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

Michael Lanza
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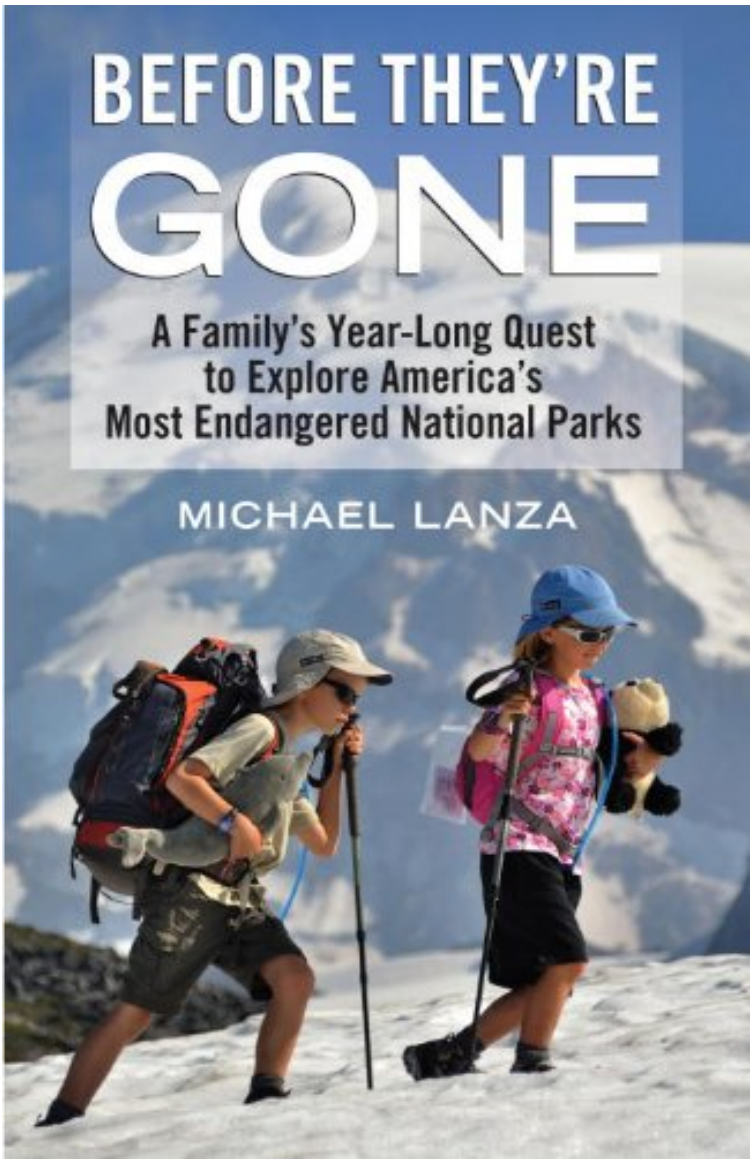

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Michael Lanza : Before They're Gone: A Family's Year-Long Quest to Explore America's Most Endangered National Parks before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Before They're Gone: A Family's Year-Long Quest to Explore America's Most Endangered National Parks:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Inspiring me to explore our parks with my family, and an important call to actionBy Sarah OI just finished reading just your book, and wanted to say thanks for writing something so important. I was a ranger in North Cascades National Park in the early 90s, but in subsequent trips I've definitely witnessed change, particularly with the recession of glaciers. Looking at some of the major fires in the west - particularly the massive fire in Yosemite last year and this year's fire in Washington state - it's hard not to think about the connections you so clearly illustrate. Global warming, pine beetles, dying forests, and so on.But I think your book espouses a great deal of hope as well in getting your kids out there. My kids are 10 and 7, and i too try to get them out as often as possible. Over the last year, my oldest has asked how climate change is impacting national parks we visit. This winter we went to Death Valley and she asked the ranger about such change when we were in Badwater. He said to look at the "lowest point" sign, and of course the elevation below sea level is changing. There are many other changes too, but I think people just say Badwater has a fixed elevation, or even Everest, but it's not.Maybe that doesn't sound hopeful, but I think by taking my kids to national parks that they see beautiful things, learn of the pending threats, and determine to preserve them. Hopefully they believe they can stem the tide, and maybe it's going to just take another generation to get there.Thanks again for writing such a great book, I really enjoyed it!2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. very well writtenBy CustomerI usually avoid memoirs because the writing is often sub par. But this book was extremely well-written (the author is a professional writer) and the subject matter was spot on. I was expecting a book about the hopelessness of global warming and the inevitability of environmental collapse, but instead this was a joyful memoir about one man's attempts to show his children some of our country's most endangered areas. I thought the author was successful in conveying the urgency of our need for change without the gloom and doom of a disaster prophecy. It was also nice to see how the author taught his children the importance of environmental issues and the value of our national parks. He never "beat the issues over their heads" but waited for the teachable moments in which his kids were interested. I thought he did a good job in keeping his kids motivated while helping them enjoy their various backpacking and camping trips. Aside from the environmental issues for which this book was written, it's a great how-to manual for young parents who think backpacking should be put aside until the kids are all grown up. Yes you CAN take young children backpacking!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Amazingly troubling and wonderful!By CustomerI read this straight through. The personal accounts and memories of the kids made me laugh out loud. The paperback will become the read for my next backpacking trip. The research and journaling are blended tremendously.

