

Age of second largest desert disputed

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Scientists in China say they have found evidence proving their nation's Taklimakan Desert, the world's second-largest desert, is older than thought.

Scientists at the Chinese Academy of Sciences said their recent research found evidence the massive desert in the Xinjiang Uygur region is 1.8 million years older than previously estimated, China's official news agency Xinhua reported Sunday.

If the scientific findings from the academy's Institute of Geology and Geophysics hold true, the actual age of the desert would be 5.3 million years old.

The findings come after decades of research by Chinese scientists regarding the arid land that has not produced a universally accepted age for the desert. The last estimation was made in 2002 and it placed the region's age at 3.5 million years old.

The recent study followed the same approach as the earlier estimation by analyzing soil samples, but the newer samples were taken from a Cenozoic Era-dated layer of the desert, the agency reported.

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