

Week of 3.12.10

On Thin Ice

Two men on a remarkable journey high in the Himalayas investigate threats to global water and food supply.



Seventy-five percent of the world's fresh water is stored in glaciers, but scientists predict climate change will cause some of the world's largest glaciers to completely melt by 2030. What effect will this have on our daily lives, especially our water and food supply? With global warming falling low on a national list of American concerns, it's time to take a deeper look at what could be a global calamity in the making.

This week, David Brancaccio and environmentalist Conrad Anker—one of the world's leading high altitude climbers—trek to the Gangotri Glacier in the Himalayan Mountains, the source of the Ganges River, to witness the great melt and its dire consequences first-hand. The two also visit Montana's Glacier

The Weekly Q

How important is the issue of climate change to you?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important

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Results do not reflect a scientific study

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National Park to see the striking effects of global warming closer to home and learn how melting glaciers across the world can have a direct impact on food prices in the U.S.

Along the way, Brancaccio and Anker bathe in the River Ganges, view a water shortage calamity in India, and see with their own eyes and cameras the tangible costs of climate change. "We can't take climate change and put it on the back burner," warns Anker. "If we don't address climate change, we won't be around as humans."

This is an extended, hour-long version of the show that aired on March 12, 2010.

Related Links

[Conrad Anker](#)

[Extreme Ice Survey](#)

[Glacier National Park](#)

[Navdanya Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology](#)

[USGS Glacier Monitoring Studies](#)



Read David Brancaccio's [daily dispatches](#) from India and see [images](#) from his extraordinary trip.

Viewer Comments

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Commenter: DENNIS KATZ

THANK YOU so much for this fine artical and indepth reporing on topic one; global warming.

It is high tide we get it right, before we have to buy fresh water like gasoline. Water to do laundry cleaning, etc. I am 63 and will not see the next century, we must all act fast to see that childen and their children will not suffer for our mistakes.

very truly

Dennis Katz

Astoria ny

Commenter: DENNIS

If we do nothing else in the next session, of Congress, let it be to trougely investigate this mater. We should not let our children, there children, the next generations with problem that they will not solve.

Commenter: Ric

OK so I believe you. Climate change is real and humans must either adapt or migrate to survive it. Since climate change is partly normal planetary variability causing or allowing evolution to continue; the other part must be influenced by human behavior. Are those human contributions natural or un-natural in the evolutionary process (?) the show wasn't very clear on this point. So humans produce 3.225% of all CO2 in the Earth's atmosphere. The other 96.775% of CO2 is therefore non-human. We can run around changing everything we do, spent lots of money, yell and stomp our feet... and only have at most a 3% influence on atmospheric CO2. Hmmm....

Commenter: Tricia Judd

The article is dated 4/17/09. Yet you say it will be on this week. Is it a repeat?

Commenter: michel taine

excellent documentary on this problem

Commenter: donald eldridge

This whole notion of global warming is nothing but lies, lies, lies. God knows what he is doing. If anything is happening it's because of world sins against a sovern holy god.

Commenter: Frederick Rodgers

Readers will quickly spot some perceptions, a few howling with rage, on the part of those who reject all the evidence to date. The supreme irony: almost all the furious comments are from individuals who will be dead or senile by 2050. I am glad that a few individuals were brave enough to cite global population growth's role in climate change. Obama could potentially be ranked next to presidents like F.D.R. if he manages to rally more national support; however, so cautious as he seems to me to be, my guess is that he will avoid even more major action until and unless he thinks the time is right. Yes? Portland, Oregon

Commenter: Gary

Anyone with any knowledge of physics knows the parallels the so-called scientist drew between the laboratory ice melting demonstration and arctic ice melting is totally bogus. The non-linearity of the specific heat of water is well known, and has nothing to do with support for or against arguments of global warming. Another attempt by the global warming religious zealots to distort science to prove their religious beliefs. Very similar to the global cooling zealots of the 1970s.

Commenter: J. Trueblood

I want to thank David and NOW for this show. What I learned was the Ganges provides water that sustains a half BILLION people and that the glacier that feeds this river is melting and has perhaps 20 to 30 years left at most. Obviously, a calamity in the making. Where will these people go? Perhaps the climate change deniers will offer to share their homes and back yards? Population control would help, as would more environmental restrictions.

Also, not one reputable scientist denies that humans are changing the ATMOSPHERE. Most lay people understand this also. We should be discussing atmosphere change and what that means to ALL life on earth. Do we have a right to change our atmosphere so dramatically, and if so, how much?

P.S. Name calling is not discourse. Try having a point.

Commenter: raghu

It is a Great Work, yet there is enormous initiative lie right ahead.

