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Melting on Mount Kilimanjaro

Natalie Mitchell

Snow on the peaks of one of the world's tallest mountains is melting at an extremely rapid rate and may disappear by the 2020s. According to scientists, dark rocks surrounding the ice on Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania absorb sunlight, causing an increased melting rate of ice on the mountain. Findings published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (November 2009) report that the melting is occurring at an alarming rate. From 1912 to 1953, ice coverage declined by only 1.1 percent per year; however, from 1989 to 2007, that rate increased to 2.4 percent per year. An astounding eighty-five percent of the ice cover has vanished since 1912. Studies have also indicated that one quarter of the ice cover present in 2000 had disappeared by 2007.

Current debate centers on whether Mount Kilimanjaro's ice loss stems from melting caused by global warming or from increased sublimation. However, no definite conclusion can be made regarding the role of either human activity or climatological influences on the melting. Researchers do stress that that the melting seen on the mountain is paralleled by melting occurring in ice fields elsewhere throughout the world, including South America and Indonesia. Thus, more conclusive research must be conducted in order to generate a clearer picture of this startling situation.