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Snow report

Updated: 1.45pm Monday 15 December 2014

So the big question in this week's snow report is whether conditions in the Alps are really as bad as some sections of the media are making out?

The answer is not straightforward.

Thanks to artificial help lots of resorts are now partially open, though clearly there is still a serious shortage of snow, particularly (but not exclusively) at low altitude and in the northern half of the Alps. Take, for example, the Austrian Arlberg where normally reliable **St Anton** has just six lifts open and the upper base is 15-20cm deep, or the French Portes du Soleil where a handful of runs are open in **Avoriaz**, but most other resorts remain decidedly green.

That said, we should be careful not to paint too negative a picture. Some resorts, particularly the higher ones towards the south side of the Alps (such as **Zermatt**, **Cervinia**, **Saas-Fee** and **Passo Tonale**), saw plenty of natural snow in November and are doing just fine. Others, such as **Ischgl** in Austria and the **3 Valleys** in France, have offered us a master class in snow-making and piste management, and have an extensive range of slopes open despite the meagre natural cover.

So yes, all things considered we are still way behind the curve, but depending on where you are going over the next couple of weeks, all is not lost and things can turn around very quickly.

Meanwhile, the picture is rosier across the pond...

Austria

First the good news... There are still some parts of Austria that can offer perfectly decent skiing conditions, even without the aid of a glacier. Chief among these is **Obergurgl** (5/89cm) where 105km of its 110km of slopes are open. **Ischgl** (0/40cm) is another – in fact here 117km of runs are now open despite the resort itself being completely snowless. Neither would be able to offer this without a herculean snow-making effort, but forget any serious off-piste here for now.

Austria's glacier resorts are also able to offer good skiing, among the best being **Sölden** (5/180cm), **Stubai** (10/150cm) **Kaprun** (50/160cm) and **Hintertux** (5/195cm).

Now for the bad news... Most Austrian resorts are still struggling and some have yet to get going at all. The Arlberg area is definitely a big worry with only 15-20cm of settled snow at altitude, and 15 out of 97 lifts open between **St Anton** (5/20cm), **Lech-Zürs** (5/15cm) and **Warth-Schröcken** (n/a).

Not surprisingly Austria's lower resorts are also in trouble. **Kitzbühel** (35/43cm) may have 18 lifts open, but the stats mask a serious lack of snow, and the **Ski Welt** (5/20cm - **Söll**, **Ellmau** etc) is also limited with only 38km of its 280km operational, thanks mostly to man-made snow.

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Skiing in June? Yep, there are plenty of good options in the Alps! tinyurl.com/llt6xzy



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Winter is still on hold over large parts of Austria. This is Zell-am-See - Photo: foto-webcam.eu

France

Lots more resorts opened in France over the weekend even if in the vast majority of cases only partially.

As with Austria we will start with the good news... The **3 Valleys** are now connected and have 94 runs open, an incredible effort given the meagre snow cover here. **Val Thorens** (50/90cm) remains the stand-out resort with at least three-quarters of its 150km now open. Elsewhere, **Val d'Isère** (0/30cm) and **Tignes** (5/50cm) are also now connected with 49 of 155 pistes in operation, though you still have to download to get back to **Val d'Isère**.

Further south there are also some good options scattered around, including **Les 2 Alpes** (0/80cm) and **Serre Chevalier** (0/100cm), both of which have a good variety runs open at altitude. Special mention must also be made of little **Isola 2000** (40/120cm) near Nice, where 90% of its 120km of slopes are open with excellent cover from top to bottom.

Generally speaking though, many places in France are struggling with most of the lower resorts still having it all to do. **Morzine**, for example, is still looking very green with just a dusting of snow on the summit of its local ski area.



Tignes and Val d'Isère (pictured) are now linked, but snow cover is still thin - Photo: valdisere.com

Italy

Italian resorts still offer some of the best skiing in the Alps. Leading the way still is **Cervinia** (30/170cm) where there are now 247km of open pistes linked to **Zermatt**, by far the greatest extent in Europe right now.

Other good options include **Val Senales** (5/260cm), **Passo Tonale** (30/350cm) and non-glacial **Livigno** (22/126cm) where an impressive 22 of its 31 lifts are now up and running.

There are also bits and pieces open in the Dolomites – 37 of 112 runs, for example, in the **Sella Ronda** (0/50cm), much of it thanks to artificial help, but overall there remains a deficit of snow and some resorts (e.g. **Courmayeur**) are yet to open.



Livigno probably offers the best entirely non-glacial skiing in the Italian Alps - Photo: valtline.it

Switzerland

Just like in other parts of the Alps, lots of resorts are now open in Switzerland, even if (generally speaking) much more snow is needed.

The best conditions remain at altitude in the south where **Zermatt** (0/170cm) combined with **Cervinia** across the border offers by far the greatest extent of open terrain in the Alps. Other southern resorts such as **Saas-Fee** (9/210cm) and **St Moritz** (0/95cm) also have lots of snow at altitude, but even here resort cover is patchy.

Further north, **Davos/Klosters** (0/65cm) also offer a decent range of pistes, but most other resorts are more limited or in some cases (e.g. **Villars**) still closed.



Samnaun (linked to Ischgl in Austria) has a good number of pistes open, but more snow would still be welcome - Photo: camserver.ch

Rest of Europe

The Pyrenees are doing ok, though it's hardly a vintage start to the season. **Baqueira Beret** (35/90cm) in **Spain** has a respectable 26 of its 33 lifts open, **Soldeu** (20/65cm) in **Andorra** has 22 of its 29.

Most Scandinavian resorts are now open, though cover is generally better in **Norway** (where **Geilo** has 70cm mid-mountain) than it is in **Sweden**, where **Åre** has just 10/20cm.

Bulgarian resorts have some snow and a handful of open runs at altitude (**Bansko** - 0/60cm) but more is needed lower down.

Scotland is also up and running, albeit in a limited capacity in **Cairngorm** (20/45cm), **Glenshee** (20/40cm) and the **Lecht** (25/40cm).



Skiing in Scotland has begun. This is Cairngorm - Photo: winterhighland.com

USA

California has finally seen some decent snowfalls with the upper base at **Mammoth Mountain** now close to 1m.

Colorado resorts are also back in the hunt after an early December lull, with fresh snow and good conditions reported in most areas including **Vail** (81cm mid mountain) which is now about 90% open.

Snow has also been falling in Utah where **Alta** has a 1m mid-mountain base, and to a lesser extent in Wyoming where **Jackson Hole** has 102/132cm depending on altitude.



Great conditions in most Colorado resorts. This is Breckenridge - Photo: breckenridge.com

Canada

Nearly all lifts are now open in the **Banff/Lake Louise** area (80/88cm) where conditions are pretty good for the time of year.

Further west, new snow has improved the situation in **Whistler**, particularly at altitude where the base is also now close to 1m deep.

Next full snow report will be on Thursday 18 December 2014, but see [Today in the Alps](#) for daily updates