The power and use of thought process is the need of the hour and it should go a long way to set the things right

iiigraghu@gmail.com

Commenter: saurabh

this is not a new phenomonon. infact now it has only intesified.

sarabh singh
innervoicefoundation@gmail.com

Commenter: Nathaniel Dkhar

The glaciers in the Himalaya are melting much faster in the east as compared to the west. Deglaciation rates are affected by climatic settings and any additional increase in temperature will amplify deglaciation. In the East Himalaya 93.33% of E. R. GLACIER has melted since 1966 to April 2009. You can contact me for details at ksuidheh@gmail.com

Commenter: Jose Leonidas Mejia

This is a Great video on climate changes and as an architect I feel I have to do more LEED projects or promoting the concept to save environment.

Commenter: alberto

i LOVE your shows! Especially those about the environmental disasters of nowadays! I hope they can make a significant difference.....

Commenter: BicycleMike

I know what I'm going to say is going to sound so bad and have nothing but a defeatist tone to it. Myself, I think it's nearly too late to reverse what is occurring. I think that the global warming issue is a result of natural as well as human influence. I think it's too late to do anything because 1) global warming (human produced) like I said is well on it's way to being no longer in our control 2) It would take a massive...MASSIVE undertaking from all leading nations who are the worst polluters. Policy change world wide, the way we live, the way we think and last but not least elected officials on a grand global scale ALL agreeing on what to do. Until then we'll continue the current path. Everybody rants and raves about global warming, we should all just agree that aside from some energy saving light bulbs we're really not in the mood to do anything. I live as lightly as I can on a daily basis to at the least try and do my part. When people continue to buy cars, new computers and things they don't need I question if they really are

serious about global warming. Lot's of bark but no bite.

Commenter: Bill McMillin

Global warming is nothing more than a way to create an industry to make money. The average temperature, according to the University of Wisconsin study, hasn't changed in almost 10 years. This is significant because there have been no reductions in greenhouse gas emissions! None. But like sheep, the populace has been snowed to think it is a catastrophe.

Commenter: Ottawawalla

As the French call it - La Source or the source. I tell travellers to India - there is the source of the "Ganges Valley Civilization". No river, no life. The rest is just Hullabaloo.

Commenter: Greg Higgins

FYI: By far the largest concentration of glaciers in the lower 48 is in the North Cascades of Washington State (over 300). Glacier Park is a distant second. There are many web sites to explore the impacts of climate change on the North Cascades'glaciers. May I suggest visiting this site: www.nooksackcirque.com

Click on the links for more scientific information on the rapid changes taking place.

Your program was excellent. A follow up program on the North Cascade glaciers would be worthwhile, and bring the issues even closer to home.

Thanks.

Commenter: Lena Williams

Thank you for this excellent documentary. Although it as a rude awaking, I found it extremely enlightening and well done.

Commenter: Valerie

This is a good video and it explains a lot that is happening to our earth....I never though this would happen, and I didn't thik I

would watch this video either because I really don't like this stuff. But after my science teacher told us about it, I decided to watch it after all. i learned a lo tfrom this video!!!

Commenter: John Bastin

The population in 2035 will be 10 billion. In 25 years, that's adding another half of today's existing population. You can talk about glaciers melting until you're blue in the face but it will be fruitless unless you accompany it with a discussion giving equal prominence to population Reduction. All of these people are going to want Big Macs, new TVs, refrigerators, cars, food, and water... For one thing, why does a country the size of India have a billion people living on it??? You can get rid of every coal plant in the world, but there's no way we can survive well if we continue to let the population spiral out of control...

Commenter: Gary L Warn

We as humans need to control our population, the more people on the planet means more of our planets natural resources will be used up! Thus putting more and more pollution in the air! When the resources are used up they are gone forever! World wide we need to limit one child per family like China. Or as humans we will go extinct!

Gary

Commenter: Barry Miller

"On Thin Ice" is a story that needs to be much more widely heard and seen than the few who watch it on PBS. Isn't there some pricing model that could be developed to help distribute literally millions of copies of the DVD in an affordable manner?

Commenter: Brenda Dodd

PBS: What ever happened with the propaganda nonsense about the coming ice age? What about the hole in the ozone layer fear-mongering? Didn't do a good enough job at scaring the public into giving up their freedoms and money did you?

Well now it's "Global Warming." When it's cold, it's called "Climate Change." Guess after all that propaganda practice, you finally figured out the ultimate scare tactic-"Man Made Global Warming/Climate Change. Looks like this latest one worked. I bet your masters are proud of your deceptive work. VOMIT.

