



Before They're Gone: A Family's Year-Long Quest to Explore America's Most Endangered National Parks

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A longtime backpacker, climber, and skier, Michael Lanza knows our national parks like the back of his hand. As a father, he hopes to share these special places with his two young children. But he has seen firsthand the changes wrought by the warming climate and understands what lies ahead: Alaska's tidewater glaciers are rapidly retreating, and the abundant sea life in their shadow departs with them. Encroaching tides threaten beloved wilderness coasts like Washington's Olympic and Florida's Everglades. Less snowfall and hotter summers will diminish Yosemite's world-famous waterfalls. And it is predicted that Glacier National Park's 7,000-year-old glaciers will be gone in a decade.

To Lanza, it feels like the house he grew up in is being looted. Painfully aware of the ecological—and spiritual—calamity that global warming will bring to our nation's parks, Lanza sets out to show his children these wonders before they have changed forever.

He takes his nine-year-old son, Nate, and seven-year-old daughter, Alex, on an ambitious journey to see as many climate-threatened wild places as he can fit into a year: backpacking in the Grand Canyon, Glacier, the North Cascades, Mount Rainier, Rocky Mountain, and along the wild Olympic coast; sea kayaking in Alaska's Glacier Bay; hiking to Yosemite's waterfalls; rock climbing in Joshua Tree National Park; cross-country skiing in Yellowstone; and canoeing in the Everglades.

Through these poignant and humorous adventures, Lanza shares the beauty of each place and shows how his children connect with nature when given “unscripted” time. Ultimately, he writes, this is more their story than his, for whatever comes of our changing world, they are the ones who will live in it.

Before They're Gone: A Family's Year-Long Quest to Explore America's Most Endangered National Parks Details

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America's Most Endangered National Parks Michael Lanza

From Reader Review Before They're Gone: A Family's Year-Long Quest to Explore America's Most Endangered National Parks for online ebook

Nancy says

An ultimate "We're Killing the Earth, Global Warming" book. the author took his 9- and 7-year olds to 10 US National Parks for 3-4 day adventures. He feels these parks are most at risk because of decreasing glacier areas, rising oceans, threats to flora and fauna. The incidents with the children are interesting but the message is so slanted and pervasive I can't imagine why I kept reading. While he cites a number of scientists and "experts: he buys it all with no question. There is no balance.

Pam says

Michael Lanza has written an interesting book full of details about numerous National Parks that he and his family were able to visit and hike. The down side of the book is that it is actually two books in one. The first about his family, two children age 6 and 8, hiking various National Parks. The second about how specific National Parks are and will be affected by climate change. The problem is that written separately both would have been great books, but in combination I was forever wishing for more information. More photographs would have helped those of us not familiar with the parks he discusses.

Kelleen says

I like the vignettes for each trip.

It does get a little bit of a 'on my soapbox' vibe, but you should know that from the title.

James Edward Mills says

Before They're Gone by Michael Lanza is cautionary journey that explores the likely outcomes in store for our National Parks should we ignore the growing threat of climate change. And typical of most modern problems, not unlike our current economic crisis, those to be most directly effected by our generations' failure to act won't be ourselves but our children. Taking his two young kids on a year-long odyssey to visit America's most iconic wild places, Lanza leads us all on an expedition through the world we stand to lose and future generations may never see.

Not to be confused with a manual on better parenting through outdoor education, Before They're Gone has much to teach anyone who aims to preserve the National Parks we had the good sense to set aside. I'm childless by choice. In the third decade of a prolonged adolescence my decision not to have kids was first born out of the selfish desire to maintain my lifestyle without dependents and secure my role as the least mature person in my family. Mission accomplished. But now with that humanity faces the dire consequences of rising global temperatures I can only take small satisfaction in not contributing to the problem by adding

to the surplus population. Even though I don't have children I'm still eager to leave a tidy planet for those of my family and friends who do. And Lanza clearly illustrates through anecdotal and scientific evidence those environmental features we love that will probably go away.

Lanza's travel with his children puts into direct context the true impact of climate change on our favorite recreation areas. The streams that provide drinking water for backpackers along the Grand Canyon or Yosemite Falls will likely dry up. Species of mega-fauna like the grizzly bear will lose primary sources of food. The Joshua Tree, that grows best in the national park that bares its name, will compromise its ability to reproduce and disappear. Much of the Florida Everglades will be submerged beneath a torrent of rising sea water. The list goes on. You don't have to be a parent to mourn the loss of any one of these precious natural artifacts. And due primarily to human activity on this planet we stand the chance to lose them all.

Ironically I had the pleasure of reading Lanza's book while on an extended National Park tour of my own. This summer I visited many of the same places he took his children, a few for the very first time. Lanza's presentation encourages a sense of urgency to not only travel and to visit these wilderness areas but to make sustainable lifestyle choices to help preserve them. With a better appreciation for exactly how endangered each location truly was I came away with a profound sense of gratitude. Though no children of mine will ever see them I truly hope that those of others will. I'm just glad that I had the chance before they're gone.

