

Cairn Gorm – the consequences of the failure to make snow

Description



Cairn Gorm:: the result of not making snow. The unusable pistes below the Sheiling and the Carpark T-Bar uptrack on Tuesday 20 Dec.

Cairngorm Mountain opened for snowsports on Saturday 17 December 2022 with uplift being provided by the two new magic carpets adjacent to the Daylodge. Ticket sales were rightfully limited to just 150 due the constrained size of the beginner area.



The magic carpets on the day they opened. Photo appeared Badenoch and Strathspey Herald credit Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd

This beginner area is served by snow from the Snowfactory which is topped up by natural snowfall and snow from a couple of fan guns. Uplift is via the two new Magic carpets. The area in use was also subject to 'smoothing' at additional cost. These assets came to a capital cost in excess of £1.5m. It will be interesting to see if HIE/CMSL publish a cost-benefit report on the effectiveness of what has been done here.

After the first day of operation, it was then necessary to close the hill business due to a storm on Sunday 18th December. The business has now re-opened for very limited snowsports on the beginner's area which today is claimed to be "in good condition":

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Our remaining snow has firmed up overnight and not thawing as fast.

8:15am Thursday 22nd December.

There is insufficient snow for any other lifts or pistes after the thaw in recent days. The beginners area is still in good condition nice and wide with 200 metres length.

Snow Level: 600m

Parkswatch recently commented ([see here](#)) on the fact that the hill business has not made optimal use of the TechnoAlpin snowmaking fan guns during the recent cold spell when snow could have been

made on a continuous basis during a period of almost two weeks duration.



Unused fan gun as featured in post last week

In fact, the majority of the fan guns were never used at all during this time period. Only four would seem to have been used and even those were only used for limited time periods. As a result, only minimal quantities of artificial snow were made.

The arrival of the inevitable thaw, overnight on Sunday 18th and through Monday 19th, has now fully exposed the folly of the operational decision, which is the responsibility of the CEO, to make minimal use of the fan guns. There are two fan guns in the foreground of the web cam photo above. Neither of them were used in the two week cold spell up to Saturday 17 December. The result is very clear with no complete piste now available. The Sunkid rope tow (on right of photo), which was also funded entirely with public money to create a beginner's area, cannot be used either.



Another three fans guns which have not been used and the resultant lack of snow cover

Snowmaking should be undertaken when the opportunity arises and the volume of snow maximised. In that way, pistes would survive thaw periods and the business could trade continuously outwith storms.



One fan gun, located adjacent to the Sunkid Control Hut.

The fan gun in this picture, powered via the electricity to the Sunkid Rope Tow Control Hut, was used at times during the two week cold spell. The resultant snow is still there having come through the mild spell. That's evidence of the fact that producing artificially made snow works well and enables snow cover to survive thaws.

It may seem obvious to say it but a snowsports area without snow can't provide any service. In these circumstances the revenue will be very constrained and employment opportunities on the hill will be limited. Furthermore, in these situations Cairngorm Mountain provides no support for the wider local winter economy which is the main justification Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) has given for the huge levels of subsidy it provides the business.

It was pleasing to note the comments in the operational update at 9am on Wednesday 21 December: "Forecasts are still indicating very cold weather coming back towards the end of the week which will allow us to start up the snow guns again". It will be of considerable interest to see if this actually means that proper use will be made of ALL of the fan guns or just four from 13 as has been the case up to now.

We'll continue to monitor the use that is made of the freely provided public assets and comment accordingly throughout the season. The operational decision to limit use of the fan guns to a point where no critical mass is ever reached is unfathomable and the CEO has questions to answer.

What has to happen now

- 1.The Board of Directors of Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd should direct the CEO that they appointed and instruct her to ensure that full use is made of the snowmaking assets.
2. As a short term measure, until the electricity supply is upgraded, generators must be hired so that full use of the fan gun fleet can be made whenever temperatures allow. This will enable the hill business to maximise revenue and be seen to be doing all it can to support the local winter economy.
- 3.The Minister with responsibility for HIE, Ivan McKee MSP, should put an end to the long history of mismanagement on the hill and facilitate meaningful discussions that lead to the hill business being owned and operated by the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust with HIE retaining all financial liability for the funicular.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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