Commenter: truuiyu

Robert Janssen,

Sorry you don't approve of names-oh, forgot, it's all about that feel-good no substance stuff isn't it?

If your so ignorant as to buy into this scam, then I feel sorry for you-Just keep drinking that Hugo Chavez coffee-Continue to be led by the nose by corrupt, snake oil salesman, who are only out for power and money. Then again, I expect nothing less from delusional sheep being led to slaughter.

Use some common sense, and start thinking for yourself-If you do, then you'll realize none of this adds up, and your being had.

Commenter: Howard Grossman

Really great coverage. Its important for city dwellers like myself to be reminded of how dire the environmental situation is getting.

Commenter: William Rogers

I wish the everyone would watch this show. Then they might see what is coming if we don't change our ways.

Commenter: odanny

Wonderful story on the effects of climate change. The disappearing glaciers are creating entirely new ecosystems where only ice once was, and the effect of these losses are not known by anyone. We are surely changing the environment, and the tragedy is the problem of pollution is going to get worse. Industrializing countries will only race the United States towards the bottom as to who is the worst polluter

Commenter: Robert Janssen

Great show. As for the nay-sayers. All I can say is this... Do a little research into the topic before making any kind of comment on global warming.

Also, if you are so sure of yourselves, why don't don't you tell everyone what your name is?

Commenter: Mike C

Steve Wingerter raises an excellent point. The evidence that is being presented leaves me with many questions. I am not denying that climate change is occurring. I am an environmentalist. I say that because there are those out there ready to persecute anyone who questions the evidence. That is a very dangerous sentimentality which threatens to smother any debate and give science, the media and government unfettered control over the so-called truth. Back to Steve's point: there are many questions I have about glacial melting that are not being addressed here. Glacial melting is not nearly as simple as is presented. Does the rate of melting naturally increase with the decrease in the size of the glacier? The glaciers of "Glacier National Park" have been there for 7000 years. Isn't that just a fraction of a second in geological time? Are we just seeing the final phase of the retreat of glaciers that occurred after the "Ice Age"? Again, I must declare my belief that climate change is real before I'm dragged into the streets to be drawn and quartered. We need to think critically and engage in intelligent debate. It is just as important to understand the nature of climate change as it is to accept it. Too many posted comments fail to site the flaws and shortcomings in the evidence presented here. That is more than a little disturbing.

Commenter: Pinakin Shah

On Thin ice is an amazing report and very sad story of ever increasing threat of global warming. As a Indian born US citizen and visited both glacier national park and Gangotri, it is very disturbing to know that no matter what we do now those glacier will be the history in a distance future, but I am very optimistic that the media program like "NOW" bringing up those stories to life, shaking up the viewers and inspire them to take a small steps to reduce the global warming.

In your program I felt like you are advocating for "Cap and Trade". I strongly oppose that idea because it will give a permit to wealthy (company/individual) to pay money and do what ever they want. It is not going to help global warming. It will be the just another revenue source for waste full government spending, unless we strongly ties those revenue to develop and promote renewable energy.

Commenter: Gail Enid Zimmer

Very timely subject coinciding with Asia Society's focus on water scarcity in India and elsewhere this week. For videos of the speakers and to download the Task Force Report go to <http://asiasociety.org/taskforce/water/>

Commenter: truuiyu

Diane Curlette,

What planet are you from? Are you on drugs?

Get off the kool-aid you delusional fool, and get a grip on the real world. We are broke, you got that? We can't afford your so-called "carbon SCAM tax!" And the only "Global Warming" going on is the hot air coming from your tuna casserole smelling a\$\$.

Hey PBS: Keep trying to scam the public with your phony, computer-generated con jobs. I'm sure your pals like the anti-American scam artist Gore, and your communist,non-profit funders are proud of your treasonous part in preparing the minions for a one world dictaorship.

Commenter: Tom Macchia

Beautiful, poignant,prophetic and sad. One of your best among many fine presentations.

As one who moved to Alaska 30 years ago partly for love of mountains I can confirm the same is true of our glaciers as well as our northern tundra.

It is a fine rebuttal to the trolls, fools and Judas goats who spew their denial.

And thank you for featuring Vandana Shiva and the woman in the meadow.

Commenter: Ann Casler

In response to S. Wingerter: Do the math. You've ignored two facts of physics. 1. As ocean waters warm they expand - thermal expansions alone will raise sea levels. 2. when ice shelves break up they allow glaciers ON LAND to flow into the ocean and raise sea levels. Land ice will make the oceans rise if allowed to melt into the ocean.

Commenter: Elizabeth Israer

Please see our blog with reference to "On Thin Ice". GreenMicrofinance is looking to prouce a special on microfinance and climate change. We already have over 60 hours of film.

