The story

“Settling the Science on Himalayan Glaciers”
by Mason Inman
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The pitch

Jan 18, 2010, Himalayan glacier pitch to an editor at Nature Climate Change:

Himalayan glaciers—and how fast they might melt away—is all over the news today, and I wanted to see if you'd be interested in a feature on the fate of the glaciers.

The hubbub is about the revelation that an oft-cited stat from the IPCC's 2007 report actually came originally from a speculation by a scientist that was printed in a news story in New Scientist. The researcher said that some Himalayan glaciers could disappear by 2035, and this got twisted and amplified to say "if the present rate continues, the likelihood of them disappearing by the year 2035 and perhaps sooner is very high if the Earth keeps warming at the current rate. Its total area will likely shrink from the present 500,000 to 100,000 km² by the year 2035." [Note that this isn't saying they'll disappear completely, but with 80% loss, many of them would, I believe.]

I'm not bringing this up to dump on the IPCC... But I thought it was interesting that none of the news stories had anything to say about a *better* estimate of when the glaciers may melt away (given a certain scenario for emissions or warming).

(And then there was the dust-up about the report on Himalayan glaciers, which Quirin blogged about in November: http://blogs.nature.com/climatefeedback/2009/11/greenland_ice_and_himalayan_g l_1.html.)

So I thought it would be a good time for a feature on the fate of the glaciers, how long they might last, and what it would take to get better data up there. In my understanding, we don't have a very good idea of what's happening with the glaciers because the data on the glaciers is pretty sparse—which is a shame since more than a billion people depend on rivers fed by these glaciers. As glaciologist Lonnie Thompson says about the Himalayas, "we know less about them than any other place on Earth."
My feature could focus on what it would take to get better data about the Himalayas—improvements in satellites, improvements in interpreting their images, more on-the-ground monitoring, better sharing of data, etc. If you think this sounds interesting, then I can dig into it more to see what I can find. But, on the other hand, if you think this whole topic has been covered enough lately, then I’ll move on to something else.