacama is less than .004 inches (.01 centimeters). Some spots have not had rain since recordkeeping began 400 years ago! With soil this dry, no plants can grow.



Unlike the Sahara, the Atacama is a cool desert. There are few scorching summer days but on winter nights, the temperature is often below freezing.

The Sahara and the Atacama are both deserts. They are alike in some ways, and different in many others.

Two Deserts

KEY VOCABULARY

- **dunes** (noun) A *dune* is a hill made of sand.
- **Sahara** (proper noun) *Sahara* is the name of a desert.
- **vast** (adjective) *Vast* means very great in size.
- **oases** (noun) An *oasis* is a spot in the desert where water is found.
- **temperature** (noun) *Temperature* is the amount of heat in something.
- **centimeters** (noun) A *centimeter* is a unit of length.
- **Atacama** (proper noun) *Atacama* is the name of a desert.
- **moist** (adjective) *Moist* means slightly wet.

1. What is the largest desert in the world? What is the driest desert in the world? Where are they? How large are they?

2. Explain why it rarely rains in the Atacama desert? What happens when it does?

3. Choose one of the two deserts. What would you pack if you planned a visit? What wouldn't you pack? Why?

4. What would you see if you visited the Sahara desert that you would probably not see if you visited the Atacama desert?

5. Which desert would you visit in summer? Which desert would you rather like to visit in winter? Why?