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: Alaskas tidewater glaciers are rapidly retreating, and the abundant sea life in their shadow departs with them. Encroaching tides threaten beloved wilderness coasts like Washingtons Olympic and Floridas Everglades. Less snowfall and hotter summers will diminish Yosemites world-famous waterfalls. And it is predicted that Glacier National Parks 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 ecologicaland spiritualcalamity that global warming will bring to our nations 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 Alaskas Glacier Bay; hiking to Yosemites 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.From the Hardcover edition.

A beautifully written, moving meditation.Richard Louv, author ofThe Nature Principle Encounters with bears and alligators as well as tender parent-child moments . . . make [Before Theyre Gone] an informative, heartwarming and, at times, heart-stopping read. Colleen McBrinn, The Today Shows travel blogThe seasons must-read new memoir about bringing up adventure kids in the age of climate change. Outside Magazines Raising Rippers blog"This is a terrific blend of adventure...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 WeeklyIntriguing premise; decent executioncertainly of interest to environmentalists and other eco-minded readers.Kirkus 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 theyand my own daughterwill have to endure the devastating consequences of our heating planet. Lanza makes abundantly clear that our children deserve better than the legacy were leaving them.John Harlin, author ofThe Eiger Obsession: Facing the Mountain that Killed My FatherI 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 Lanzas 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 ParkDelightful a fresh and engaging way to tell the climate change story.Laura Helmuth, senior science editor, SmithsonianWilderness 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: its also an entertaining collection of backcountry anecdotessurprise encounters with grizzlies, anxious moments on glaciers and wild coastlines, jaw-dropping views from remote summitsthat bring climate change to life in a way thats more palpable and persuasive than any data chart. Above all, Before Theyre Gone is a fetching love letter to Mikes wife, children, and friends and to the wild places he treasures as only a hiker, climber, and explorer can.Jonathan Dorn, editor in chief, BackpackerAbout the AuthorMichael 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 Montanas Glacier National Park and other wild lands helped Backpacker win a National Magazine Award. He runs the website TheBigOutside.From the Hardcover edition.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Chapter 6: The Backbone of the WorldAugust 2010We hear the menacing snarls and let our eyes trace the sound to itssource. Just a few hundred feet below where we stand at 7,050-foot LincolnPass in Montanas Glacier National Park, two grizzly bear cubs tussleplayfully where this open, rocky mountainside meets a sparse coniferforest. Vigilantly close by, their mom vacuums her nose over the ground,searching for tidbits. A plus-size lady, she has a weight lifters physiqueatop hips and legs that might cause a self-conscious bear to frown at herreflection in a lake. But she moves like a four-hundred-pound balletdancer, hinting at speed and power that we cannot fathom.Seeing her arouses a feeling so primal that few words even form inour minds or emerge from our mouths. Our skin prickles, our throatsturn to sandpaper. If we possessed ears that normally drooped down,at this moment they would stand straight up. If we had the option, wewould dive without further contemplation into a claustrophobic burrowand cower for a long time.But we have no burrow. And the bears are just four or five steps offthe trail we have to descend.As any backpacker or armchair adventurer understands, this representsthe worst possible circumstance. A grizzly bear alone might normallyflee from the sounds and odors of humans, probably before thepeople even realized a bear lurked nearby. But other than a polar bear, a griz sow with cubs is arguably the most fearsome, ferocious terrestrialbeast in the Americas. She may perceive any sizable creature in her vicinityas 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 ofno more than stumbling upon the same patch of earth at exactly thesame moment as her cubs. In July 2011, a sow with cubs killed a 57-yearoldman hiking with his wife in Yellowstone.So we wait, hoping the bears will move on. There is no wind; theymay not smell us. They disappear into the woods, but we periodicallyhear their growls, too close to the trail for us to consider venturing downthere. An hour drips by like candle wax.Three other hikers, two men and a woman, come along, headingin our direction. After a brief, lively huddle, we agree on a plan: we willwalk in close formation down the trail, making abundant noise. Bears,according to conventional thinking, will not engage this large a groupof people.But apparently, these grizzlies did not read the rulebook.As we buckle on backpacks, the woman says, gravely, There are thebears. When we look downhill, she clarifies, No, behind you.We spin around. The sow, not thirty feet away, saunters noiselesslyacross the grassy meadow were standing in, her cubs in tow. While wewere strategizing how to outwit them with our superior intellects, theyhad pulled off a perfect flanking maneuver. From this close, we see hershoulder muscles rippling, the fur backlit by sunlight, and razor teethdesigned 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 grandestdreams of backpackers, it is Glacier.Straddling the Continental Divide hard against the Canadianborder, the northernmost U.S. Rockies resemble a collection ofmountain-scale kitchen implementsmeat-cleaver wedges of billionyear-old rock and stone knives lined up in rows that stretch for miles,everything standing with blades pointed upward. More than a hundredof them rise above eight thousand feet, the highest exceeding tenthousand feet.Streams collect the runoff from fields of melting snow and ice,pouring down mountainsides, shouting loudest when crashing over innumerablecascades and waterfalls. Late-afternoon sunlight glints offpebbly creeks spilling from lakes, the waters surface sparkling like diamondsslowly twisting. Geological strata stripe mountainsides in parallelbands. Wildflowers in a palette of colors dapple vast, treeless tundraplateaus.The Blackfoot called these mountains the backbone of the world.The description fits a place where the land vaults up so dramaticallyfrom the very edge of the Plainsand where Triple Divide Peak is oneof only two North American mountains that funnel waters to threeoceans: the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic.Swiss-born paleontologist Louis Agassiz, hailed as one of the greatestscientists of his time, comprehended the origins of places like thefuture Glacier National Park. In the 1840s, he theorized that an ice agehad once locked up much of the planet. His ideas explained the signs ofglaciers in Europe and North America where they did not exist: groundscraped down to striated bedrock, and massive glacial-erratic bouldersdeposited in meadows and forests by some mysterious but powerfulforce. Today, a glacier in the north of this park is named for him.The renowned writer George Bird Grinnell, who began lobbying todesignate the area a national park after visiting in the

