

Snowsports and HIE's mismanagement at Cairn Gorm - the Scottish Government's latest report (1).



This post is a critical analysis of the latest report into the

impact of snowsports commissioned by the Scottish Government which was quietly published in January ([see here](#)). The report contains some major flaws/ inaccuracies which need to be addressed and has implications for all of Scotland's ski centres, including the three in the Cairngorms National Park, the Lecht, Glen Shee and Cairn Gorm. While Glencoe and Nevis Range are not within the National Park I have included them in my analysis because diversification, as recommended in the report, at Glencoe has helped to make it a growing force in Scottish skiing whereas at Nevis Range it has almost closed down the skiing operation.

1. Supply of data for the report

There was limited engagement by the public, ski clubs and businesses in the production of the report which has implications for its conclusions.

For example the number of public responses to the survey undertaken by the consultants, EKOS, was 1530. The SE Group report of 2018 estimated the number of snowsports participants in Scotland is 10% of an approximate population of 5.5M = 550,000! That same report, see screenshot below, quotes the Snow Factor at Braehead as having had some 500,000 people learn to ski there!

climbing wall, sledging, Bavarian-themed restaurant and ice bar. Snow Factor boasts that 500,000 people having learned to ski there. It is located a short drive from Glasgow City Centre. There are other indoor real snow slopes across the UK: the Chill Factor in Manchester, the Snow Centre in Hempstead and the original Snowdome at Tamworth.

There was no mention of the sister indoor snow slope at Castleford in Yorkshire but people from England, particularly the north, ski in Scotland too!

Questions

- (1) How many have learned at Hillend and all the other artificial ski slopes?
- (2) How many people use the artificial slopes?
- (3) Are they not classed as snowsports enthusiasts?
- (4) Why is there almost nothing in the report about them after all there must be quite significant numbers who learn to ski/ board on plastic?

The number of Scottish skiers could be well in excess of 550,000.

2. Representation of data in the report

Now I will take a look at the graphs in the report, pages 31 and 63 – 65 inclusive, and show how seriously flawed they are.

From page 31:-

Report section 4 Visitor Trends:-

Figure 4-1 also shows snowsports visitor data from four of the five mountain centres.⁹ The chart shows a clear declining trend in numbers of visitors.

Figure 4-1: Snowsports visitor numbers by year (for four of the five mountain centres)



Table: Snowsports visitor numbers by year (for four of the five mountain centres)

2010/ 11	2011/ 12	2012/ 13	2013/ 14	2014/ 15	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/ 19	2019/ 20
168,575	63,393	177,371	157,877	154,113	151,615	32,218	188,189	50,711	74,900

Source: data provided by the mountain centres

There are three years where the level of snow was particularly low, and this impacted considerably on visitor numbers (i.e. 2010/11, 2016/17 and 2018/19).

Note that the text states "Data for the years 2016/17, 2017/18, and 2018/19 was only available for four of the five mountain centres". Furthermore, it is claimed no data is available for 2020/21, hence the chart only shows visitor numbers up to 2019/20. Note how the first statement before the graph implying ALL data was supplied by only four of the five resorts is then contradicted by note above!

Strange that some of this data is only available from FOUR of the FIVE mountain centres when Alan Bratney managed to assemble a complete set of data from 2004 to 2019 for both Parkswatch ([see here](#)) and the Save The Ciste Campaign:

