

# The Vanishing Antarctic



## THE WEST ANTARCTIC ICE SHELF IS MELTING RIGHT UNDER THE FEET OF SCIENTISTS

Richard Wilson travels to the West Antarctic Ice Shelf to see the work of the British scientists investigating changes to the shape of the ice – and the possible consequences for our world. Until recently the West Antarctic area was considered safe from rapid melting. Now something has made them change their minds – it is melting more than 100 times faster than expected! Using an unmanned robot submarine they discovered that the sea temperature was increasing, melting the ice sheet from below and eating at its underbelly. It is now believed that the melting of the Pine Island Glacier and the West Antarctic Ice shelf may be the biggest factor in global sea level rises this century.

Hugh Corr is an aerogeophysicist who worked on a vast expanse of floating ice called Larsen-B in 1997. In the beginning of 2002 it was there, but in less than two weeks it completely vanished. Ice shelves restrain the glaciers behind them. That fact is now clear from the speed-up of the glacier after the collapse of Larsen-B. In the six months after the collapse, the glaciers behind the ice shelf lost about 30 metres in height as they melted and sped toward the sea. Ice shelves float and do not contribute to sea level rise, but the glaciers racing behind them toward the open ocean do. The great coastal cities of the world could be swamped by five metres of water if the West Antarctic Ice Sheet goes.

**“IT’S BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE THE GREATEST VANISHING ACT ON EARTH.”**

Presenter Richard Wilson



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