New ropeway on New Zealand's sacred Mãori mountain

LEITNER ropeways completes project where "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy was filmed

1 August 2019 - The new "Sky Waka" gondola lift from LEITNER ropeways on Mount Ruapehu on New Zealand's North Island has been inaugurated last weekend. With a journey time of under five minutes, it carries up to 2600 people per hour over the volcanic landscape in Tongariro National Park, which is a recognized UNESCO World Heritage Site. To New Zealanders, the ropeway is currently the country's most exciting tourist attraction.

While many parts of Europe are basking in summer temperatures, people are skiing on the most beautiful side of the world. LEITNER ropeways has completed a ropeway project on the North Island in time for this year's winter season in New Zealand, seeing an investment of EUR 15 million. When constructing the new 10-passenger gondola lift on Mount Ruapehu, there was the initial challenge that this sacred mountain belonging to the Mãori iwi is still an active volcano and was therefore causing mud and debris storms (lahars). The mountain is also known as one of the places where the famous film trilogy "The Lord of the Rings" was filmed.

Thus it was not only the transport logistics to New Zealand that required special measures – the ropeway material was transported by ship taking two months – but particularly the topographical and cultural status quo once arrived. Since the entire area is also part of a national park and therefore protected, no cars can be driven through it. LEITNER ropeways therefore used a helicopter to build a temporary material ropeway to transport the components required for the gondola lift. Moreover, the position of the route played a crucial role. Due to the ongoing danger of lahars, the towers had to be built in locations where the terrain is secure. The height of the 14 towers in total also had to be adjusted due to this ever-present natural threat. Lastly, the particular weather conditions called for further technical adaptations. Due to possible high winds of up to 275 km/h, an additional 80 kg of steel has been fitted in each of the ropeway cabins.

When opening the ropeway, Ross Copland, CEO of Ruapehu Alpine Lifts, emphasized that this ropeway is unique in New Zealand and brings the mountain to a new level for visitors:

"Sky Waka is the culmination of years of planning and today is an exciting day for not only mountain visitors but also the region as whole." The Sky Waka project will provide an enormous boost for the local economy, accommodation and restaurants, and also provides local people with jobs all year round.

The 49 cabins on the new ropeway feature panoramic windows, leather seats and an audio system, and transports passengers 1.8 km from the Bruce base area up to the Knoll Ridge Chalet – at 2020 m above sea level, the Knoll Ridge Chalet is the highest restaurant in New Zealand.

LEITNER ropeways has also been busy on New Zealand's South Island. The "Coronet Express II" ropeway has been built in the New Zealand Alps, near the city of Queenstown. LEITNER ropeways has installed a new Telemix system (a chairlift and gondola lift combined) in the "Coronet Peak" ski resort run by NZ Ski. As the area is not just visited by tourists in winter, but is particularly popular with hikers and cyclists in the summer, a third of the chairs will be fitted out with practical bike holders.

LEITNER ropeways is part of the High Technology Industries (HTI) Group, which also includes the brands PRINOTH (snow groomers and tracked utility vehicles), LEITWIND (wind turbines), DEMACLENKO (snow making systems), AGUDIO (material ropeways), POMA (passenger ropeways) and MINIMETRO (cable-hauled railway vehicles). In 2018 the group of companies, which has 61 subsidiaries as well as 123 sales and service locations, achieved a turnover of 1.02 million Euros.

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