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Recent picture of Mount Everest and Rongbuk Glacier compared with photograph taken in 1921

SHRINKING "RIVERS OF ICE"

A series of **comparative** photographs appears to prove that many of the glaciers in the Himalayan Mountains have dramatically shrunk, or decreased in size, over the last 80 years.

David Breashears, a well known American mountain climber and filmmaker, took the modern day photographs. Mr. Breashears has successfully climbed Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, several times.

The first climbing expeditions to the Himalayas took place in the early 1900s. Mr. Breashears traveled to the same areas as some of these expeditions. He then took pictures of the mountains and glaciers from exactly the same places where members of these early expeditions had taken photographs, over 80 years ago.

One early expedition that Mr. Breashears followed was to K2, the second-highest mountain in the world.

K2 is on the border between Pakistan and China. This expedition took place in 1909. Vittorio Sella, a photographer and mountaineer, took the photographs on this Italian expedition to K2.

Mr. Breashears also took pictures of the glaciers around Mount Everest, which is on the border between Nepal and the Chinese controlled region of Tibet. These photographs were taken from the same places as the ones in 1921.

The 1921 British expedition to Mount Everest planned to map the area and look for the best route to take to climb the mountain. Major Edward Wheeler and George Mallory took the expedition's photographs. Three years later Mallory took part in one of the first expeditions to climb Mount Everest. He and his climbing partner, Andrew Irvine, were last seen high on Mount Everest not far from



the top. Yet they never returned, and both died on the mountain.

Mount Everest was first climbed in 1953. The two people who first stood on top of the mountain were Edmund Hillary, from New Zealand, and Tenzing Norgay, a [sherpa](#) from Nepal. The following year two Italian mountaineers climbed K2 for the first time. Today, most experienced mountaineers agree that K2 is far harder to climb than Mount Everest.

Mr. Breashears's photographs, when compared with those taken in 1909 and 1921, [show that](#) the glaciers around the two mountains have shrunk in height, length, and width. Mr. Breashears calculates that the Rongbuk Glacier, which flows north from Mount Everest, has lost 330 feet (100 meters) of ice from its vertical height since 1921.

Most scientists agree that global warming caused by human activity is one of the main reasons for the melting of the Himalayan glaciers. They blame the burning of fossil fuels (oil, natural gas, and coal) which release extra carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Increasing amounts of this gas, they say, is now acting like

a greenhouse and causing average world temperatures to rise.

Experts [believe that](#) there are other reasons why the glaciers in the Himalayas are melting so quickly. They [say that](#) the amount of rain and snow falling in the area is decreasing. This [means that](#) less ice forms to replace the ice that is melting. Another problem is pollution. The ice is now becoming covered in a very thin layer of carbon soot. This soot comes from smoke produced by factories and trucks. The ice then gets darker in color. This causes it to melt more quickly, as it reflects less sunshine.

There are thought to be around 18,000 glaciers in the Himalayas. Some experts [predict that](#) if the current rate of melting continues many could disappear within 40 or 50 years.

Some people call the Himalayas "the roof of the world" because the mountains there are so high. Others describe the mountain range as the "Third Pole". This is because the area has the largest amount of ice in the world apart from the North and South Poles.

The meltwaters of the Himalayan glaciers feed many of Asia's biggest rivers, including the Indus, Ganges,

Brahmaputra, Salween, Irrawaddy, Mekong, Yangtze, and the Yellow River. So shrinking ice in the Himalayas could cause future problems for hundreds of millions of people.

Many people depend on these rivers for their livelihoods. They also provide drinking water as well as irrigation water for field crops. The experts [say that](#) these rivers will be unlikely to dry up completely if the glaciers disappear. Yet their flow, especially during the dry seasons, could be seriously reduced. The worst affected are predicted to be the Indus and the Brahmaputra, as they get most of their water from ice in the Himalayas.

Mr. Breashears's photographs are part of an exhibition called "Rivers of Ice: Vanishing Glaciers of the Greater Himalaya". The Asia Society Museum has helped to arrange the exhibition. This organization tries to improve relationships and promote better understanding among the people and leaders of Asian countries and the U.S.

The Rivers of Ice exhibition opened on July 13, and will close on August 15. It is being held at the Asia Society's headquarters, in New York City, in the U.S. [▣](#)

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