

OBSERVATION TOWER

The present invention relates to an observation tower, in particular an observation tower having a moveable observation enclosure.

In this regard, observation towers of many types are known in the art. For example, observation towers of the sort disclosed in EP 1031681 and EP 0659959 are employed for sighting forest fires. Such towers can be rapidly constructed, provided with foot-ladders or a lift for transporting personnel to the top, and can also be made out of environment-friendly materials or disguised so as to blend in with the surrounding environment.

Observation towers may also be used as means for providing leisure and entertainment facilities. Examples include the "Tower of the Americas" in Texas, USA, the "Faro de Madrid" in Madrid, Spain and the "Skylon" near Niagara Falls in Ontario, Canada. Numerous similar towers exist around the world, however in these examples, the observation platform, which may include therein restaurants and shops, is fixed at a specific height. Lifts or stairs are therefore provided to transport visitors from ground level to the observation platform, usually within the internal tower shaft. Thus,

visitors are confined to restricted views when ascending and descending the tower to and from the observation platform. Alternatively, transparent lifts can be provided on the
5 outside of the tower shaft, as on the "Macau Tower" in Macau, Asia, however the above identified problems may still prevail, with the added disadvantage that external lifts may be unsightly and disrupt the aesthetic profile of the tower.

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Further examples of tower structures, such as those disclosed in GB 655970 and EP 0337673 are provided with an observation platform mounted on a tower which itself is capable of ascending or descending. In both instances, the
15 tower is capable of moving up and down, either by collapsing in on itself (e.g. using a so-called 'lazy tongs' system) or by sinking completely into the ground. The observation platform of these arrangements can thereby travel from a lower position to a higher position. In both examples, a
20 large horizontal or vertical surface area is required at ground level. With the 'lazy tongs' system, a larger surface area will be required for increased heights, and with the latter example, the height of the tower must be accommodated below the surface of the ground. Restrictions with regard to
25 locating the observation tower therefore apply with both examples of moveable tower.

Furthermore, the vertical movement of the tower shaft required to enable boarding and disembarking of the observation platform compromises its overall strength, thereby limiting its maximum height and making it more vulnerable in adverse weather conditions.

GB 1109555 and US 3633904 disclose towers that comprise a fixed tower shaft provided with a moveable observation platform. In both instances, visitors board the observation platform when it is at ground level and enjoy the surrounding scenery as the observation platform ascends to its maximum height. Similar towers have been designed and manufactured by Huss Maschinenfabrik GmbH & Co. GK and Intamin Deutschland GmbH & Co. GK, for example the Skytower and Gyro Tower, respectively. The aforementioned towers are limited by their height and the speed at which the observation platforms may ascend, and because of their profiles are susceptible to lateral movement during adverse weather conditions. As previously indicated, safety of the passengers and crew is likely to be compromised in such conditions and the tower will have to be removed from operation until such time as conditions improve.

Furthermore, the shape of the observation platform disclosed in GB 1109555 provides only restricted panoramic visibility,

and the shape of the observation platform disclosed in US 3633904 prevents visitors from assuming a normal vertical position when seated or standing, thereby diminishing their
5 comfort. Functionality of the tower is hence restricted as a result of the observation platform's shape and angled orientation.

It is hence an object of the present invention to provide an
10 observation tower that seeks to overcome the above identified disadvantages.

From US 4712652 it is known to provide an observation tower comprising a substantially upright support member; and an
15 observation enclosure moveable up and down said support member, wherein the observation enclosure projects radially outwardly from and substantially normal to said support member.

20 The present invention is characterized in that the enclosure is annular and has a toroid profile, the enclosure presenting a tapering aerodynamic exterior profile around its circumference, the enclosure further being seized to allow 70-100 people to walk around there-within as the
25 enclosure moves up and down such that they are able to have a 360 degree panoramic walk-around experience, the tower

further comprising damping apparatus for damping undersirable vibrations of the tower.

- 5 The curved sides of the observation enclosure allow air currents to flow easily over and around the enclosure to thereby reduce the amount of lift or drag that is applied thereto. Less resistance is thus exerted on the observation enclosure by air currents when, for example, it is moving up
10 or down the supporting member of the observation tower.

Also, the tower is less vulnerable to high speed winds and as a result, the observation enclosure is capable of ascending to heights of up to 200 metres. Increased control
15 can be exerted over the speed at which the observation enclosure is movable, the speed being variable if and when necessary.

In particularly adverse weather conditions the height of the
20 observation enclosure can be reduced to decrease lateral deflection of the tower caused by wind pressure. This will enable the tower to remain in operation during strong winds while maintaining safety and comfort for both visitors and crew.

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Conveniently, the substantially upright support member has a

first portion arranged substantially above ground level and a second portion arranged substantially below ground level. In this regard, the observation enclosure may be lowered below
5 ground level for gaining access to, or visibility of, an underground attraction or enclosure.

A boarding level may be provided between said first and second portions of the support member for boarding said
10 observation enclosure; wherein the observation enclosure is moveable up or down relative to said boarding level.

Preferably, a sunken enclosure is provided around said second portion of the support member and may be arranged to house
15 the observation enclosure when the observation enclosure is provided at the second portion of the support member.

An outer surface of the sunken enclosure may comprises
substantially transparent material.