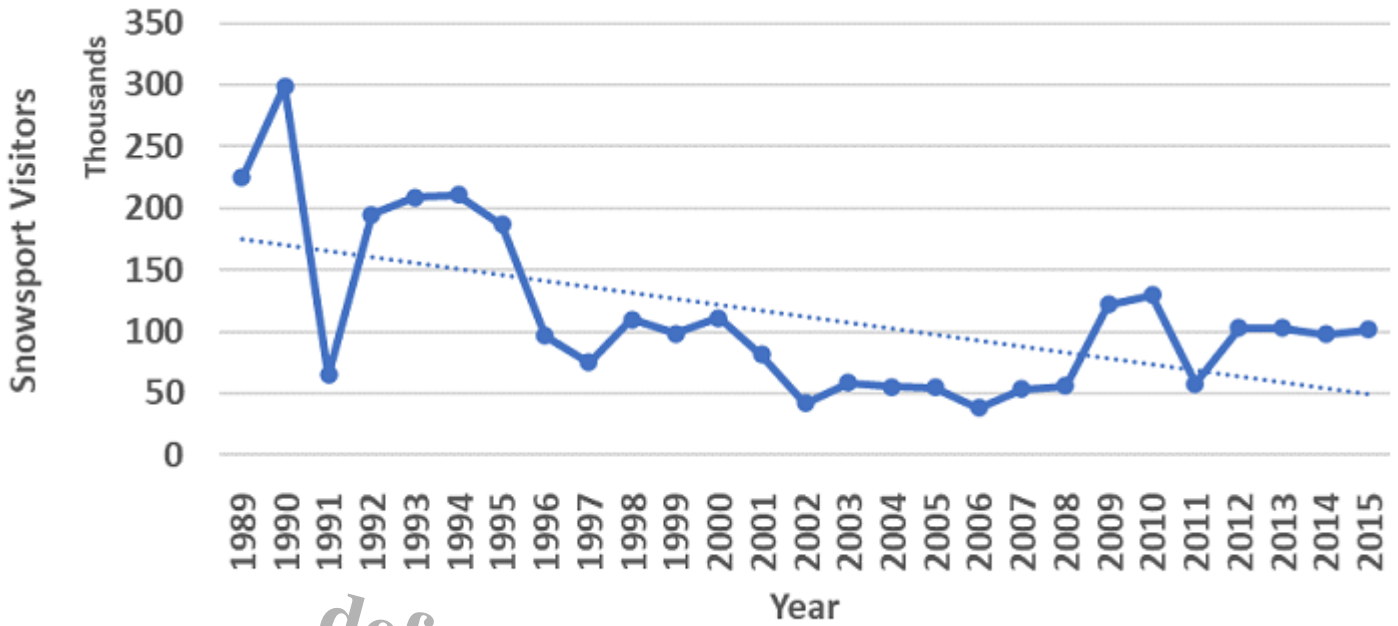
Winter	Glencoe		Nevis Range		The Lecht		Glenshee		Cairngorm		Total Skiers		
	360m Skiers	1070m %Market	655m Skiers	1221m %Market	645m Skiers	775m %market	650m Skiers	1070m %Market	640m Skiers	1230m %Market			
2004	7,000	4.3	20,855	12.7	50,636	30.8	27,471	16.7	58,500	35.6	164,462		
2005	12,000	8.2	18,338	12.5	25,252	17.2	36,000	24.5	55,586	37.8	147,176		
2006	16,623	10.7	18,430	11.9	22,303	14.4	42,460	27.4	55,000	35.5	154,816		
2007	7,623	9.7	11,149	14.1	13,200	16.7	8,521	10.8	38,553	48.8	79,046		
2008	23,000	13.9	23,021	13.9	18,061	10.9	39,007	23.6	62,000	37.6	165,089		
5yr Total	66,246		91,793		129,452		153,459		269,639		710,589		
5yr Ave	13,249	9.32	18,359	12.92	25,890	18.22	30,692	21.6	53,928	37.95	142,118		
2009	16,899	10.6	15,876	9.9	19,110	12	43,000	26.9	65,000	40.7	159,885		
2010	26,135	7	34,686	9.3	52,147	13.9	116,614	31.1	145,000	38.7	374,582		
2011	14,037	4.8	18,289	6.3	40,678	14	95,571	33	121,000	41.8	289,575		
2012	10,614	8.1	9,788	7.4	10,856	8.3	33,947	25.8	66,463	50.5	131,668		
2013	24,000	8.3	16,668	5.7	44,429	15.3	92,899	31.9	113,000	38.8	290,996		
5yr Total	91,685		95,307		167,220		382,031		510,463		1,246,706		
5yr Ave	18,337	7.35	19,061	7.64	33,444	13.41	76,406	30.64	102,093	40.95	249,341		
%change		-1.97		-5.28		-4.81		9.04		3			
2014	16,075	6.8	25,711	10.9	31,578	13.4	84,397	35.9	77,430	32.9	235,191		
2015	31,218	13.4	29,375	12.6	35,046	15.2	58,407	25.6	76,588	33.2	230,634		
2016	25,156	12.1	26,760	12.9	29,488	14.2	59,126	28.5	67,000	32.3	207,530		
2017	4,002	7.5	10,348	19.3	5,941	11.1	12,111	22.6	21,267	39.6	53,669		
2018	40,047	16	33,000	13.2	41,431	16.6	76,367	30.6	59,003	23.6	249,848		
5yr Total	116,498		125,194		143,484		290,408		301,288		976,872		
5yr Ave	23,300	11.9	25,039	12.8	28,697	14.7	58,082	29.7	60,258	30.84	195,374		
%change		-1.51		5.16		7.35		-0.94		-10.15			
2019			Nevis Range		Glenshee		Cairngorm		Glencoe		The Lecht		
2020			2377	4.37	7989	14.68	9022	16.58	9030	16.59	26000	47.78	54418
%change			-8.43		-15.02		-14.26		1.89		35.88		

