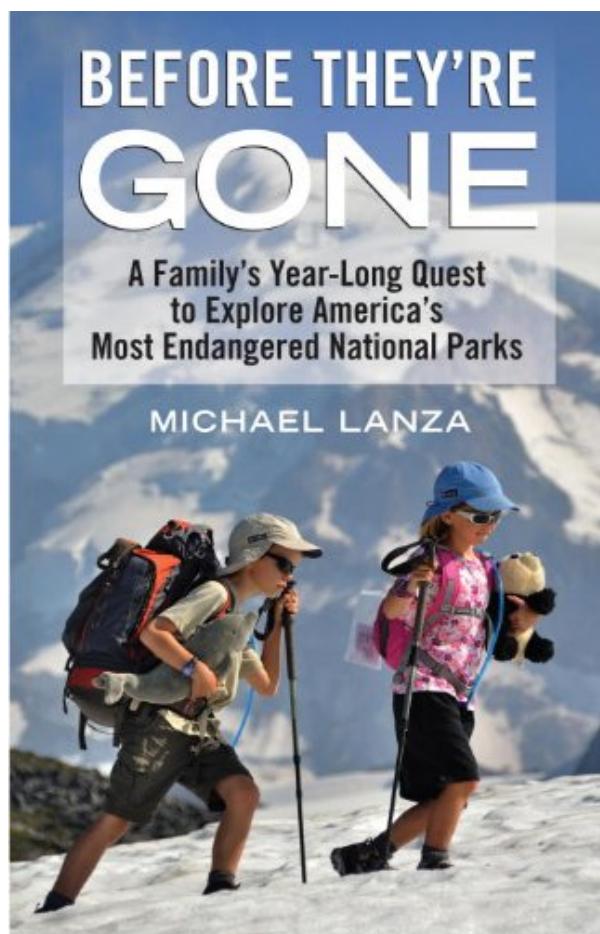


**BEFORE THEY'RE GONE: A FAMILY'S
YEAR-LONG QUEST TO EXPLORE
AMERICA'S MOST ENDANGERED
NATIONAL PARKS BY MICHAEL LANZA**



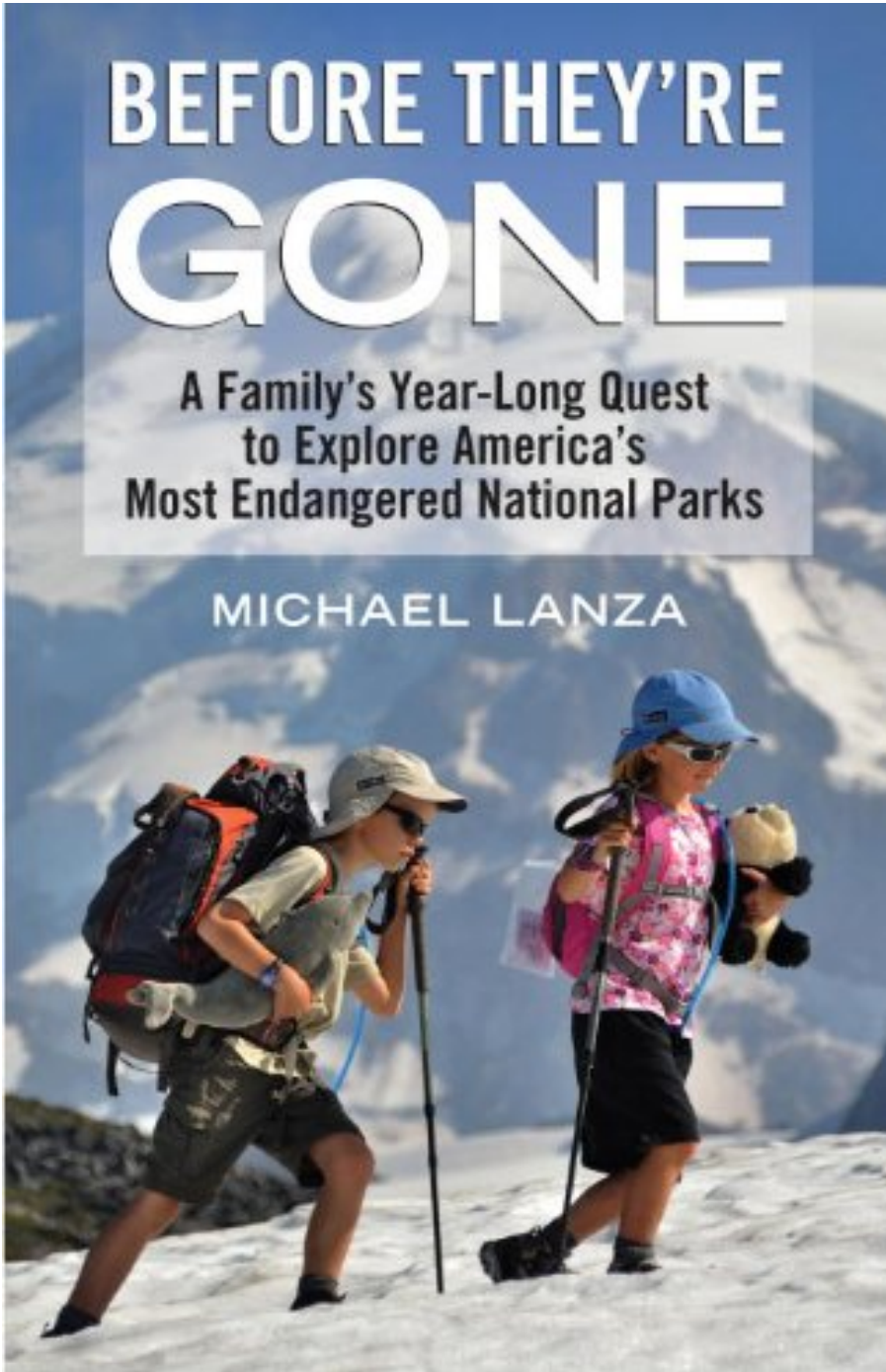
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Encounter a great bear close up and, regardless of how you had planned to react, you may find yourself overwhelmed by one instinctive thought: flee. You backpedal, maybe stumble. You might reach for the pepper spray on your belt or forget it's there. You know in your bones that you possess little control over what happens next.

