

The snowmaking failure at Cairn Gorm and its consequences

Description

The funicular may have been non-operational and much of the other uplift removed but provision for snowsports at Cairn Gorm this winter was much worse than it should have been given the amount of snow making equipment Highlands and Islands Enterprise had bought for its subsidiary Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd (CMSL). The screenshots in this post, courtesy of CMSL, tell the story.

(A) 16/12/2023



Note the snow level just above the SSC race hut top right of picture, then in (B) & (C), 14 and 15 days later.....

(B) 30/11/2023

SunKid 2023-11-30 12:35:54



(C) 01/12/2023

SunKid 2023-12-01 15:40:02



The difference in snow cover from 12.35hrs on 30/11/23, (photo B), to 15.40hrs on 01/12 23, (photo

C), is significant and illustrates just how effective the snow cannons are when they are operating. There are at least four cannons working, two in the foreground, one at the bottom of the poma and in the middle distance by the Day Lodge the snow cloud can be seen from a fourth.

Compare those two photos to the next, photo (D) on 09/12/23 and three months later, photo (E) on 09/03/24.

(D) 09/12/2023



(E) 09/03/24

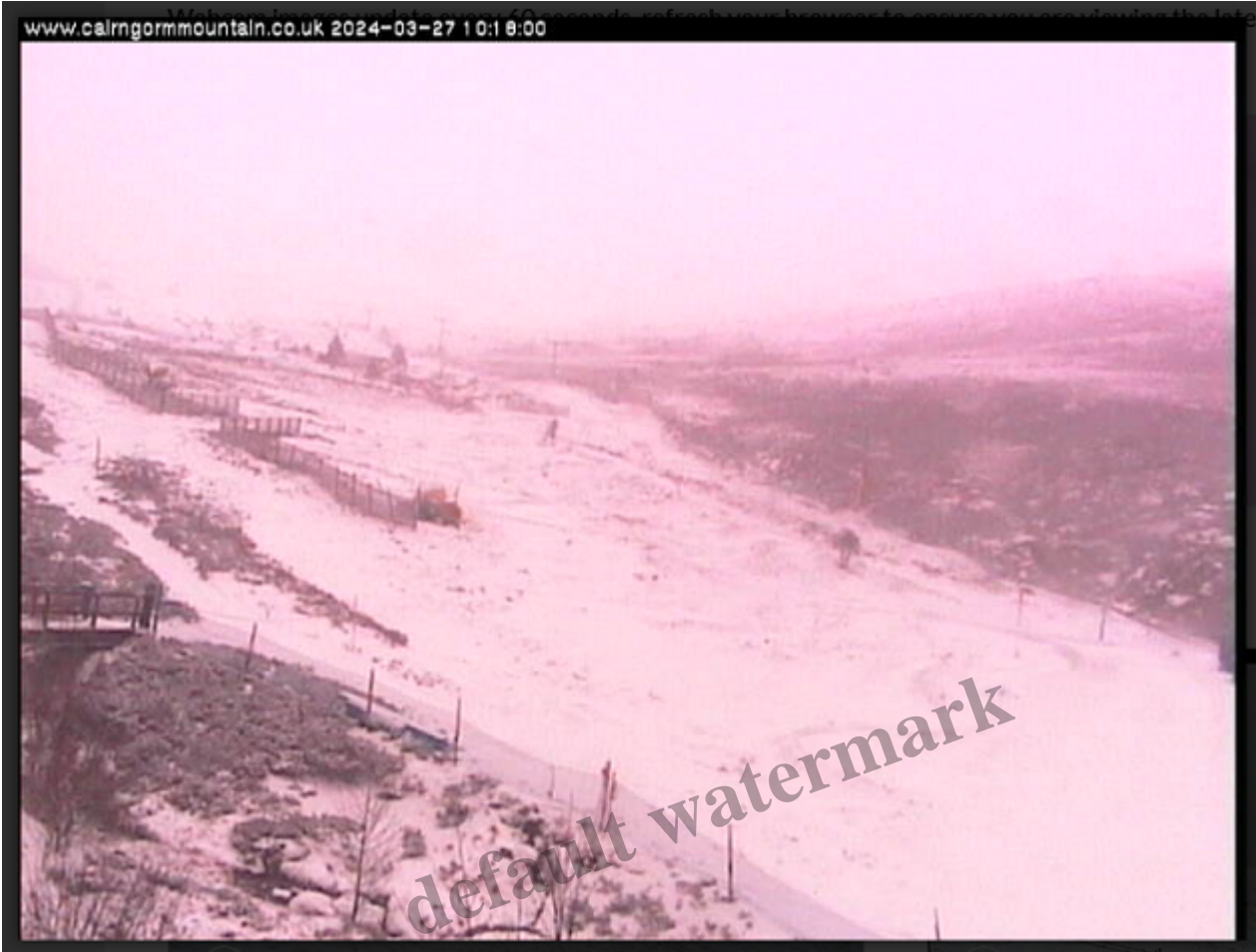
SunKid 2024-03-09 11:16:52



What is immediately obvious is that where natural snow, even above the snow cannon, has thawed and disappeared due to rain, warmer temperatures and wind, snow produced by the three snow cannon at the bottom and top of the SunKid tow has survived.

The only other place where snow has lasted is on the beginner slope. Snow made by the factory however has to be regularly topped up because being lower down the mountain it is quite often BELOW the natural snow level. But even that snow has been disappearing because the factory is not being fully utilised. The next screenshot fully illustrates the folly of that decision.

(F) 27/03/24 (10.12am)



The dark patches on the upper half of the beginner slope are obviously where the Mountain Bike trails had been covered but are now becoming exposed. The next screenshot, is the weather two hours later



and four hours later the dark patches have almost disappeared.

(G) 27/03/24 (14.22)



With the bank holiday weekend / Easter holidays starting on Friday, 29/03/2024, two days of possible
yesterday



Even through the water drops on the

webcam it is obvious that the upper half of the beginner area is gone and the lower half is not much better.