Why couldn't the consultants do the same?

These flaws show what a nonsense the chart or graph (as it is more commonly known) actually is and therefore why it cannot be used to formulate a way forward.

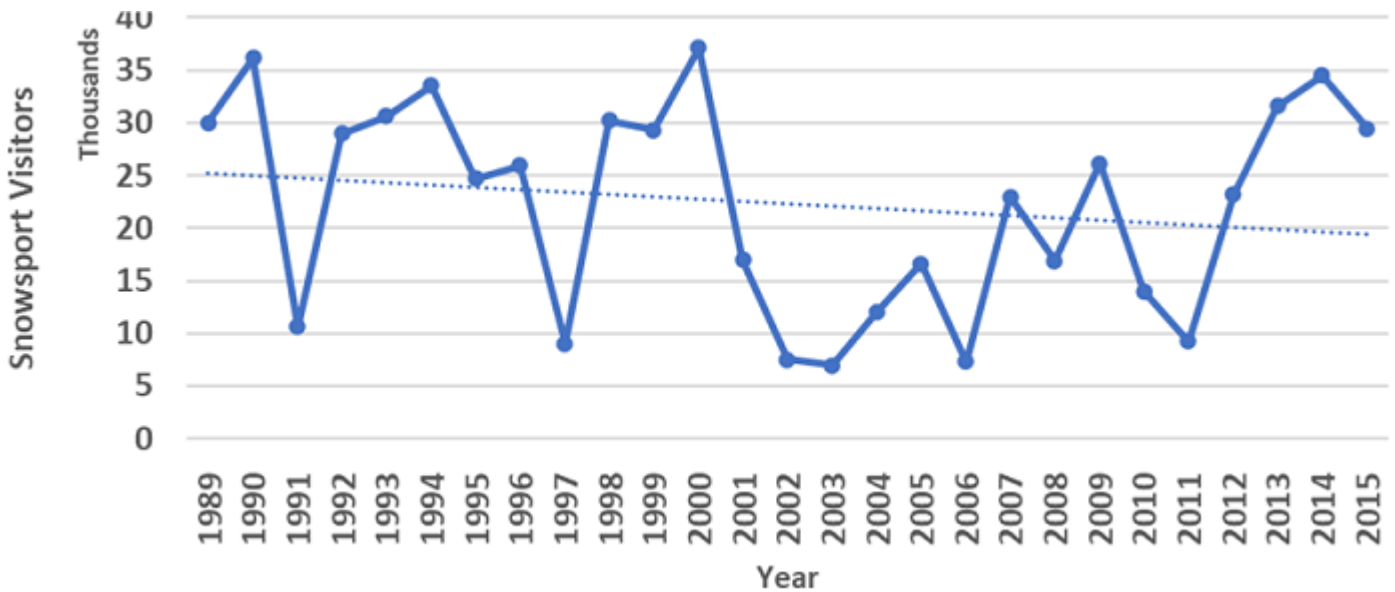
Now let's look at another two graphs from appendix A (page 63):-

