

A For years, the Sahara has been regarded by many Europeans as a *terra incognita** of little economic value or importance. But this idea may soon change completely. Politicians and scientists on both sides of the Mediterranean are beginning to focus on the Sahara's potential to provide power for Europe in the future. They believe the desert's true value comes from the fact that it is dry and empty. Some areas of the Sahara reach 45 degrees centigrade on many afternoons. It is, in other words, a gigantic natural storehouse of solar energy.

- 1 a mention of systems which could not be used
- 2 estimates of the quantity of power the Sahara could produce
- 3 a suggestion for how to convince organisations about the Sahara's potential
- 4 a short description of the Sahara at present
- 5 a comparison of the costs of two different energy sources

B A few years ago, scientists began to calculate just how much energy the Sahara holds. They were astonished at the answer. In theory, a 90,600 square kilometre chunk of the Sahara – smaller than Portugal and a little over 1% of its total area – could yield the same amount of electricity as all the world's power plants combined. A smaller square of 15,500 square kilometres – about the size of Connecticut – could provide electricity for Europe's 500 million people. 'I admit I was sceptical until I did the calculations myself,' says Michael Pawlyn, director of Exploration Architecture, one of three British environmental companies comprising the Sahara Forest Project, which is testing solar plants in Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Pawlyn calls the Sahara's potential 'staggering'.