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Headline: Swiss ski spot left snowless, deserted by mild January

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A view shows the closed Dent-de-Vaulion ski lift amid lack of snow at altitudes below 1500 m due to high winter temperatures induced by climate change, with snow-covered Alps on the horizon, in Vaulion, Switzerland, February 2, 2024. REUTERS

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VAULION, Switzerland — The once-popular ski runs of Dent-de-Vaulion in the Swiss Jura Mountains are now deserted as unusually mild weather has driven away winter sport enthusiasts and forced ski resorts to close across the country.

Abandoned pole rods of the ski lift sway in the wind. Crusty snow dots stretches of yellowed grass. Lift pylons stand alone in rocky terrain where cheerful crowds once puffed steam in frigid temperatures.

Switzerland, a major ski destination, is warming at about twice the global average rate partly because its mountains trap heat, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said in a report.

January was exceptionally warm, with temperatures hovering more than 2 degrees Celsius above the average between 1990 and 2020, said MeteoSwiss, the country's federal office for meteorology and climatology. That temperature difference amounts to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

"We are beating records so often that it doesn't feel extraordinary anymore when it actually is," said Christophe Salamin, a meteorologist at MeteoSwiss. "We haven't heard of any cold records in Switzerland for years."

Winter seemed to be almost over on Friday in Dent-de-Vaulion, at more than 1,400 meters (4,593 feet) above sea level. Skies were clear and temperatures mild at 9 degrees Celsius, far above the normal January level of around -1 Celsius.

Next week is expected to be even warmer, at around 11 degrees.

Mountain Wilderness, an NGO focused on preserving mountainous areas, said last year that 65 mechanical ski lifts were rusting away due to the absence of snow and unusually high temperatures.

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