Figure A-1: Snowsports Visitors (Individual Mountain Centres) - Cairngorms



And

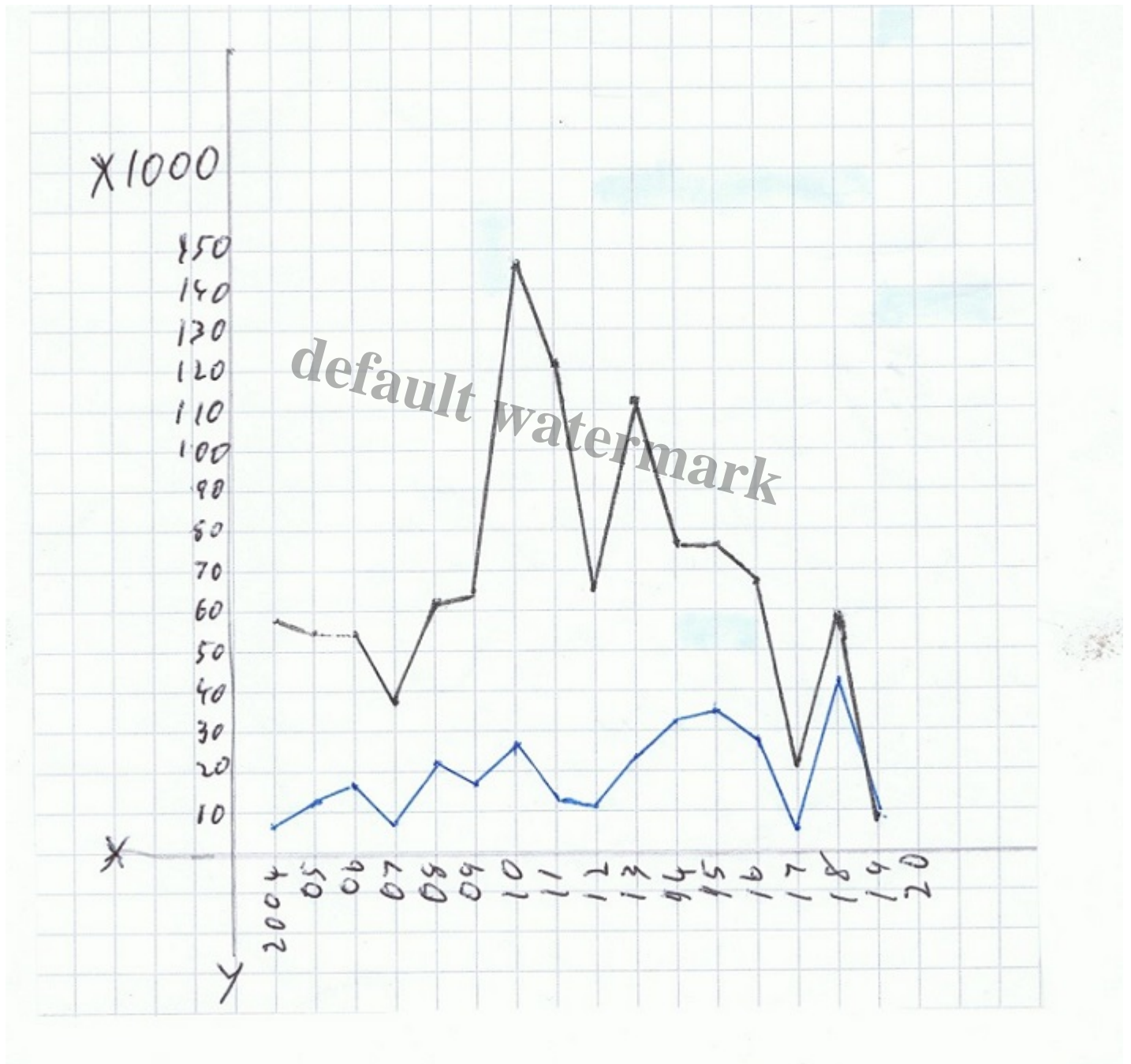
Figure A-2: Snowsports Visitors (Individual Mountain Centres) – Glencoe



(1) Anyone from school age and upwards who has studied maths will tell you straight away that you can't compare graphs with different scales. The Y-axis, the vertical, is not the same on both graphs giving a false impression when comparing them. There is no indication as to the significance of the dotted line, though it seems intended to imply that the average number of skier days are falling at both resorts.