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A lifelong backpacker, Michael Lanza knows our national parks like the back of his hand. As a father of two, he hopes to share these special places with his kids. But he has seen firsthand the changes wrought by global warming and understands what lies ahead: melting glaciers, disappearing species, and inundated coastlines. 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 is determined 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, Mt. 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 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.

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Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Deals with stewardship of nature and family

By Kristal D. Cooper

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.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A Trifecta

By Stumbles

Wow. Lanza has delivered a hat-trick of an read that I couldn't put down. As an engaged citizen, his ability to deliver the message of climate change and its impact on lands I love was real and compelling. As an outdoor lover, Before They're Gone took me back to familiar stomping grounds at some of our national jewels while adding new 'must do' trips to my life-list. And as a parent of children the same age as Lanza's children, I read his book with awe and admiration for a parent who so purposefully is creating such a rich childhood and lifelong memories for his whole family. The only better thing than finishing his book was the permit arriving in the mail last week for our first backpacking trip in a National Park with my children that was inspired by his example. Lanza's gift to me will go far beyond his inspirational and entertaining writing.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A book you don't want to miss

By TamG

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 now 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.

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BEFORE THEY'RE GONE: A FAMILY'S YEAR-LONG QUEST TO EXPLORE AMERICA'S MOST ENDANGERED NATIONAL PARKS BY MICHAEL LANZA PDF

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Review

"This is a terrific blend of adventure ('Seeing a bison gallop thirty miles an hour—as they can—is like seeing a grand piano suddenly sprout horns and charge you with the speed of a horse.') and ecological forecasting (and forewarning) that aptly conveys the passion of a devoted outdoorsman, and serves as a wake-up call to the state of our planet."—Publishers Weekly

"An informative, heartwarming and, at times, heart-stopping read."—Colleen McBrinn, Today's Travel blog

"The season's must-read new memoir."—Outside's Raising Rippers blog

"A beautifully written, moving meditation."—Richard Louv, author of *The Nature Principle*

"Before They're Gone is a beautifully written, moving meditation on the meaning of parenthood, our parks, and the first generation of children to grow up in the age of global warming."—Richard Louv, author of *The Nature Principle* and *Last Child in the Woods*

"Intriguing premise; decent execution—certainly of interest to environmentalists and other eco-minded readers."—Kirkus Review

"Michael Lanza braids a story of family, wilderness, and climate that's at once heartwarming and terrifying. I envy his kids for the incredible year they spent exploring America's finest wild places. And I mourn that they—and my own daughter—will have to endure the devastating consequences of our heating planet. Lanza makes abundantly clear that our children deserve better than the legacy we're leaving them."—John Harlin, author of *The Eiger Obsession: Facing the Mountain that Killed My Father*

