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Then and now glacier photos illustrate global warming

By HEATHER HACKING - Staff Writer

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CHICO -- After flying through the air over some of the world's most impressive glaciers, photographer David Arnold said the images he captured are "shocking."

"Al Gore low-balled what's happening," the photographer said. "It's happening much faster."

Arnold spoke at Chico State University Wednesday night to discuss his photographs that are currently part of the Gateway Science Museum's exhibits on climate change.

The photographs, taken this decade, are paired with photos taken by Bradford Washburn 50-80 years ago.

Washburn was a "gentleman explorer" who lugged around a 50-pound high-quality camera, documenting glaciers in Switzerland and Alaska.

Arnold worked for the Boston Globe for 25 years and more recently has worked as a freelance writer, photographer and video producer.

Recently, Arnold decided to revisit Washburn's trail and have another look at the glaciers through his own camera lens.

With permission from Washburn, he tried to capture the exact same scenes, from similar angles as close to the same day and time as the originals were taken.

His first adventure was in Yakutat, Alaska, population 400, three hours from Glacier National Park. A surf shop has opened there because the water has warmed 6 degrees since 1980, Arnold said.

After the first shoot, Arnold knew he was on to something. When compared to the photos taken by Washburn in 1940, the glacier had retreated 400 feet and the winters are 7 degrees warmer. Now spruce trees manage to grow at the base of the glacier.

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"I'm a photographer, not a scientist, but I can't afford not to believe," Arnold said.

Each set of photographs tells a similar story, with huge amounts of ice now gone.

Fifteen of the sets of images are at the museum in Chico.

The Matterhorn in Switzerland is now being resculpted, Arnold said. Permafrost has led to times when the ice thaws and rocks now slide. The engineers who built tunnels at the popular destination never thought the ice in the tunnels would thaw, causing problems with water and trains.

Inspired by his adventures with glaciers, Arnold has shifted his focus to coral reefs. His latest work includes taking photos of underwater reefs and finding their exact locations today.

But in the case of coral reefs, not as much time needs to pass for dramatic change. One of his comparisons is photos of the Wreck of Rhone, in the British Virgin Islands. The disappearance of the amount of coral in only the past few years is dramatic, he showed through comparison photos.

Arnold said to reverse the changes already in motion would take great sacrifice and changes in lifestyle, particularly for nations like the United States, where emission of greenhouse gases is disproportionate to other nations.

Several of the coral reef photographs can be viewed at doubleexposure.net.

Gateway Museum exhibit continues

The exhibit "Double Exposure" will be on display at the Gateway Science Museum through Aug. 14. The photographs of glaciers, then and now, accompany many interactive displays about sustainability.

The museum is at 625 The Esplanade, next to Bidwell Mansion. Summer hours are noon to 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays.

Cost is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children.

On the Internet: www.gatewayscience.org.

Staff writer Heather Hacking can be reached at 896-7758 or hhacking@chicoer.com.

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