

Swiss to hold high-altitude wake for lost glacier

September 22 2019, by Eloi Rouyer With Agnes Pedrero In Geneva



Images of the Pizol glacier taken in 2006 (L) and 2019 (R) show how much ice has been lost

Dozens of people will undertake a "funeral march" up a steep Swiss mountainside on Sunday to mark the disappearance of an Alpine glacier amid growing global alarm over climate change.

The Pizol "has lost so much substance that from a scientific perspective it is no longer a glacier," Alessandra Degiacomi, of the Swiss Association for Climate Protection, told AFP.

The organisation which helped organise Sunday's march said around 100 people were due to take part in the event, set to take place as the UN

gathers youth activists and [world leaders](#) in New York to mull the action needed to curb [global warming](#).

Dressed in black, they will make the solemn two-hour "funeral march" up the side of Pizol mountain in northeastern Switzerland to the foot of the steep and rapidly melting [ice formation](#), situated at an altitude of around 2,700 metres (8,850 feet) near the Liechtenstein and Austrian borders.

Once they arrive, a chaplain and several scientists will give sombre speeches in remembrance of the glacier, accompanied by the mournful tones of alphorns—a 3.6-metre (12-foot), pipe-shaped wooden instrument.

A wreath will be laid for the Pizol glacier, which has been one of the most studied glaciers in the Alps.

The move comes after Iceland made global headlines last month with a large ceremony and the laying of a bronze plaque to commemorate Okjokull, the island's first glacier lost to [climate change](#).



This combination of three handout pictures taken (From top) Summer 2006, August 2017 and September 2019 shows the now vanished Pizol glacier in the Swiss Alps

500 glaciers gone

But unlike Iceland, Sunday's ceremony does not mark the first disappearance of a glacier from the Swiss Alps.

"Since 1850, we estimate that more than 500 Swiss glaciers have completely disappeared, including 50 that were named," Matthias Huss, a glaciologist at the ETH technical university in Zurich, told AFP.

Pizol may not be the first glacier to vanish in Switzerland, but "you could say it is the first to disappear that has been very thoroughly studied," said Huss, who will participate in Sunday's ceremony.

The logs kept since scientists began tracking the glacier in 1893 paint a bleak picture of recent rapid changes to the climate.

Pizol has lost 80-90 percent of its volume just since 2006, leaving behind a mere 26,000 square metres (280,000 square feet) of ice, or "less than four football fields," Huss said.

Pizol, which sits at a relatively low altitude, was never very big.

According to Glacier Monitoring Switzerland, or GLAMOS, it, like nearly 80 percent of Swiss glaciers, has been considered a so-called glacieret.



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Referendum

It has figured among some 4,000 glaciers—vast, ancient reserves of ice—dotted throughout the Alps, providing seasonal water to millions and forming some of Europe's most stunning landscapes.

But Huss and other ETH scientists recently cautioned that more than 90 percent of the Alpine glaciers could disappear by the end of this century if [greenhouse gas emissions](#) are not reined in.

Regardless of what actions humans take now, the Alps will lose at least half of their ice mass by 2100, according to their study, published in April.

And in a subsequent study published earlier this month, the researchers indicated that the Alps' largest glacier, the mighty Aletsch, could completely disappear over the next eight decades.

Sunday's "funeral" for Pizol provides an occasion to point out that climate change is not only melting [glaciers](#) but is endangering "our means of subsistence", according to the organising groups, including Greenpeace.

It is threatening "human civilisation as we know it in Switzerland and around the world," they warn on the event webpage.

With this in mind, the Swiss Association for Climate Protection recently presented the 100,000 signatures needed to launch a popular initiative, to be put to a referendum, demanding that Switzerland reduce its net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050.

The date for the vote has yet to be set, but the Swiss government in August said it supported the objective.

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