



## Chasing Ice Discussion Guide

Director: Jeff Orlowski

Year: 2012

Time: 75 min

**You might know this director from:**

CHASING ICE is Jeff Orlowski's first feature-length documentary film.

## FILM SUMMARY

"There is this limitless universe of forms out there that is surreal, otherworldly, sculptural, architectural, insanely ridiculously beautiful. That's when I thought: the story is in the ice somehow." With this thought in his mind, nature photographer, mountaineer, scientist, and environmentalist, James Balog, established the Extreme Ice Survey in 2007, setting out to capture photographic proof of the alarmingly ill state of earth's glaciers. CHASING ICE follows Balog and team across the barren and bone-chilling expanses of Iceland, Greenland, Alaska, and Montana as they deploy 25 time-lapse cameras in an effort to provide a voice to the silent ice.

With fiery determination, Balog traverses the globe, garnering undeniable evidence of the rapidly melting glacial expanse. He places delicate electronics in the harshest environmental climates. He endures frostbite conditions and returns again and again - despite the odds, despite the battered equipment, the broken knees - to assemble the most undeniable proof that climate change is real, that global warming is indeed happening now.

By employing the visual to illustrate the conceptual, CHASING ICE makes the abstract real, concrete, and damning. Rather than sinking into the heated global warming debate with yet more rhetoric, Balog uses his experience as a nature photographer and presents both scientific and public communities with picture proof. These awe-inspiring, heart-stopping, miraculous images unveil the debilitated state of some of earth's oldest storytellers and providers of water: the glaciers. With 75 minutes of glacial retreat, CHASING ICE serves as a page in the history book of earth's quickly disappearing ice.

## FILM THEMES

With their ability to preserve climate records, glaciers not only hold the key to our past but also to our planet's future. Yet we still argue whether climate change is real, if we as human beings actually have the power to affect our world as much as environmentalists claim. James Balog, in a stubborn and perilous manner, lets his camera tell the chilling truth.

### GLACIERS AS MESSENGERS

Glaciers hold scientific evidence in their cores. Dating back thousands, even hundreds of thousands of years, they reveal the state and activity of our planet long before we were around. And yet so many of them are dying, shrinking away like expansive forests being cleared, taking their stories and their life-giving properties with them. As we inadvertently silence these wise old storytellers, we lose our past. And if we lose our past, how can we say anything about our future? How can we be certain that our future stories will be worth living with?

### PHOTOGRAPHERS AS INTERPRETERS

Seeing is believing, especially in this age of flash-forward technology and speed-of-lightning data blinking before our eyes like never before. The powerful proof presented through James Balog's photographs swayed many climate change sceptics to change sides in the global warming debate. If ever we doubted or rejected the notion that we humans have an incredible power in our grasp to truly alter the earth's equilibrium, we must face Balog's arresting photographic journey. The pictures are worth a billion words, serving to translate the emergency status of our climate into a comprehensible language for the masses.

### PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

The Extreme Ice Survey required 25 cameras, along with an extensive team of scientists, technicians, photographers, mountaineers, and more. Through the use of time-lapse photography, which is inherently a time-consuming endeavour, the team could take a long look at the ice, capturing solid evidence of the melting state of the earth over the span of several years. With patience on their side, Balog and team garnered the narrative that only time could tell.

### DOGGED DETERMINATION

Defying his doctor's wishes and using knee surgery as a means to continue climbing rather than a tool for healing his body long-term, Balog was determined to let nothing stand in the way of him and the glaciers. Despite excruciating pain and hazardous climbs demanded by the project day after day, Balog persevered. He even went as far as to cry out, "If I don't have pictures, I don't have anything. Everything's a failure." This man's determination to capture images of the changing glaciers screamed louder than any physical pain, any doctor's orders, or any family member's concern. Balog hiked, hauled, set up, tore down, and led his team in a undertaking of superhuman resolve.

