

MELTING MOUNTAINS



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THE FUTURE OF SKIING LOOKS SHAKY. SCIENTISTS THINK GLOBAL WARMING MAY BE BADLY AFFECTING GLACIERS ALL ACROSS THE GLOBE.

In recent years, consistently rising warmer temperatures, and a decrease in snowfall, has led to growing fears that skiing and snowboarding could be killed off in the UK, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and Austria. Global warming is also negatively affecting ski resorts in America and other parts of the world.

Europe has many winter snow resorts, thanks to the mountainous regions of the Alps. Tourist businesses are beginning to see evidence that their livelihood is under threat.

A university in Zurich, Switzerland, carried out a study using satellite data which predicted that in the foreseeable future lower Alpine resorts across Europe will suffer severely. Some places like Austria will lose a large percentage of their winter tourist industry altogether.

A sports writer	"Patches of frozen ground that had lasted for a million years disappeared from glaciers in four main skiing countries during a particularly hot weekend in August this year."
A university Professor	"Climate change will have the effect of pushing more and more winter sports higher and higher up mountains, concentrating impacts in ever-decreasing high altitude areas."
An Olympic skier	"Even the two biggest Scottish resorts now make more money from summer activities than winter snow pursuits."

In the next 30 to 50 years, the number of ski resorts that will have reliable snow is expected to drop to 63%.

In the worst case scenario, where the snowline rises to 1,800 metres, one in four European resorts will close, resulting in tourism losses of £925 million a year.

Skiing in Scotland

Scotland is home to many winter sports resorts. However, their future currently looks doubtful. Glencoe (Scotland's oldest ski resort) has had to close in the past after the company running the ski lifts suspended operations due to commercial reasons. The

snow was poor, so less people were able to come and ski. Therefore, there was not enough money around to make running the lifts profitable.

Sadly, some climate experts predict that the entire Scottish ski industry will cease to exist within 20 years.

The death of the skiing industry in any country would mean the loss of jobs for many people. Not just the ski instructors, or the people running the lifts, but also those employed in hotels and taxi companies. Local shops also benefit from money the tourists spend.

The Plastic-Wrap Swiss Solution



Workers remove canvas covers from the glacier ice on top of Germany's highest mountain, the 2,962 metre Zugspitze near the southern Bavarian resort of Garmisch-Partenkirchen. To keep ski-lift sections safe for the winter seasons, the glacier ice is protected from melting from April to September.

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A Swiss resort has decided to use a revolutionary technique in order to fight global warming. As the ski-season comes to an end and summer approaches they now wrap the glacier up in plastic!

Each May, more than 3,000 square feet of the GURSCHEN Glacier, near Switzerland's Andermatt are covered with an insulating re-useable PVC foam cover. It is hoped that this will protect the surface layers from heat and rain, thus preventing the ice on the glacier from further melting.

The Gurschen glacier alone has lost about 20 metres of ice since 1990. In fact, global warming has meant that since 1850 the Swiss Alps have lost more than 1,000 glaciers. Geographers at Zurich University predict that within the next 30 years, 70 percent of all the remaining glaciers in Switzerland may well have disappeared.

Swiss Scientists hoped that the PVC foam would mimic a natural effect. Rock debris can fall from the steep valley sides into the glaciers. It acts as an insulating blanket and protects the glacier from the sun's rays, therefore ice is less likely to melt.

A year after using the PVC foam, scientists felt that it was a success and had reduced melting by a third. However it is extremely expensive. Another solution is needed. Perhaps we all need to help prevent further global warming.

Adapted from a case study © Geography in the News