

## Chasing Icebergs: How Frozen Freshwater Can Save the Planet

**Matthew Birkhold**

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The “Cold Rush” is coming, professor Matthew Birkhold heralds, and its quarry is icebergs and the freshwater supplies they could ensure. *Chasing Icebergs*, with its affable blend of history and predictions, probes the ins and outs of ice and the ethics of its exploitation.

Birkhold asserts that, by 2030, global water demand will outstrip supply by 40%, and two-thirds of the population may experience water shortages—a threat that felt potent during his visit to South Africa’s Table Mountain. Iceberg harvesting was proposed as a solution in the 1970s: glaciers calve some 15,000 icebergs a year, and these often pose danger to vessels; further, towing them to where their water is needed could be cheaper than desalinization.

Birkhold’s jaunty travelogue is full of unusual pitstops and conversations. In Newfoundland, he met a fifth-generation fisherman and “iceberg cowboy.” In West Virginia, he attended a Fine Water Society taste test where Svalbard’s iceberg water from Norway was prized. Still, despite the book’s light tone, the ecological situation it addresses is complex. Climate experts express no misgivings unless the icebergs relocated number in the hundreds to thousands, but there is a significant carbon footprint to moving them. Furthermore, the effect on marine ecosystems is not yet known, and there is no guarantee that the project will prevent sea-level rise. Birkhold addresses such potential ethical thorniness on his travels to Greenland to understand Indigenous perspectives. Icebergs are of cultural importance there due to their appearance in myths, but are also used in public water works. Native people’s water rights cannot be ignored, he says, and international and humanitarian laws governing icebergs—which as of now fall into gaps in legislation related to water, fish, and flotsam—are essential.

As lively as it is fervent, *Chasing Icebergs* is a playbook for a creative solution to an environmental quagmire.

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