



In August 2021, we photographed the Rhône Glacier, which has changed dramatically in recent years.

One of the attractions of the Rhône Glacier has long been a cave dug into the ice so that visitors can hike through an ethereal cool blue grotto and listen to the sound of dripping water. Once you're inside, the ice — grubby and grey on the surface — refracts the light in a very special way.

As the glacier is moving, the grotto deforms over the course of the season and has to be re-dug every year. In recent years, however, the ice was receding so quickly that special measures had to be taken. The family, who run the nearby souvenir shop and practically own a piece of the glacier, had to watch how their livelihood was simply melting away. The grotto, which used to be several metres below the surface of the ice, is now sometimes not even completely covered and resembles more of a crevasse than a cave.

A few years ago, they started to protect their piece of ice by covering it with thick, white textile blankets, which have an insulating effect and help to conserve the attraction at least for a whole season. They try — with all available financial and technical means — to keep the glacier cool.

Yet, the process of global warming cannot be stopped with a few blankets. Coverings or not, the glacier is flatter, shorter, narrower than ever before. The blankets do not hold up well to the elements anyway — they are torn and frayed by wind and weather. Every year, the grotto moves a little further away from the souvenir shop, becomes a little shallower as the glacier's thickness decreases.

Twenty thousand years ago, the Rhône Glacier was a 3,000 metres high dome and part of a sea of ice that covered most of Switzerland. With only a few isolated rocks towering above. If you stand next to the waterfall on the edge of today's glacier lake, you would have been well under a kilometre of ice.

Now you can find an impressively shrunken remnant of the glacier up there. Actually, you see a dying glacier, exquisitely wrapped in shrouds. It's just a tiny area — but big enough to remind us of all the glaciers around the world that are defenselessly exposed to global warming. The climate crisis won't wait. In a world of 7.9 billion people, each of us can help to fight climate change — and build a society based on sharing, improving, and caring.

All the best for 2022!

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