



A century and a half ago there were 150 glaciers in what is now Glacier National Park. Twenty-five remain.

DJAMILA GROSSMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Twilight of the Glaciers

Glacier National Park in Montana was named for huge rivers of ice that defined its terrain. Today’s visitors are witnessing their retreat. **BY STEPHEN P. NASH**

AN hour or so up ahead, at the higher elevations along the trail that leads over Siyeh Pass, huckleberries were ripening. Even a dawdling day hiker like me knows that huckleberries can quickly mean grizzlies in Glacier National Park. I indulged a nervous tic and patted around for the loud red aerosol can on my belt, whose label reads Counter Assault. It’s effective as a bear repellent, but even more reliable at making an urbanite feel faintly ridiculous.

I was in northwest Montana for the hikes and the huckleberries, but most of all to experience the name-

sake glaciers, which, I had recently learned, might be around for only another decade or so. Given that a century and a half ago there were 150 and now there are 25, the trip makes me an enlistee in the practice known by a somewhat prickly term: last-chance tourism.

For now, though, there are still glaciers to be seen. The park’s skein of well-maintained trails traverses every section of its million-plus acres and can accommodate any level of ability, from backpackers to the sheets-and-coverlets crowd. Even visitors who prefer to commune with nature through a car window

can be awed by the views of the Jackson and Blackfoot Glaciers from Going-to-the-Sun Road, the often car-choked highway that more or less bisects the park west to east.

And for those who want to get closer, some serious legwork over steep terrain can put you right next to both the Grinnell and Sperry Glaciers, respectively a day and an overnight’s hike away. There are other glaciers to be glimpsed in the distance during a hike, but they can’t be reached by trails. These are excursions that require ice ax, ropes or crampons: the

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