(I) 07/04/24

WhiteLady 2024-04-07 13:18:55



While the M1 poma (lift to right of funicular) could still allow access to the top of the mountain, with the Cas in its current state, how do you get back down?

(J) 07/04/24



Discussion

At the beginning of August 2019 CMSL submitted a planning application to the CNPA for the creation of this beginner slope which was covered in the following and other posts ([see here](#)). A number of valid objections were lodged with the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) about the application but unfortunately these were over-ruled. Since then an application was made to move the snow factory 300m uphill from its current position which again was approved by the CNPA but hasn't happened

The screenshots above help prove that providing a beginner area on the lowest part of the mountain was and will be a hugely expensive and environmental mistake. The snowline is generally rising higher and higher every year due to global warming, a situation which is unlikely to change any time soon. Photos (B) – (E) show exactly how a beginner slope further up the hill could hold snow, a mix of artificial and/or real, for most of the season. There is the added advantage that there is already underused uplift in place and the Shieling could be rebuilt with ski school facilities and restaurant. This area was, until the arrival of the funicular, used as the beginner area and trainer tow.

The drawback is that there is currently no means of getting customers, either beginners or better qualified, from the car park to the new beginner zone.

In the early 1960's there were two options to access the Shieling:-

- (1) You walked up the mountain, a lot easier in the leather boots we wore back then, or,
- (2) You used the bus!



Notice how inconspicuous the chairlift pylons (above) are compared to the funicular piers in the next shot.



With climate change it's not just a strenuous walk up the hill to reach the M1 Poma, Cas tow or Shieling, but an arduous return journey after a long day on the hill.

Today's customers are not so willing to make that walk. There is therefore a necessity to build suitable uplift as a matter of urgency, without which the skier numbers will continue to decline, maybe to the point where Cairn Gorm as a ski area ceases to exist.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. CNPA
3. HIE
4. planning
5. snowsports

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