<http://www.joytrippproject.com>

Laura Cottam Sajbel says

I felt positively guilty as I read this book--Not only for being part of the human population contributing to the global warming that is melting the permafrost, but for not having trekked my kids on three-day backpacking excursions through far-flung reaches of all the National Parks. Lanza has a very understanding wife, apparently; she acquiesces to paddling in kayaks past 12-foot gators in the Everglades and hiking through grizzly territory in Glacier, with two small kiddos in tow.

Lanza, a writer for Backpacker Magazine, serves up compelling descriptions of the family adventures. My own family of avid hiker-campers has seen a few of the spectacular views that Lanza's family enjoys. But his chutzpah in seizing the moment lit a fire under me to get my family to the rest of those spots we haven't yet experienced. In that regard, the book was terrific. On the flip side, his heavy-handed descriptions of prospective changes from climate change became really depressing and lengthy, although he has certainly done his homework. I can only hope that we have better odds of turning around the changes we have set in motion than he thinks we do.

Sharon says

The book is filled with stories of hiking and trekking through several National Parks with his children, but it is also filled with FACTS about the effects of CLIMATE CHANGE . Temperatures are rising, ice is melting, but for the most part, we are not taking responsibility. As I read what is going on in the news, I am saddened by the poor choices we as a people are making.

Malin Friess says

Imagine Glacier National Park in Montana with no glaciers, Joshua tree National Park in California with no Dr. Seuss like Joshua trees, Everglades national park in Florida completely underwater with no mangrove tunnels, Rocky Mountain National Park with no Aspen trees (all killed off by Mountain Pine Beetles), Yellowstone without Grizzly Bears, The Grand Canyon NP too hot to descend into, or worse yet...Yosemite National park with its majestic waterfalls slowed to a trickle.

Backpacker Michael Lanza is convinced by research and what he has seen first hand hiking that due to the affects of climate change (increase of about 2 degrees) our National Parks are endangered and will not be the same in the next generation. With this urgency in mind Lanza takes his 7 year old daughter and 9 year old son on a remarkable journey to visit Yellowstone, Mount Rainier, Alaskas Glacier Bay, the Grand Canyon to see them before "they're gone."

Lanza is a superb writer and desperately wants his children to appreciate nature:

"I want my kids to discover what I've found: the satisfying simplicity of purpose in moving under your own power, at human velocity, through a place crowded not with people, artificial noise, machines or flashing lights, but with abundance of nature. I've seen how a rushing creek, a mountain lake, or a pine forest engages my kids endlessly, never bores them like our yard or the school playground. Like adults, they find something intangible, but necessary in the complexity and stimulation of a natural environment...to sear into them memories that outlive myself."

Does that paragraph not make you pine to leave the office and get outside?

Nate and Alex get hungry, tired, hot, they have meltdowns hiking the RNP, they wonder why they are skipping past Disneyland to rock climb in Joshua Tree..but over the course of a year the kids undergo a miraculous personality change.

I am not an Al Gore, "Sound the Alarms", The Ocean is rising" green peace environmentalist..but something strange is happening out West. Ski resorts that use to be open for months (Hoodoo and Sandia in New Mexico) are open for weeks or do not open at all? Driveways that use to have 8 foot walls of snow in Logan, Utah--now have 60 degree weather in January? Lakes are drying up in California? It is indisputable that the glaciers on South Sister, Mount Rainier, and Glacier NP are decreasing faster than anyone expected. Climate Change is affecting the West (I'm not so sure about the Winters back East?)

But do balance Lanza's assessment as his experts are ardent environmentalist..and some from Portland State University..need I say more?

5 stars. Lanza doesn't make me feel guilty for driving an SUV or drinking out of a styrofoam cup (I mean he flies his kids to these National Parks)..no Lanza inspires me to take my own children to visit these wonderful places (so many within a day or two drive of NM).

So I showed the cover of this book with Lanza's two kids hiking in shorts in the snow with ski-poles, backpacks, and hanging on to their favorite stuffed animal to my 2 daughters. I asked Amealia (11) and Meredith (8) if they wanted to do this..."No way."

Maybe I'll get a second chance with Oliver.

Trish says

I wish the author would have added more photos to this book. The author does a good job of describing some of the many bad climate/global warming changes that may take place during my lifetime, and my kids and grandkids will have to deal with the fallout. While I would love to take a year off and travel to as many national parks as possible, he took some risks I would not take with my kids (hikes on an narrow icy trail at the Grand Canyon). His kids were very lucky to be able to take this trip, but how did the author deal with schooling his kids that year--homeschooling? (I don't remember any comments on that).