**“You can’t divorce civilization from nature. We totally depend on it.”**

James Balog

**“You feel this tension between the huge enduring power of these glaciers and their fragility.”**

James Balog

**“He’s looking to make a global worldwide impact.”**

Simone Balog

**FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:**

1. Do you believe that global warming is an acute problem?
2. Have there been any severe weather changes over the last few years where you live, changes that have been attributed to climate change?
3. Have you ever seen a glacier? If so, what were your impressions of it?
4. Why do you think CHASING ICE, and James Balog’s photographs in general, affect people so greatly?
5. What do you feel is the most positive way for you to personally affect climate change?
6. What were your impressions when you first heard the terms “global warming” and “greenhouse gases”? How have your impressions changed since then?
7. Do you believe governments should issue higher taxes on gasoline and the automotive industry, to encourage people to drive less?
8. Alternative energy sources are available, so why are we as a world so slow to embrace them? What are the motivating factors that hold us back?
9. Did CHASING ICE make you feel more sad or hopeful? Do you feel more or less empowered?
10. Do you live in an environmentally forward-thinking community? Why or why not? What are some things your community could do to lessen your environmental impact?

**NOTES:**

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## FILM FACTS:

- CHASING ICE received 7 awards, including a Cinematography Award at Sundance, and was nominated for an additional 3 awards, including an Oscar for Best Achievement in Music Written for Motion Pictures, as well as the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance.
- According to the National Snow & Ice Data Center, there are 13 types of glaciers: mountain, valley, tidewater, piedmont, hanging, cirque, rock, ice aprons, ice shelves, ice fields, ice caps, ice streams, and ice sheets. 99% of glacial ice is contained within ice sheets in the polar regions.
- In 2007, photographer James Balog founded the Extreme Ice Survey (EIS), which photographs the world's glaciers in order "to give a visual voice to the planet's changing ecosystems." As of 2014, 28 cameras are situated at 13 glaciers in Greenland, Iceland, the Nepalese Himalaya, Alaska, and the U.S. Rocky Mountains, with plans being made to expand the camera network into South America and Antarctica.
- When glacial ice becomes extremely dense, it absorbs a small amount of red light, leaving a bluish tint in the reflected light, causing the ice to appear blue. When the ice is white, that denotes the presence of many tiny air bubbles.
- Antarctic ice is up to 3 miles thick in some areas, and can calve icebergs over 50 miles long. The Antarctic continent has been at least partially covered by ice for the past 40 million years.
- The Global Mean Sea Level has risen at a rate of 3.2 mm a year over the past 20 years, roughly twice the average speed of the preceding 80 years. Hundreds of millions of people live in areas that will become increasingly vulnerable to flooding, and low-lying islands could be submerged completely.
- As the Himalayan glacier continues to melt at an alarming rate, the availability of freshwater continues to decrease in many parts of Asia. This could potentially affect 1 billion people by 2050.
- Greenhouse gases are the cause of most of the climate warming and glacial retreat over the past 50 years. Other factors include increased dust and soot from grazing, farming, and burning of fossil fuels and forests. The recent glacial retreats in Europe were most likely caused by soot from burning coal in the late 1800s.
- Systematic glacier monitoring began on a large scale in 1894. In 1986, the World Glacier Monitoring Service was established under the United Nation's Environment Programme, and the World Glacier Inventory currently contains information on over 130,000 glaciers.
- Glacier melting has accelerated in the Alps since 1980. 10-20% of its glacial ice was lost in less than 20 years. Half the volume of the Alpine glaciers has disappeared since 1850. By the end of this century, half of those left will be gone.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Place great importance on our changing climate by voting for political leaders who act on climate legislation. Make sure they have a record of acting on climate legislation, rather than just talking about it.
2. Purchase a fuel-efficient, low-greenhouse gas vehicle, and try to use your own energy to get yourself around as much as possible by walking, biking, jogging, car-pooling, and using public transportation.
3. Support organisations like [350](#), [Greenpeace](#) and [Union of Concerned Scientists](#), that work to reduce climate change through active measures and research. Consider donating to them, sign petitions and spread the word!
4. Reduce, reuse, recycle. Glaciers are disappearing because of our overuse of Earth's natural resources. Think before you buy, compost food waste, and recycle as much as you can.

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**