

Landslide closes main rail line

THE MAIN railway line between London and South Wales was closed last month after a landslide north east of Bristol. Network Rail said there was a small slippage by the track on 23 January, which caused speed restrictions.

At 10.10am the following day, it was noticed the situation had deteriorated and the landslide covered the downward line. By 11.00am the upward line was also blocked.

Network Rail released a statement

saying: "A landslip has occurred west of Chipping Sodbury tunnel affecting signalling between West-erly Junction and Hullavington. Train services between Swindon and Bristol Parkway are disrupted by the incident."

As well as blocking the line, the landslide caused damage to signalling equipment and track circuits.

The statement continued: "The landslip was caused by poor weather conditions over the past few days,

when heavy rainfall saturated the embankment. Nearly 40 engineers from Network Rail are on site, working towards clearing nearly 2000t of debris by tomorrow [25 January] to allow train services to resume.

First Great Western said the line between Swindon and Bristol Parkway was expected to remain closed for at least two days with services to and from South Wales diverted, extending journey times by up to 30 minutes.

More damage to Scarborough's troubled sea defences

SCARBOROUGH'S TROUBLED Accropode sea defences have suffered a new setback after sustaining abnormally high damage.

A significant number of pre-cast concrete Accropodes in the armoured revetment protecting 1.5km of Scarborough's coastline have been badly damaged.

Only completed in 2005, the troubled Castle Headland coastal defence project is showing a greater than normal level of damage for a scheme of this nature, according to one breakwater expert.

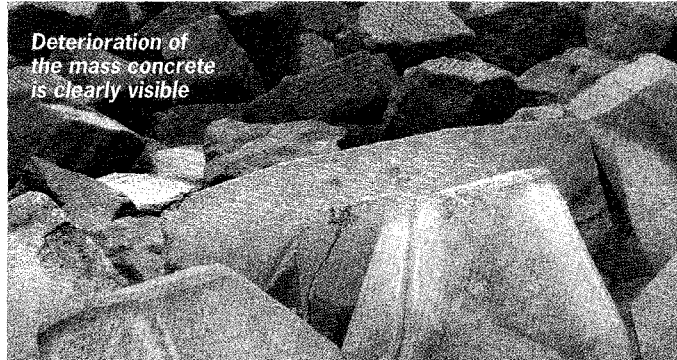
"Along the seawall, a larger number of Accropodes than might be expected show direct evidence of collision damage [from tidal action]," he said.

"Quite a few, again more than should be expected, also show clear signs of rough handling, suggesting that the units might perhaps have been dragged across a hard rough surface during early handling."

A spokesman for contractor Edmund Nuttall denied this saying: "The Accropodes were manufactured relatively close to Scarborough, and were then stored on the beach, so there was minimal handling."

Scarborough Borough Council has denied any significant degradation at the town's seafront saying that it had not picked up on anything that might be a concern.

A visit to the defences along the 100 year-old Marine Drive coastal road showed clear evidence of damage to the revetment, with at least 20 armour units displaying considerable damage. Pictures taken show armour units at the top of the revetment exhibiting some of the worst



examples of damage with some units broken or cracked. These elements are on a section of the sea defence that is least affected by coastal tides.

Construction of Scarborough's coastal protection scheme began in 2002 with a budget of £28.6M, although the council later agreed increased costs with Nuttall of £46.5M, the extra £18M due to unforeseen ground conditions on the seabed. Designer was consultant High Point Rendell.

Even after these extra costs were agreed, the council and Nuttall remained locked in battle over the cost of repairing more than 50 of the mass concrete Accropodes.

This dispute had been running since broken structures were discovered in the summer of 2004. A council report in 2006 revealed that a budget of £100,000 had been set aside to carry out laser scan surveys of the coastline to examine and track the damage.

The scan was undertaken in 2007, along with aerial surveys and surveys by boat.

Scarborough Borough Council's head of engineering and harbour services John Riby said the surveys showed that the sea defence was fit for purpose.

However, Scarborough Council group engineer Neil Corrie admitted the whole of the revetment was still being monitored. "There's nothing that's been picked up that's a concern, there's not been a significant problem," said Corrie.

Commenting on the Accropodes, he said: "Of the number that were damaged during construction, the majority were replaced.

"One or two were not because it wasn't impinging on the integrity of the revetment itself." Those that were not replaced are understood to have been strong enough to perform their function.

Riby added that he thought any damage was likely to have occurred when [the Accropodes] were in situ in the revetment rather than during construction.

High Point Rendell was unavailable for comment.

Kevin Walsh

Name change for Wilky

Piling contractor Wilky Foundations Systems will become Neil Foundations Systems (NFS), following a management buyout. The change reflects its new independent status for the firm. The company will continue to be led by Neil Miller, managing director since 2004. NFS will remain at Stake Works, Farnborough, Hampshire.

Nakheel creates Universe

Dubai, home to the man-made Palm and World offshore islands, will now add The Universe. It will surround the existing World. Islands will take the shape of the sun, the moon and the planets, according to developer, Nakheel. Construction will begin following engineering, feasibility and environmental studies that are already under way.

Hydro breakthrough

Scotland's new large-scale hydro electric scheme has seen the breakthrough of its 200m long tunnel boring machine. It has created 8km of tunnels and climbed over 600m on the scheme for Scottish and Southern Energy, at Glendoe near Loch Ness. Development of the tunnels will allow water from a new reservoir to reach the underground power station near the south east corner of the loch before being discharged into the loch itself (GE August 2006). The power station's capacity will be about 100MW.

Call for in-house flood experts

Every county council and unitary authority in England and Wales will have to hire senior flood management engineers, according to recommendations in Sir Michael Pitt's final report into last summer's floods. Speaking last month at an environment select committee meeting, Pitt confirmed that his final report, due this summer, will recommend that in-house experts be employed to enable councils to lead on the management of surface water flooding and drainage. "Local authorities have been quite seriously denuded of experts," he said.

Anti-heave thumbs up

Following recent LABC approval, foundation and piling firm the Withers Group has now received NHBC endorsement for its With-A-Void anti-heave solution. The construction method, used in conjunction with piled foundations, features collapsible formwork that does away with the need for traditional void formers.