Kristal Cooper says

I'm going to give this author the highest praise I can think of: His writing style is Krakauer-esque. The words and phrases he uses to describe the outdoors and his family's experiences evoke perfect images. Some may think it's hyperbole, but I assure you that our National Parks are worthy.

One of my favorite lines: "Powerful landscapes like the Tetons will manhandle your psyche; they can make you wonder what the hell you've been doing all these years, for which you won't have a satisfying answer." (This exact scenario happened to me and my husband during a vacation to Zion, after which we quit our high-paying jobs, bought an RV, and moved to the Grand Canyon. In the five years since, we've worked and lived in five National Parks - each an experience beyond belief.) If YOU haven't felt the emotion Lanza describes in that quote, I say: "Get thee to a National Park." Quick!

And that's the jist of this book... The parts of this country that were so unique we decided to make them National Parks and protect them for posterity are being dramatically changed by global warming. Everything IS connected and Lanza does a great job of laying out the parade of cause and effect that will make our country's most special treasures un-recognizable in just a few decades.

This is a book with an important message, but there are plenty of personal anecdotes and fun thrown in too. I recommend it to anyone and everyone -- you'll enjoy the ride and learn a lot as you go.

Teresa says

Let me just say to begin, that I love our National Parks System. I have a loose plan to visit all of them someday before I die. The reason I picked this book off the library shelves is because I love the National Parks.

That being said... This is an okay book. There are 10 chapters, each one devoted to a national park that the author's family visited over the course of a year. For most of the trips, the author's wife accompanied him and for all the trips, so did his young children (ages 7 and 9). I enjoyed reading about the family adventures in these parks; so much so, that I have moved a couple of the parks up on my priority list to visit. But this was only part of the focus of this book.

The rest of the book is spent expounding the dangers of climate change and the effect that change will have on these specific national parks. Glaciers are melting faster than projected; beetles are surviving not-so-cold winters in record numbers and eating/killing lots of trees; sea levels will rise and wipe out coastlands and wetlands. Okay, alright already. I get it. Some of what makes these parks great are in danger of being significantly altered or in disappearing altogether.

So? The author just leaves the reader hanging. "I'm really glad that I had a chance to take my kids to the parks before irreparable harm is done to them by a changing climate. No, I'm not going to go out of my way to help alleviate climate change. I'm not going to ask any of the hundreds of scientists and climatologists that I interviewed for my doomsday forecasts how the average Joe can help keep our park viable." There was not a single method that anyone, average Joe or no, could do to save "America's Most Endangered National Parks." There wasn't even a statement saying to contact the National Parks Service for more information about anything.

Because of the lack of 'things' that could be done to help save the parks, the science about how endangered the parks are is just so much preaching. My hope is that a new edition in a few years will show aspects of the parks that most people don't encounter, some (only a little) science to show the danger that the parks are in, and ways that I can help to save the National Parks system.

Ashley Speed says

Good book. I wanted more personal anecdotes about children in the National Parks and while I got some of that the book leaned more in the "global warming" side of the scale.

Leighanne Medina says

I really wanted to love this book, but from the first few pages I knew it was going to be a slog.

I graced this book with 2 stars because I love the fact that the author wrote about National Parks. Also, the author did lead me to thinking about our Earth and just how small we are on this Earth.

I was super intrigued about a book where a family visited many different national parks over the course of the year. I was excited to hear of their journey and what they learned/discovered.

However, this book was SO PREACHY!!! Oh my goodness... We get it... Global Warming is a thing. And I am one who works hard to reduce my carbon footprint, so it isn't that the message didn't speak to me... It was how much the author crammed it down your throat. And the journey of the actual family was eclipsed by the author's message. We didn't hear much about the journey at all.

Also, the author makes it sound like his kids are the only kids ever created who don't sit in front of a TV, and get out and explore the wilderness. Ugh! Guess what, other kids are active too.

Marjorie Elwood says

One of the editors of Backpacker magazine, Lanza takes his children on outdoors adventures in 10 of the national parks most affected by climate change. While the trips are enticing and the book well-written, it's a little overly preachy and I was depressed by the end of it.

Cathy says

Those are some amazing kids! Loved the writing about the places visited, but I felt beat over the head with the portions of the book about climate change. I get it! We are destroying our planet!

Tammielyn says

Before They're Gone is equal parts travel journal, personal memoir, and environmental reality check. Author Michael Lanza's year long quest to share with his children the most threatened parks in America is both bittersweet, and heartwarming. Liberally sprinkled with memories of past treks, scientific data, and the simple pleasures of a parent spending time with his kids. Michael's detailed, and often times humorous, writing makes you long to be relaxing in the shade of lodgepole pines in the Rocky Mountains or watching the sun set in the Everglades, right alongside them. To me, Before They're Gone is proof that even though our environment is changing, and not for the better, we can still celebrate, enjoy, and hopefully preserve, what we have left.