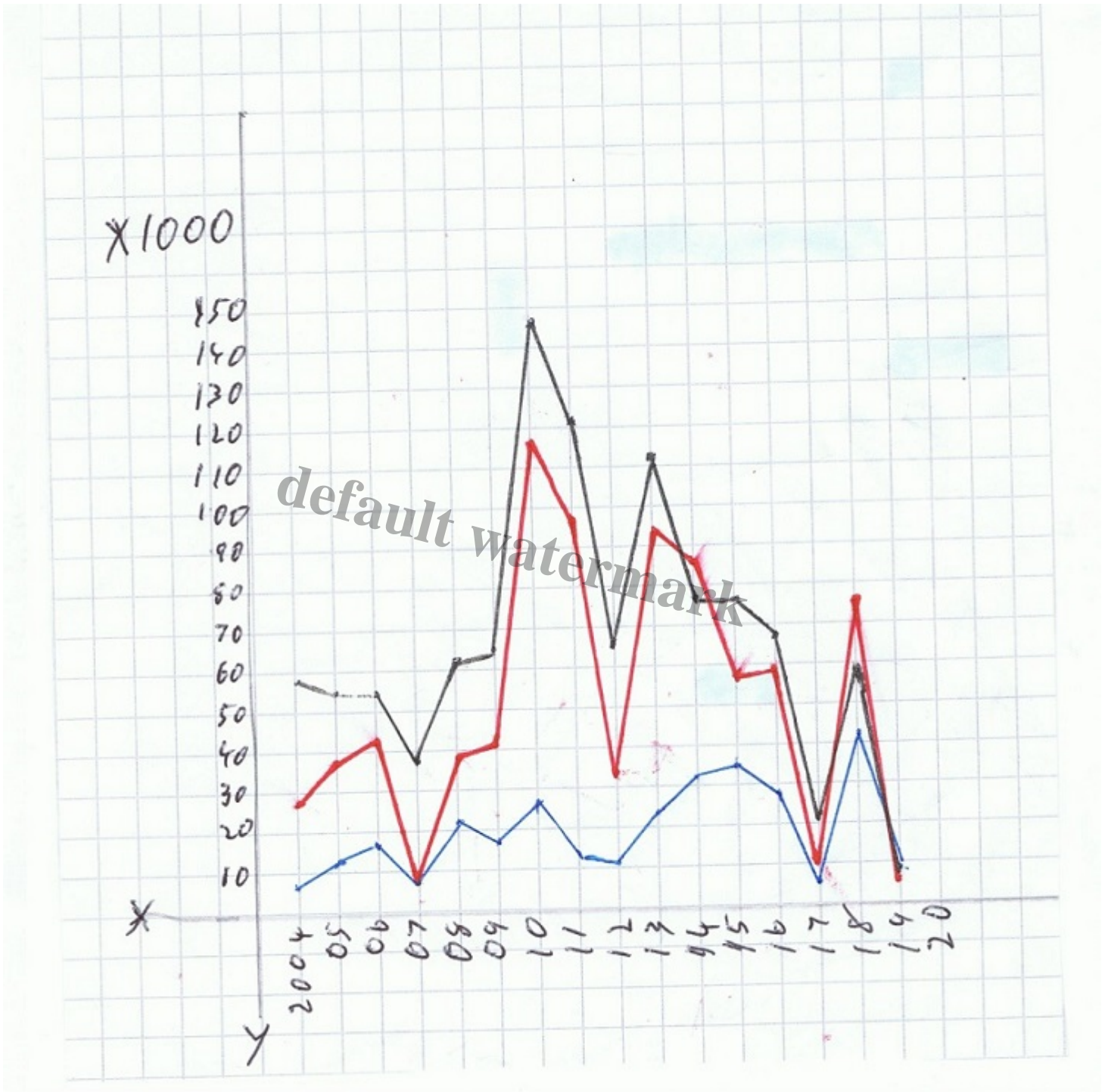
2) When the first graph (4.1 above) shows data to **2020** why has that not been carried through to the next two graphs, **Figures A-1** and **A-2** which end in **2015**?