"I grew up in a national park, worked in twelve others and have visited well over two hundred of them. Their values, for people like me, often are taken for granted. In this wonderful book, Michael Lanza's children learn and experience what is most important about our national parks – the necessity to leave them 'unimpaired for future generations' – and why."—Bill Wade, Chair, Executive Council, Coalition of National Park Service Retirees and former superintendent of Shenandoah National Park

“Delightful ... a fresh and engaging way to tell the climate change story.”—Laura Helmuth, senior science editor, Smithsonian

“Wilderness adventurers like Lanza are the advance scouts of global warming, bringing back firsthand testimony from pristine landscapes that powerfully corroborates what climate scientists are telling us about our changing planet. But this eyewitness report is much more than an impassioned polemic: it’s also an entertaining collection of backcountry anecdotes—surprise encounters with grizzlies, anxious moments on glaciers and wild coastlines, jaw-dropping views from remote summits—that bring climate change to life in a way that’s more palpable and persuasive than any data chart. Above all, *Before They’re Gone* is a fetching love letter to Mike’s wife, children, and friends and to the wild places he treasures as only a hiker, climber, and explorer can.”—Jonathan Dorn, editor in chief, Backpacker

About the Author

Michael Lanza is a veteran freelance outdoors writer and photographer. He is the northwest editor of Backpacker magazine, where his articles about the impacts of climate change on Montana’s Glacier National Park and other wild lands helped Backpacker win a National Magazine Award. He runs the website [TheBigOutside](http://TheBigOutside.com).

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Chapter 6: The Backbone of the World

August 2010

We hear the menacing snarls and let our eyes trace the sound to its source. Just a few hundred feet below where we stand at 7,050-foot Lincoln Pass in Montana’s Glacier National Park, two grizzly bear cubs tussle playfully where this open, rocky mountainside meets a sparse conifer forest. Vigilantly close by, their mom vacuums her nose over the ground, searching for tidbits. A plus-size lady, she has a weight lifter’s physique atop hips and legs that might cause a self-conscious bear to frown at her reflection in a lake. But she moves like a four-hundred-pound ballet dancer, hinting at speed and power that we cannot fathom.

Seeing her arouses a feeling so primal that few words even form in our minds or emerge from our mouths. Our skin prickles, our throats turn to sandpaper. If we possessed ears that normally drooped down, at this moment they would stand straight up. If we had the option, we would dive without further contemplation into a claustrophobic burrow and cower for a long time.

But we have no burrow. And the bears are just four or five steps off the trail we have to descend.

As any backpacker or armchair adventurer understands, this represents the worst possible circumstance. A grizzly bear alone might normally flee from the sounds and odors of humans, probably before the people even realized a bear lurked nearby. But other than a polar bear, a griz sow with cubs is arguably the most fearsome, ferocious terrestrial beast in the Americas. She may perceive any sizable creature in her vicinity as a threat to her babies. Every two or three years in the western U.S.

or Canada, a sow horribly mauls or kills some hapless person guilty of no more than stumbling upon the same patch of earth at exactly the same moment as her cubs. In July 2011, a sow with cubs killed a 57-year-old man hiking with his wife in Yellowstone.

So we wait, hoping the bears will move on. There is no wind; they may not smell us. They disappear into the woods, but we periodically hear their growls, too close to the trail for us to consider venturing down there. An hour drips by like candle wax.

Three other hikers, two men and a woman, come along, heading in our direction. After a brief, lively huddle, we agree on a plan: we will walk in close formation down the trail, making abundant noise. Bears, according to conventional thinking, will not engage this large a group of people.

But apparently, these grizzlies did not read the rulebook.

As we buckle on backpacks, the woman says, gravely, “There are the bears.” When we look downhill, she clarifies, “No, behind you.”

We spin around. The sow, not thirty feet away, saunters noiselessly across the grassy meadow we’re standing in, her cubs in tow. While we were strategizing how to outwit them with our superior intellects, they had pulled off a perfect flanking maneuver. From this close, we see her shoulder muscles rippling, the fur backlit by sunlight, and razor teeth designed for tearing through flesh as her mouth gapes open.

Then she sniffs the air and swings her head to stare directly at us.

If there is a national park that seems created to fulfill the grandest dreams of backpackers, it is Glacier.

Straddling the Continental Divide hard against the Canadian border, the northernmost U.S. Rockies resemble a collection of mountain-scale kitchen implements—meat-cleaver wedges of billion-year-old rock and stone knives lined up in rows that stretch for miles, everything standing with blades pointed upward. More than a hundred of them rise above eight thousand feet, the highest exceeding ten thousand feet.

