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Elevated crane spotting

Passionate crane spotter Nick Johnson took time out to climb a new central London landmark that has some controversy - the infamous Marble Arch Mound. As he says, he discovered a notable feature clearly overlooked by critics of the structure. Here is his report.

At the beginning of 2021 Westminster City Council was looking for ways to attract people back to London's Oxford Street following the Covid-19 lockdowns. So it homed in on the idea of creating a new visitor attraction in the form of a viewing platform atop an temporary artificial hill located beside Marble Arch at the western end of the world famous shopping street.

A Rotterdam-based architectural firm was commissioned to design the new hill that became known as The Marble Arch Mound. It promised good views of the surrounding area including out over the adjacent Hyde Park and this new London landmark was budgeted to cost some £3.3 million. But by August 2021 the total cost, including construction, operation and removal, had reportedly risen to £6 million.

Situated in the middle of a busy roundabout right next to the famous 19th century white marble faced triumphal arch, the structure utilises Layher system scaffold to create the 25 metre high viewing platform. The exterior of the hill with its 130 steps is covered with lightweight sedum turf and a number of trees have been inserted to try and make artificial hill look more natural.

The 'Mound' opened to the public on 26th July but reactions from the public and reviewers from the national press were not favourable. People complained that the mature trees on the edge of Hyde Park obscured views, while some journalists described the Mound as "the worst tourist attraction in London" and "our most absurd new landmark".

The deputy leader of Westminster City Council resigned in the wake of the cost overruns and in order to



The much derided Marble Arch Mound in London has a feature missed by its critics



Tower cranes working around the nearby Grosvenor Square are clearly visible



When Nick Johnson ascended, visitors could get close to one of Falcon's Jaso luffers

attract visitors, the original entry charge was removed. Whilst the 25 metre high attraction does not provide views comparable to more established London landmarks, it does provide another vantage point for crane spotting in the capital - a virtue clearly missed by critics of the structure.

No sooner had the entry fee been dropped, I ascended the hill and discovered that, at the top, one could count more than 50 tower cranes. The closest at that time was the bright yellow Jaso J208PA luffing jib crane from Falcon Tower Crane Services, working for Galliford Try on the nearby Portman Estate development.

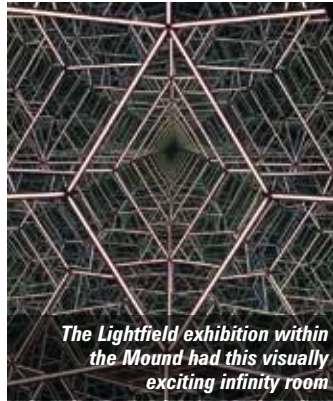
Also close by are two prominent luffers - a Wolff 1250B and a Terex CTL - working for Multiplex on the site of the former American Embassy in Grosvenor Square. Just behind them is a Saez SLH205 hydraulic luffer supplied to the Toureen Group by Trident Lifting Solutions. A pair of binoculars highlights other more distant groups of cranes including those now working on new high rise blocks beside the Thames near Battersea. When descending inside the Mound, access aficionados will appreciate the maze of Layher Allround modular system scaffolding that supports the structure, I was also impressed



Amongst the many tower cranes on the horizon were this cluster by The Thames near Battersea



The Mound is supported by an intricate maze of Layher Allround modular system scaffolding



The Lightfield exhibition within the Mound had this visually exciting infinity room

by the Lightfield exhibition by W1Curates and the British American artist Anthony James.

The exhibition has what is described as an infinity room, which utilises cubes, formed from stainless steel, specialised glass and LED lights,

placed in a square grid. The cubes are connected via Ethernet cables, which are said to simulate the interconnected root structure of a birch tree forest and communicate with one another creating a large canvas for light to dance around.

The Marble Arch Mound is due to remain open until the 9th of January after which it will be dismantled. With the leaves now gone from the adjacent trees, the Mound should provide a good view of the giant observation wheel, the roller coasters and other tall fairground rides that form part of the nearby Winter Wonderland seasonal event within Hyde Park.

After the Mound is consigned to history, crane spotters seeking aerial views of machines working in the capital will still be able to use the London Eye, the View from The Shard, the Sky Garden at the top of The Fenchurch Building (the Walkie-Talkie) and the 'old school' platform around the top of The Monument. And, during 2022, another high rise vantage point is set to open - the Battersea Power Station Chimney Lift - installed to take visitors up the rebuilt 103 metre high North West Chimney of this revitalised London landmark.

Where there's a will, there's a way

When Covid rules prevented Father Christmas from visiting the children in the Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital for a second year running, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and charity, the Archie Foundation, found a way for him to at least reach the windows of the upper floor wards - using a truck mounted rescue platform from the Aberdeen City Fire Station - while local businesses rallied to the cause and provided presents.

Archie's chief executive Paula Cormack said: "While it's not what we would hope, and we weren't able to do the full in-person visit it was every bit as special and incredibly emotional to see all of the children waving from the window. Their smiling faces and the fantastic image we have of little Casey high-fiving Santa really just showed how much it means to children and their families facing the Christmas period in hospital."

Kris Malcom of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service added: "The Covid restrictions meant that we couldn't do our usual visit from Santa to deliver gifts, but we really wanted to do something for the children and their families during this difficult time. The kids were so excited to see Santa, it was really heart-warming experience for us all."

The Archie Foundation helps children and families across the north of Scotland, funding specialist roles and projects at Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital, Highland Children's Unit, Tayside Children's Hospital and Dr Gray's Hospital, Elgin. It also cares for bereaved children who have lost a loved one. To find out more about its work, visit www.archie.org or if you are feeling generous - <https://archie.org/donate>.



The Rescue platform proves a life saver



Six year old Casey Rae greets Father Christmas



The event was a true team effort

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