Elizabeth Israel

<http://www.greenmicrofinance.org/Blog>

Commenter: Diane Curlette

Excellent program on glaciers and climate change. I am sad that the policy makers are so afraid of carbon "tax" -- even the word upsets them. We need more journalism to explore just what a tax would mean to us on a daily basis. Until we know the pluses and minuses, how can we even decide to support it and at what level.

From my reading it seems like cap and trade can be more easily corrupted and weakened by the oligarchy.

So please help us start grappling with this issue. I think citizens are ahead of washington on this.

Thanks for your great programs.

Commenter: malfax

What an utterly ridiculous load of lying propoganda! You actually think normal people buy into this "Global Warming" hoax you lefy extremists espouse? It's obvious the REAL reason behind this blatant lie is more government control and higher taxation, to reduce the populace into feudal slaves of "world government."

PBS is full of a bunch of wack-job tree-huggers from the lunitic fringe, who are stuck in the 60's radical time warp. Serious mental help is needed for you.

The lunatics are truly running the asylum!

Commenter: Unes

As usual I enjoy the Now program. This week program about the melting the glaciers were produced very nicely. I just wanted to thank the people who are responsible for producing such meaningful and informative program.

Commenter: Kris Percell

Mr. Brancaccio,

I learned a lot from your 4/17/09 NOW episode on the effects of Global Warming on glaciers. For a popularized discussion of the findings of one dedicated scientist, Dr. Lonnie Thompson of Ohio State University, read the book, "Thin Ice" by Mark Bowen. Lonnie's findings, from a lifetime of dedicated research on glaciers throughout the world, portend even worse effects on the planet than did your NOW program this evening. You might consider reporting on Lonnie's researches as a sequel to that program. It would be a natural.

G'Luck

Kris Percell

Commenter: Greg

I live in Calgary, Alberta - to the west in the mountains is the Athabasca Glacier, This supplies water to Calgary, a city of 1 million people. I have photo's of the glacier taken by my grandfather in the 1940's. they built the highway at that time to BEND AROUND the glacier. Now the glacier has retreated way back up against the mountain. It is so much smaller than it was back in the 1940's. this climate change problem is CRITICAL to human survival, but a local radio talk show host INSISTS that climate change is NOT happening at all.. that it is a left wing LIBERAL 'plot' to increase TAXES and adversely affect big

business !!! ... Greg

Commenter: Biff

Small point: the canyon in Bozeman is called Hyalite Canyon, not Highlight Canyon.

Commenter: Steve Wingerter

Hi,

Did you know that if all the ice in the arctic melted that the sea level would not rise at all? Why, you might ask it would not rise at all? It's is all ready displaced the volume of water when it melts.. Real fact and you can check it out your self with a glass of water and ice..

Where is you imperical data??? You have no real facts!!!

Commenter: Bob Lugar

I was disappointed this program made no mention of the notable role nuclear power plays in meeting our country's (20%) and the world's energy needs without any carbon emissions. Recently the 30 year anniversary of the Three Mile Island accident passed, and barely a word was uttered by the press regarding the safety record and zero carbon emission energy production that we have enjoyed from nuclear power plants since the accident. Any discussion of how the world will reduce carbon emissions and simultaneously meet growing energy needs must include consideration of not only conservation and renewable sources, but also the role of nuclear power generation. One of the biggest mistakes made was calling the spent nuclear fuel "waste." I'm sure our material scientists will have a use for it in the next fifty to one hundred years that we can't even begin to dream about. I suggest NOW investigate the pros and cons of nuclear power, especially in light of the new US EPA position on certain climate change pollutants, and include information on what Japan, France, and China are doing.

Commenter: Jim Nichols

David, a great show with beautiful nature combined with a horrible future unless the world gets it together. Thanks for

making the trek and showing us more of our planet and what is going wrong. Hope this wakes up those at the Cato Institute.

Commenter: Judith Logue

Thank you for the beautiful photography and taking us to the glacier communities and river communities that count on the glaciers for water. Those of us who are older appear to have lived in the best part of the earth's history. Too bad all of us didn't civilize at the same rate - those corporate types and self-centered individuals have actually remained cavemen. They have ignored pleas for moderation and care of the earth. What a waste of their educations!

Guess what? Individuals CAN live without a personal car and even without having babies.

Someone in your presentation used the phrase, also rejected by the selfish and sort-sighted: population control. Might be a good time to open that can of worms.

Tonight's program should be awarded a prize - brilliant even in its sad prediction. Thanks again for a great presentation - beautiful and truthful.