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The damping apparatus may in this regard comprise a mass spring damper, tunable to vary its damping characteristics in accordance with the height of the enclosure relative to the upright support member. In this way, undesirable
25 vibrations in the support member due to adverse weather conditions can be dampened out.

Such a damping apparatus is preferably incorporated into the upright support member. Conveniently the damping apparatus is incorporated within a top portion of the support member.

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Examples of the present invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:-

Figure 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d show an observation tower according to the present invention with an enclosure at different height positions;

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Figure 2 shows a close up perspective view of the enclosure of the present invention; and

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Figure 3 shows a cross-sectional view through the enclosure of the present invention.

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As shown in the figures, a tower 1 comprises a substantially upright support member 2 and an annular observation enclosure 3. The enclosure is moveable up and down said support member which is provided centrally thereto.

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The observation enclosure 3 projects radially outwardly from and substantially normal to said support member 2 and as shown presents a tapering aerodynamic exterior profile around

its circumference.

In the example shown, the observation enclosure has an
5 annular profile, in particular a toroid exterior profile. As
such, the curved sides of the observation enclosure allow
air currents to flow easily over and around the enclosure to
thereby reduce the amount of lift and/or drag that is
applied thereto. Less wind pressure is thus exerted on the
10 observation enclosure by air currents when stationery or, for
example, when it is moving up or down the supporting member
of the observation tower. The aerodynamic profile of the
enclosure means therefore that it is less vulnerable to the
affects of high winds, such that the enclosure will be
15 stable at higher positions.

Damping apparatus (not shown) is provided as part of the
observation tower for damping undesirable vibrations of the
tower. The damping apparatus may in this regard comprise a
20 mass spring damper, tunable to enable its damping
characteristics to be varied in accordance with the height
of the enclosure relative to the upright support member. In
this way, undesirable vibrations in the support member due
to adverse weather conditions can be dampened. The damping
25 apparatus may be movable within the support for tuning
purposes.

Such a damping apparatus is preferably incorporated within the upright support member at a top portion thereof.

- 5 An annular flow path may be provided through the centre of the enclosure between an inwardly facing wall 4 thereof and the support member 2 as shown in Figure 2.

10 The enclosure is sized to house around 70-100 persons, offering them a 360-degree panoramic walk-around experience. It can be air-conditioned with climate-control to ensure comfort is optimised. A retractable solar shading arrangement may be provided to cover the roof of the enclosure when required.

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The enclosure may be constructed of steel and glass, preferably using curved laminated safety glass.

20 As shown in Figures 1a to 1d, the enclosure is movable up and down the support member 2 and can dock at an alighting platform position 5 and also move to an underground position, shown in Figure 1d.

25 The underground position can provide shelter from particularly adverse weather conditions or may provide access to a particular or restricted access area.

For example, the underground area may incorporate an underground aquarium, whereby the enclosure drops into an annular tank housing various aquatic plants and creatures.

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Horizontally translating off-set hinged glazed doors may afford access to the enclosure.

The support member may be formed for example, from 3.4 m
10 diameter grade 43 galvanised steel. A machine room, not shown, is provided at a lower portion of the support member.

Renewable energy is utilized to power the observation tower and this may take the form of photovoltaic systems or wind
15 turbines.

CLAIMS

1. An observation tower (1) comprising:
5 a substantially upright support member (2); and
an observation enclosure (3) moveable up and down said support member; wherein the observation enclosure projects radially outwardly from and substantially normal to said support member, characterized in that the enclosure is
10 annular and has a toroid profile, the enclosure presenting a tapering aerodynamic exterior profile around its circumference, the enclosure further being sized to allow 70-100 people to walk around there-within as the enclosure moves up and down such that they are able to have a 360
15 degree panoramic walk-around experience, the tower further comprising damping apparatus for damping undersirable vibrations of the tower.
2. An observation tower according to claim 1, wherein the
20 tower (1) has a height of up to 200 metres.
3. An observation tower according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the observation enclosure (3) is moveable at variable speeds.
- 25 4. An observation tower according to any preceding claim

wherein the substantially upright support member (2) is provided with a first portion arranged substantially above ground level and a second portion arranged substantially below ground level.

5. An observation tower as claimed in claim 4, further comprising a boarding level (5) provided between said first and second portions of the support member for boarding said observation enclosure; wherein the observation enclosure is moveable up or down relative to said boarding level.

6. An observation tower according to claim 4 or 5, wherein a sunken enclosure is provided around said second portion of the support member (2).

7. An observation tower according to any one of claim 4, 5 or 6, wherein said sunken enclosure is arranged to house the observation enclosure when the observation enclosure is provided at the second portion of the support member (2).

8. An observation tower according to claims 4 to 7, wherein the sunken enclosure offers a substantially aqueous environment.

9. An observation tower according to any preceding claim,

wherein the observation enclosure (3) comprises substantially transparent material.

5 10. An observation tower according to any preceding claim, wherein renewable energy is utilized to power the observation tower (1).

11. An observation tower according to claim 10, wherein
10 said renewable energy comprises photovoltaic system or wind turbines.

12. An observation tower according to any preceding claim, wherein a machine room is provided at a lower portion of the
15 support member (2).

13. An observation tower according to claim 1 wherein the damping apparatus comprises a mass spring damper, tunable to vary its damping characteristics in accordance with the
20 height of the enclosure relative to the upright support member.

14. An observation tower according to any preceding claim, wherein the damping apparatus is incorporated within an
25 upper portion of the upright support member (2).