Oil Shale in Morocco: Reserves, History and Production by Judy

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The production of oil shale in Morocco is potentially a significant resource for the area. Morocco has ten deposits of oil shale which are known. These ten deposits contain approximately 53.381 billion barrels of oil from shale. The study of oil shale in the area has been being conducted since 1930 and there have been several plants that have extracted shale oil from the formations. However, as of 2011 commercial extraction of shale oil in Morocco has not begun.

Oil Shale Reserves

The oil shale reserves in Morocco contain about 3.5% of the shale oil resources in the world according to the United States Department of Energy. Of the ten known oil shale reserves located in Morocco, the two most important are the Timahdit, which is located in the Middle Atlas Mountains and the Tarfaya, which is located in the south western part of the Morocco.

The oil shale deposit at Tarfaya is the largest deposit located in Morocco and it is estimated to have around 22.7 billion barrels of oil shale. The Tarfaya deposit has two flanks on opposite sides of Tazrha sabkha. The eastern flank is approximately 140 square kilometers and the western flank is over 200 square kilometers. The

Formation has an average depth of around 22 meters and a moisture content of around 20%. The sulfur content of the formation is roughly 2%

The shale oil deposit located at Timahdit is the second largest of Morocco and is located around 250 kilometers away from Rabat on the south east. There are two basins that compromise the formation, the Angueur and El Koubbat synclines. The formation is roughly 70 kilometers in length and about four to ten kilometers in width. The Angueur syncline is about 100 square kilometers in size and the El koubbat syncline is around 250 square kilometers. It is estimated that the Timahdit oil shale deposit has around 16.1 billion barrels of oil shale.

History and Present Production

The research of the oil shale industry began in the 1930s in the Moroccan area and Tanger was the first of the oil shale deposits to be discovered. During the years 1939 and 1945, Societe des Schistes pilot plant extracted the shale oil from the formation.

During the 1960s, both the Tarfaya and Timahdit oil shale deposits were discovered. During the 1970s and through the 1980s, testing was done on these two deposits. There was over 2000 tons of the shale oil taken

From these deposits and processed through plants located in the United States, Europe, Japan, and Canada. After these tests were completed, the Moroccan government tested an extraction process that they called T3. This process involved surface retorting using semi continuous retorts that were identical. The results of this process were an oil yield of 70%.

As recently as 2005, a new legal framework was laid out for all oil shale activities. Since the year 2008, Total S.A. and Petrobras have been in charge of the evaluation of the oil shale deposit located at Timahdit. The San Leon Energy company signed a 3 year contract for developing the

Tarfaya deposit in the spring of 2009.

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