As a consequence of these flaws, I have reworked the Glencoe graph (blue lines) to the same scale as the one for Cairngorm (black lines), combined them using the figures published on here and by Save the Ciste and extended the timescale to the last available data 2019. I have excluded data from earlier years as it's accuracy is questionable.

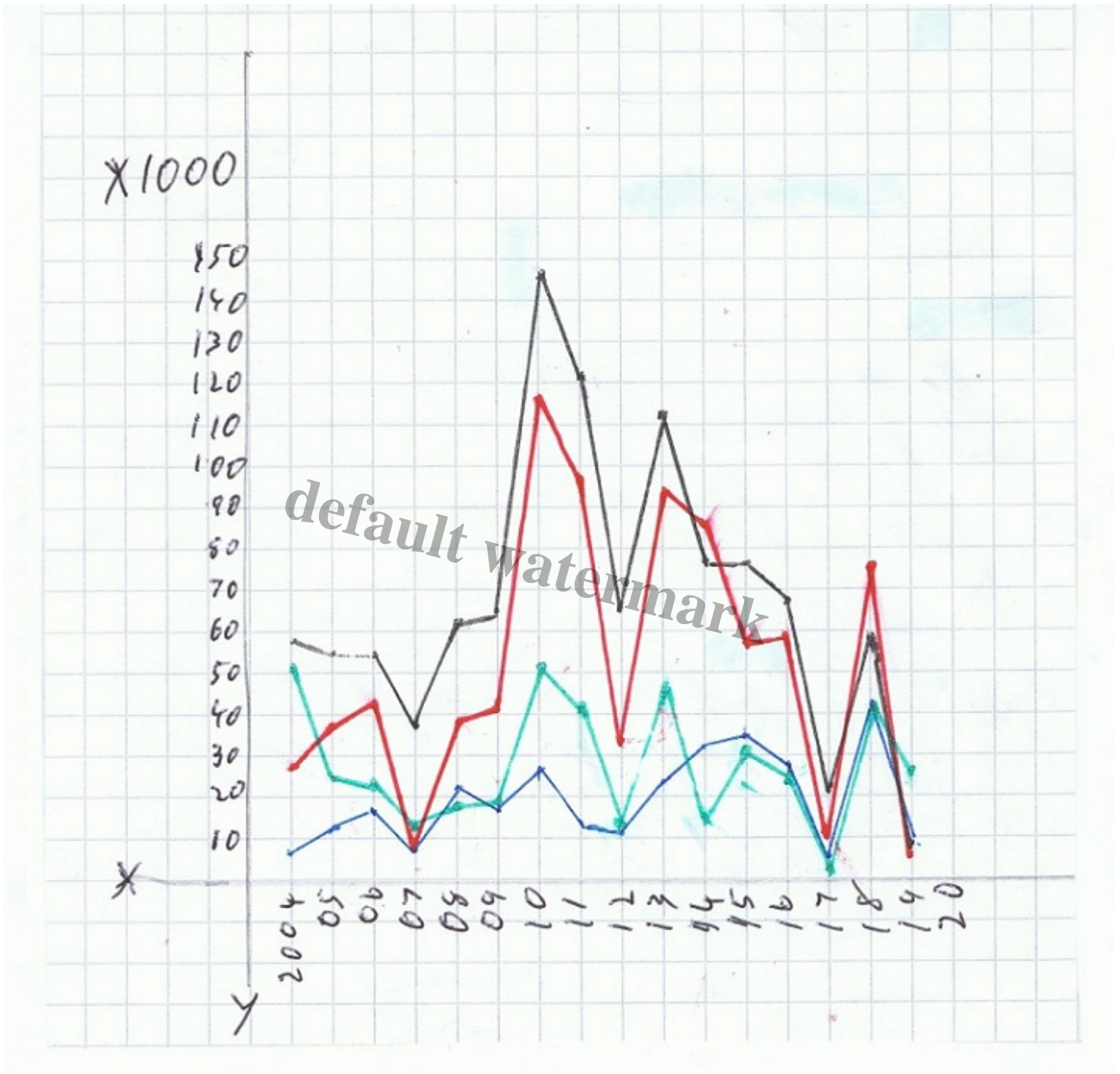


This presents a very different picture, showing that while the snowsport day numbers at Cairn Gorm are consistently falling, Glencoe is actually on the up!

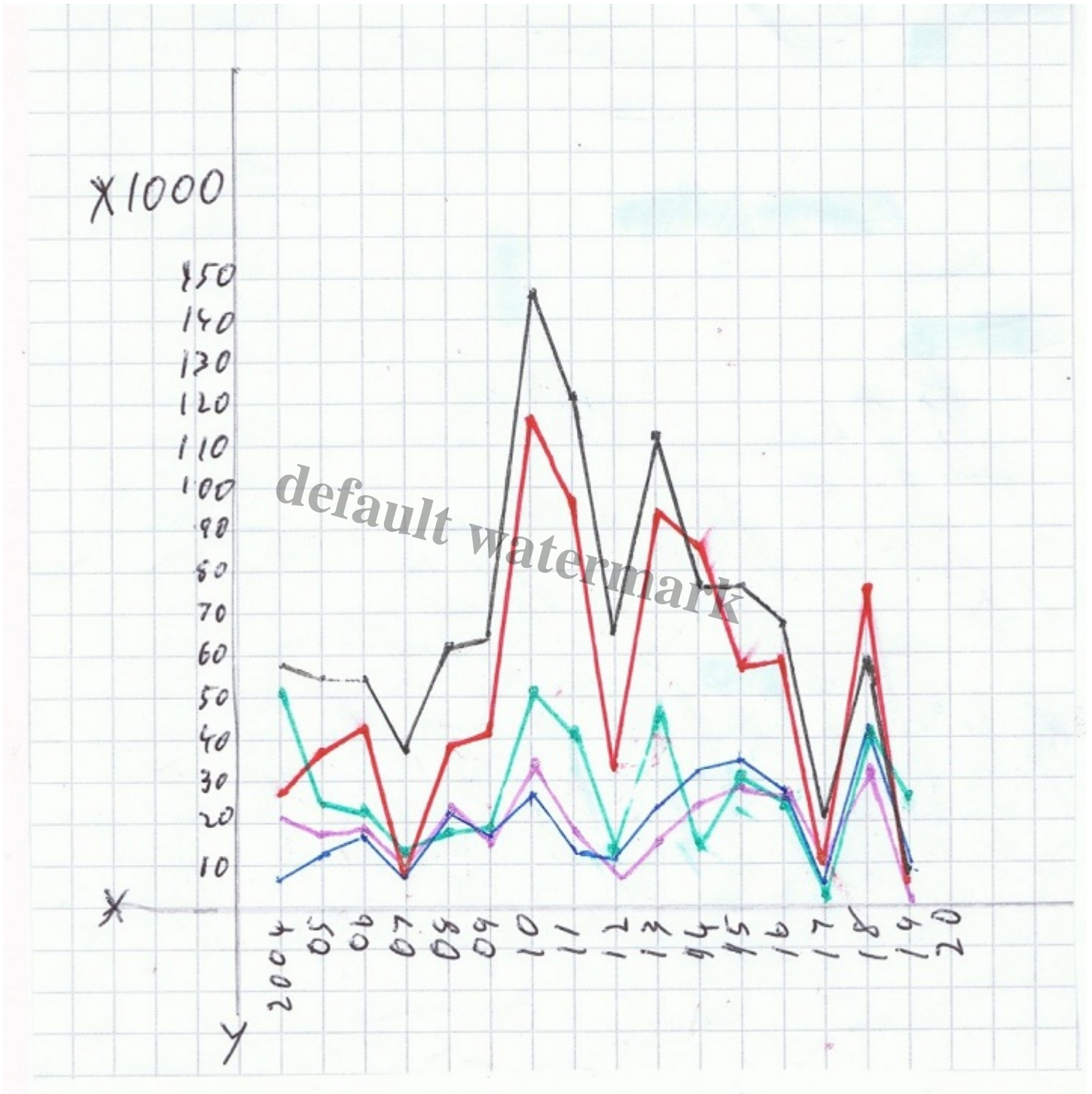
To illustrate further what is going on, in the next graph I have added the data for Glenshee (red lines).