Streams collect the runoff from fields of melting snow and ice, pouring down mountainsides, shouting loudest when crashing over innumerable cascades and waterfalls. Late-afternoon sunlight glints off pebbly creeks spilling from lakes, the water’s surface sparkling like diamonds slowly twisting. Geological strata stripe mountainsides in parallel bands. Wildflowers in a palette of colors dapple vast, treeless tundra plateaus.

The Blackfoot called these mountains “the backbone of the world.” The description fits a place where the land vaults up so dramatically from the very edge of the Plains—and where Triple Divide Peak is one of only two North American mountains that funnel waters to three

oceans: the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic.

Swiss-born paleontologist Louis Agassiz, hailed as one of the greatest scientists of his time, comprehended the origins of places like the future Glacier National Park. In the 1840s, he theorized that an ice age had once locked up much of the planet. His ideas explained the signs of glaciers in Europe and North America where they did not exist: ground scraped down to striated bedrock, and massive “glacial-erratic” boulders deposited in meadows and forests by some mysterious but powerful force. Today, a glacier in the north of this park is named for him.

The renowned writer George Bird Grinnell, who began lobbying to designate the area a national park after visiting in the 1880s, called these mountains “the Crown of the Continent.” The Great Northern Railway, hoping to bring in paying tourists, dubbed the area “Little Switzerland.” But in one important aspect, it differed from the Swiss Alps as much as Central Park from the Serengeti: unlike the settled Alpine valleys and mountainside meadows, the Northern Rockies were an intact, pristine wilderness. Today, some 90 percent of the park’s million acres remain inaccessible except to those willing to explore on foot.

Glacier is among just a few U.S. wild lands outside of Alaska that host a nearly complete array of the continent’s native megafauna. Only two are missing: the bison and woodland caribou. Sixty-two mammal species live here, and 260 kinds of birds are seen. Glacier and neighboring Waterton Lakes National Park in Canada have been designated an international peace park, an international biosphere reserve, and a World Heritage Site.

A backpacker on any of the park’s more than seven hundred miles of trails may lose count of how many times she sees cliff-scaling, bearded mountain goats. Many backpackers go home with breathless tales of walking past that most regal of creatures, the bighorn sheep. Some—like my friend Geoff Sears when we took a trip here together—tell of leaving a sweaty T-shirt hanging outside to dry overnight, only to discover it even more soaked in the morning because deer have gummed it for the salt from perspiration. Hikers in early fall might hear bull elk bugle or see two bull moose clashing massive antlers.

Encounters with black or grizzly bears—both number in the hundreds here—occur rarely, for one simple reason: a bear will usually detect the humans first and avoid them. This dynamic undoubtedly serves the interests of both parties. A bear attacking people ultimately loses, as park officials will destroy it. And no one with a healthy attitude toward life wants to cross paths with a grizzly.

When Lewis and Clark explored the American West, the grizzly numbered an estimated 50,000 and ranged over two-thirds of the contiguous United States, from the Canadian border to Mexico to Ohio.

While more numerous in Canada and Alaska, about 1,400 remain in the Lower 48, and they live only where humans tolerate them. More than seven hundred bears dwell in Glacier and the surrounding national forests, and another six hundred in Greater Yellowstone. Small, at-risk populations hang on in remote mountains in Washington, northern Idaho, and northwestern Montana.

No other species in North America shapes our perception of wilderness as definitively as the grizzly. There are wild lands with grizzlies, and there are those without, and they are as far apart in our minds as terror is from thrill.

Where they live, we enter the woods with a heightened alertness. Every dense copse of spruce trees or tall bushes potentially harbors a menace. Come upon a steaming pile of scat the size of a soccer ball, and you will wonder which direction the bear went and which you should go. We are not so far evolved from our hunter-gatherer ancestors to have lost our innate aversion to being eaten.

Encounter a great bear close up and, regardless of how you had planned to react, you may find yourself overwhelmed by one instinctive thought: flee. You backpedal, maybe stumble. You might reach for the pepper spray on your belt or forget it's there. You know in your bones that you possess little control over what happens next.

Terror hits hard right in the gut and takes the wind out of you. I know, because I've felt it.

When that sow grizzly and her cubs crept up so stealthily behind my friend Jerry Hapgood and me at Lincoln Pass on that late-summer morning, she not only Tasered us with one of the biggest, voice-seizing frights of our lives; she also clarified an unsettling truth: when you walk through country inhabited by grizzly bears, you see and hear them everywhere—except the ones that are actually right on top of you. To our good fortune and vast relief, that sow and her cubs merely continued on their way, giving us no more than a glance.

Now, eleven months later, I'm backpacking that same trail in Glacier with my wife and children, on another perfect summer day in mountains carved from glaciers but designed in dreams.

And I am thinking about bears.

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