Fact or Fiction?



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Glaciers- Some Melt–Some Don't

The fabled snows of Kilimanjaro are disappearing and have become a much publicized icon for global warming afficionados. However, Kilimanjaro is melting not because of any temperature increase. It is melting because of deforestation. Once there was a rain forest at the foot of Kilimaniaro and from this forest came moisture that led to snow and ice. The rain forest has been cut down, and instead of moisture there comes heat which melts the ice. And there's no more snow to generate the ice. As Philip Mote and Georg Kaser report, "So it's a simple thing, but has nothing to do with temperature."1

Disappearing snow on Kilimanjaro is not something new. Glacier recession has been a feature on the mountain for more than 100 years, but we're not told that by the alarmists. "Kilimanjaro turns out to be just another snow job, precipitated by a journalistic community that has lost its desire for critical factual investigation when it comes to our globe's environment," summarized Pat Michaels, of the University of Virginia and a past president of the American Association of State Climatologists.²

An example of remarkably one-sided reporting on ice occurred on ABC News with the late Peter Jennings on July 7, 2002. He spoke of melting alpine glaciers in Italy but somehow failed to mention that Alpine glaciers have been melting and receding for over a hundred years in this region. The glaciers surged forward (grew) during the period known as the Little Ice Age - a relatively cool couple of centuries that came to an end sometime in the mid-to late 19th century. As Earth's climate emerged from the Little Ice Age, temperatures warmed and the pumped-up glaciers receded.³

Fred Pearce adds, "In other regions, as on Kilimanjaro, glacial retreat began long before human activity altered the climate. In both the Himalayas and the Alps, glaciers have been in retreat ever since the



Victorians explored them. From the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, Alpine glaciers lost half their mass, according to the European Environment Agency. Europe's biggest glacier, the Breidamerkurjökull in Iceland, has been shrinking for most of the past century. The ice fields of Patagonia started melting around 1880. In the U.S., ice in the Glacier National Park in Montana was already melting when the park was set up in 1910.⁷⁴

There are one hundred sixty thousand glaciers in the world. About sixty-seven thousand (42%) have been inventoried, but only a few have been studied with any care. Mass balance data exist for about 200 glaciers, but this is only for a single year. There are mass balance data extending five years or more for only 79 glaciers in the entire world. As Sherwood and Idso add, "Furthermore, if ten years of record is used as a cutoff, only 42 glaciers qualify. This lack of glacial data highlights one of the most important problems for mass-balance glaciology and demonstrates the sad fact that many glacierized regions of the world remain unsampled, or only poorly sampled, suggesting that we really know very little about the true state of most of the world's glaciers."5

And speaking of unsampled regions, in all of India there are only about a dozen scientists working on 9,575 glaciers. Research on about 50 of these show that nothing abnormal has occurred in any of them in the past 200 years.⁶

R. J. Braithwaite reviewed measurements of glacier mass balance in the period 1946-95. He summarizes data for 246 glaciers based in Western Europe, North America and the former USSR with too few measurements from other parts of the world, simply because the data once again aren't available. The data are also biased towards wetter conditions with too few data from dry-cold glaciers that are typical of many regions. He concludes, "There is no sign of any recent global trend

towards increased glacier melting and the data mainly reflect variations within and between regions." For example, he notes, "Alpine glaciers are generally shrinking, Scandinavian glaciers are growing and glaciers in the Caucasus are close to equilibrium for 1980-1995. Significantly, regarding this most recent 15 year period of time, Braithwaite reports "There is no obvious common or global trend of increasing glacier melt in recent years."⁷

J. Oerlemans of Utrecht University in the Netherlands has studied records of 169 glaciers around the world, some going back to 1600. He reported in *Science* that most glaciers reached a peak sometime in the early 19th century and then began a steady retreat. That is far too early to be a signature of man-made climate change.⁸

There is no question that some glaciers are melting, but some do buck the trend. There was less melting in Glacier National Park in the second half of the 20th century than in the first half. However, all we hear is that Glacier National Park's glaciers are melting. Yet the summer temperature remains the same as the regional average as it was when the record began 107 years ago, long before the escalation in fossil fuel combustion.⁹

While most glaciers in the Sierra Nevada are retreating, seven around Mount Shasta

in California are growing, due to local increase in snowfall. Three have doubled in size since 1950.³ The best-measured glacier in North America, the Nisqually on Mount Rainier, has been growing since 1931.¹⁰

Hubbard Glacier, the largest calving glacier on the North American Continent (25% larger than Rhode Island) is defying the global paradigm of valley or mountain glacier shrinkage and retreat in response to global climate warming. Hubbard Glacier is the largest of eight calving glaciers in Alaska that are currently increasing in total mass and advancing.¹¹

Franz Josef glacier is the most famous in New Zealand. It's the prime tourist attraction of the Westland National Park. In more recent times it had retreated over 600 yards between 1999 and 2003. At that time local papers regularly, and the international climate alarmists occasionally, cited it as evidence of man-made climate change. However, as Roger Bate reports, "But how things change. While many glaciers around the world are alleged to be shrinking because of global warming, the Franz Josef is now growing at a rate of about 12 feet a day (and there has been no significant change of temperature in New Zealand in the recent past). Its speed of growth is actually affecting the adventure tourism business."12 Guides say the Franz Josef and Fox glaciers continued advancing down their valleys in the past year and may soon be close to positions reached 40 years ago.13

Summary

One could go on *ad nauseam* with more examples, but if you've read this far you get the point. Sure some glaciers are melting, but many are not. Arthur Robinson notes that glaciers that are shortening began to do so around 1800, long before human use of coal, oil and natural gas was significant. He adds, "Even more interesting is that the rate of shortening for the past 200 years has been linear, and the rate of shortening did not increase at all during the six-fold increase in hydrocarbon use after 1940."¹⁴

One last trivia bit that I can't resist reporting. Kilimanjaro, the opening lead in this column, is a favorite poster child of global warming used by Al Gore as he stumps the world in his cause. Gore claims that Kilimanjaro's snowcap is melting because of global warming in spite of the information mentioned earlier and in spite of the fact that the temperature on the mountain hasn't changed. Many of the assertions Gore makes have been refuted by science both before and after he made them, yet many folks have accepted his preachings as if they were "gospel truth." One example: John Fund notes, "I guess it was inevitable. The global warming hysteria for which Al Gore is the leading rabble-rouser has now taken on all the trappings of a cultish religion. Exhibit A: The Gaia Napa Valley Hotel and Spa in my native state of California has decided not to put the traditional Gideon Bible in the nightstands drawers of its rooms. Instead, each will prominently display a copy of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth.*"¹⁵

After reading this I called Gaia Napa Valley Hotel to check this out and it's true! Indeed, global warming has become a religion for some folks. *Pass*

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