And in the next includes data for the Lecht (light blue lines) :-



And last, but not least, Nevis Range (purple lines) :-



This final graph appears to reflect the link between no sports days and snowfall, e.g. in 2018 remember the Beast from the East? Glenshee that year attracted most people but because of its easterly position usually attracts fewer than Cairn Gorm, the difference probably being accounted for by its closer proximity to major centres of population and its large uplift/ piste area, enabling it to capture greater numbers on good days.

The patterns at Glencoe and Nevis range are again very similar probably due to their closeness to the western seaboard. The position of the Lecht in mid-field despite the lower altitude, is most likely due to the astute business acumen of the late Mr. James McIntosh MBE. Let's hope its staff can carry on

that legacy.

3. Finances.

The report covers funding for the ski centres while avoiding critical comment:

“Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd (CMSL), which operates the Cairngorm centre is a wholly owned subsidiary of HIE and receives funding from HIE through submission and agreement of an annual business plan. CMSL also receive capital funding from HIE through the submission and agreement of formal business cases”.

The Lecht, Nevis Range and Glencoe also operate within the geographic area covered by HIE but do not receive revenue funding from the enterprise agency. They do, however, benefit from capital investment from HIE periodically in support of a range of capital projects.” (page 17)

The differences in funding are better explained on page 40 of EKOS’s previous report 2011;-

“The Scottish ski industry is really broken down into two types of facility (i) The ski and activity resorts of Nevis Range and Cairngorm which have received significant levels of public funding in their development and attract a greater proportion of overnight visitors and (ii) the more commercially-managed ski centres The Lecht, Glenshee and Glencoe, which attract mainly day visitors. The support Nevis Range and Cairngorms have received has allowed more rounded / viable businesses to be developed. Both are now able to attract summer visitors, sightseers and activity participants through diversification;”

Notice in the first paragraph that there is a failure to state explicitly that HIE has **100%** funded **every** requirement of CML/ CM(S)L since **2008**. There is an admittance however in the second paragraph that since 2010 both CM(S)L and Nevis range have had, and will continue to need, *“significant levels of public funding”*, i.e 100%, compared to the *“more commercially managed ski centres”* of Glencoe, Glenshee and the Lecht 2090.

It is also apparent that Nevis range is a consistently poor performer in the snowsports market and probably only survives because of HIE’s input and diversification at the public’s expense!

The report is silent on the unfair economic competition this creates but the Scottish Government should have an obligation to force HIE and SE to address this either by:

- (a) 100% funding all the ski resorts to assist Glencoe, Glenshee and the Lecht 2090 to diversify and upgrade all current infrastructure, or,
- (b) only 40% fund all the resorts as currently received by the three privately owned and better managed areas.

Option (b) of course would finish the unviable business at CM(S)L and possibly at Nevis range as well, leaving (a) as the only fair and honest way to fund Scottish skiing. Let us hope that happens but meantime congratulations and thanks should be given to the hard working staff of Glencoe, Glenshee

and the Lecht for surviving in such an unfairly economic situation.

ALL RESORTS SHOULD HAVE THE SAME LEVEL OF FUNDING.

Category

1. Cairngorms

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