CLAIMS:

1. A load-bearing apparatus comprising:

a detensioning winch apparatus defining an outboard side and an inboard side; and

a load-bearing spoolable medium for connecting to a load on the outboard side of the detensioning winch apparatus, the load-bearing spoolable medium comprising a plurality of load-bearing elements, being spooled for at least one turn about the detensioning winch apparatus, and defining an outboard portion extending on the outboard side of the detensioning winch apparatus and an inboard portion extending on the inboard side of the detensioning winch apparatus; and

a tension control apparatus for individually and variably controlling the tension of each of the plurality of load-bearing elements;

wherein the load-bearing elements are arranged side-by-side on a contact surface of the detensioning winch apparatus; and

wherein the detensioning winch apparatus reduces tension within the load-bearing spoolable medium from the outboard portion to the inboard portion.

2. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the contact surface of the detensioning winch apparatus engages at least a portion of each of the plurality of load-bearing elements.

3. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the detensioning winch apparatus comprises or defines a detensioning device.

4. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein one or more load-bearing elements comprise an elongate load-bearing element.

5. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein one or more load-bearing elements comprise a synthetic fibre rope.

6. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the plurality of load-bearing elements comprises 2 to 5 load-bearing elements.

7. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 6, wherein the plurality of load-bearing elements comprises 3 load-bearing elements.

8. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the plurality of load-bearing elements comprises a plurality of separate load-bearing elements.

9. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the load-bearing elements are arranged on the contact surface of the detensioning winch apparatus in a plane substantially parallel to an axis of rotation of the detensioning winch apparatus, and/or substantially tangential to the contact surface of the detensioning winch apparatus.

10. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the load-bearing elements are arranged in sequential order around or about the detensioning winch apparatus.

11. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein a weight of the load is distributed amongst the plurality of load-bearing elements.

12. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein a diameter of each of the plurality of load-bearing elements is substantially identical.

13. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein a contact surface of the detensioning winch apparatus is substantially flat or grooved.

14. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein a contact surface of the detensioning winch apparatus is substantially continuous or interrupted.

15. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the tension control apparatus is provided on an inboard side of the detensioning winch apparatus, and is arranged to control, apply, and/or adjust the tension of an inboard portion of the plurality of load-bearing elements.

16. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the tension control apparatus comprises a plurality of tension control devices, each capable of controlling, applying and/or adjusting the tension of a respective load-bearing element.

17. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the tension control apparatus is arranged to maintain a difference in tension between the load-bearing elements at or below a predetermined level.

18. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a plurality of tension-measuring devices, each capable of measuring the tension of a respective load-bearing element.

19. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 18, wherein at least one actuator and/or tension control device is activated and/or actuated in response to a measurement made by a/the tension-measuring device(s).

20. A method for bearing a load, comprising:

spooling a load-bearing spoolable medium around a detensioning winch apparatus for at least one turn, wherein the load-bearing spoolable medium comprises a plurality of load-bearing elements arranged side-by-side on a contact surface of the detensioning winch apparatus, wherein the load-bearing spoolable medium defines an outboard portion extending on an outboard side of the detensioning winch apparatus and an inboard portion on an inboard side of the detensioning winch apparatus; and

connecting a load to the load-bearing spoolable medium on the outboard side of the detensioning winch apparatus; and

individually and variably controlling the tension of each of the plurality of load-bearing elements;

wherein the detensioning winch apparatus reduces tension within the load-bearing spoolable medium from the outboard portion to the inboard portion.

21. The method according to claim 20, comprising controlling paying out and/or paying in of the plurality of load-bearing elements.

22. The method according to claim 20, comprising controlling applying and/or adjusting the tension of the plurality of load-bearing elements on the inboard side of the detensioning winch apparatus and/or on the inboard portion of the load-bearing elements.

23. The method according to claim 20, comprising measuring the tension of each load-bearing element.

24. The method according to claim 20, comprising controlling, applying and/or adjusting the tension of one or more load-bearing elements in response to measuring the tension of one or more load-bearing element.

25. The method according to claim 20, comprising providing feedback following measurement of the tension of one or more load-bearing element.

26. The method according to claim 20, comprising operating in a closed-loop control system.

27. The method according to claim 20, comprising automatically controlling, applying and/or adjusting the tension of one or more load-bearing element in response to measuring the tension of one or more load-bearing element.

28. The method according to claim 20, comprising manually controlling, applying and/or adjusting the tension of one or more load-bearing element in response to measuring the tension of one or more load-bearing element.

29. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 1, comprising a storage apparatus for storing the load-bearing spoolable medium on the inboard side of the detensioning winch apparatus.

30. The load-bearing apparatus according to claim 15, wherein the tension control apparatus is arranged to control, apply, and/or adjust the tension of the inboard portion of the plurality of load-bearing elements to maintain or apply substantially equal tensions between respective outboard portions of the plurality of load-bearing elements.

31. A load-bearing apparatus comprising:

a winch apparatus; and

a load-bearing spoolable medium for connecting to a load, the load-bearing spoolable medium comprising a plurality of load-bearing elements;

a tension control apparatus for controlling the tension of each of the plurality of load-bearing elements, the tension control apparatus comprising a plurality of tension control devices, each capable of controlling the tension of a respective load-bearing element and at least one actuator for actuating one or more tension control devices;

wherein at least a portion of the load-bearing spoolable medium is spooled about the winch apparatus,

wherein the load-bearing elements are arranged side-by-side on a contact surface of the winch apparatus.