

GEOGRAPHY OF CAMEROUN

The Republic of Cameroun is not one of the larger states of Africa. Tucked into the armpit between Nigeria and Gabon, at roughly five degrees above the equator, it covers an area of about 180,000 square miles, more or less the size of England, encompassing an astonishing geographical variety. Not without reason is it sometimes held to contain a microcosm of the entire continent. From the deserts in the far north of the country to the tropical rain-forests and mangroves found on the coast it exhibits within a relatively small area the most sharply contrasted range of terrain and climate. Mountains stretch, all along the so-called Cameroun Line from south to north, for hundreds of miles, among them many volcanoes. The most massive of these, Mount Cameroun (4040 m.), is still active, but some of those that are extinct, having become crater lakes, are far from dormant. In 1986 Lake Nyos exploded, emitting a cloud of CO₂ gas in which 1700 people suffocated. The most temperate climate – and the most beautiful scenery – is found up-country, in the highlands of Bamenda and beyond, where the savannah grasslands with the blue mountains in the distance stretch for mile upon mile – not unlike the Great Karoo of South Africa.