



North Patagonian Icefield South America

Forests, grasslands, deserts, and mountains are all part of the Patagonian landscape that spans more than a million square kilometers of South America. Toward the western side, expanses of dense, compacted ice stretch for hundreds of kilometers of the Andes mountain range in Chile and Argentina. The two lobes of the Patagonian icefields—north and south—are what is left of a much more expansive ice sheet that reached its maximum size about 18,000 years ago. The modern icefields are just a fraction of their previous size, though they remain the southern hemisphere’s largest expanse of ice outside of Antarctica.

The northern icefield covers about 4,000 square kilometers and has 30 significant glaciers along its perimeter. In April 2017, Landsat 8 captured this rare cloud-free view of a portion of the icefield.

Ice creeps downslope through mountain valleys and exits through so-called “outlet glaciers.” Many come to an abrupt end on land, while others terminate in water. The San Rafael and San Quintín glaciers (shown at the right) are the icefield’s largest. Both have been receding rapidly in the past 30 years.