1880s, called thesemountains 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 muchas Central Park from the Serengeti: unlike the settled Alpine valleys andmountainside meadows, the Northern Rockies were an intact, pristinewilderness. Today, some 90 percent of the parks million acres remaininaccessible except to those willing to explore on foot.Glacier is among just a few U.S. wild lands outside of Alaska thathost a nearly complete array of the continents native megafauna. Onlytwo are missing: the bison and woodland caribou. Sixty-two mammalspecies live here, and 260 kinds of birds are seen. Glacier and neighboringWaterton Lakes National Park in Canada have been designatedan international peace park, an international biosphere reserve, and aWorld Heritage Site.A backpacker on any of the parks more than seven hundred milesof trails may lose count of how many times she sees cliff-scaling, beardedmountain goats. Many backpackers go home with breathless tales ofwalking past that most regal of creatures, the bighorn sheep. Somelikemy friend Geoff Sears when we took a trip here togethertell of leavinga sweaty T-shirt hanging outside to dry overnight, only to discover iteven more soaked in the morning because deer have gummed it for thesalt from perspiration. Hikers in early fall might hear bull elk bugle orsee two bull moose clashing massive antlers.Encounters with black or grizzly bearsboth number in the hundredshereoccur rarely, for one simple reason: a bear will usually detectthe humans first and avoid them. This dynamic undoubtedly servesthe interests of both parties. A bear attacking people ultimately loses, aspark officials will destroy it. And no one with a healthy attitude towardlife wants to cross paths with a grizzly.When Lewis and Clark explored the American West, the grizzlynumbered an estimated 50,000 and ranged over two-thirds of the contiguousUnited States, from the Canadian border to Mexico to Ohio.While more numerous in Canada and Alaska, about 1,400 remain inthe Lower 48, and they live only where humans tolerate them. Morethan seven hundred bears dwell in Glacier and the surrounding nationalforests, and another six hundred in Greater Yellowstone. Small, at-riskpopulations hang on in remote mountains in Washington, northernIdaho, and northwestern Montana.No other species in North America shapes our perception of wildernessas definitively as the grizzly. There are wild lands with grizzlies, andthere are those without, and they are as far apart in our minds as terroris from thrill.Where they live, we enter the woods with a heightened alertness.Every dense copse of spruce trees or tall bushes potentially harbors amenace. Come upon a steaming pile of scat the size of a soccer ball, andyou will wonder which direction the bear went and which you shouldgo. We are not so far evolved from our hunter-gatherer ancestors to havelost 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 instinctivethought: flee. You backpedal, maybe stumble. You might reach for thepepper spray on your belt or forget its there. You know in your bonesthat you possess little control over what happens next.Terror hits hard right in the gut and takes the wind out of you. Iknow, because Ive felt it.When that sow grizzly and her cubs crept up so stealthily behindmy friend Jerry Hapgood and me at Lincoln Pass on that late-summermorning, she not only Tasered us with one of the biggest, voice-seizingfrights of our lives; she also clarified an unsettling truth: when you walkthrough country inhabited by grizzly bears, you see and hear themeverywhereexcept the ones that are actually right on top of you. Toour good fortune and vast relief, that sow and her cubs merely continuedon their way, giving us no more than a glance.Now, eleven months later, Im backpacking that same trail in Glacierwith my wife and children, on another perfect summer day inmountains carved from glaciers but designed in dreams.And I am thinking about bears.