ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS

Coronet Peak - Coronet Express Chairlift - Gondola Cabins

Department of Conservation Concession

NZSKI Limited

June 2019

patch

landscape ■ architecture ■ planning

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report provides an assessment of the visual and landscape effects of proposed gondola cabins associated with the new Coronet Peak Express Chairlift as part of a Concession Application (74167-Ski) to the Department of Conservation for the Coronet Peak Ski Field.

1.2. This report specifically responds to the *Guide to Preparing Your Environmental Impact Assessment for Concessions Applications* and the *Request for Further Information* dated 17 May 2019. A full landscape assessment of the Express Chairlift replacement dated October 2018 was undertaken as part of a resource consent application which assessed the effects of the proposed Express Chairlift as a whole on the wider landscape and visual amenity. The report below will provide landscape comment with regard to the proposed gondola cabins which will form part of the Express Chairlift.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE LANDSCAPE

2.1. Coronet Peak (1,649masl) is part of the Harris Mountains, which extend from the Wakatipu Basin north to the Matukituki River. The Shotover River and its upper catchments, including Branches mark the western extent of the Harris Mountains while the Motatapu River and Soho Creek mark the mountain's eastern extents. These mountains increase in height to the north, with the highest summits near the northern extents of the range, including Black Peak (2,283masl) and Treble Cone (2,088masl). Coronet Peak and Mt Dewar are the southernmost peaks of the Harris Mountains which end markedly at the Wakatipu Basin.

2.2. The Coronet Peak massif is a complex landform. It holds a series of summits, ridges and valleys which are punctuated by rocky outcrops, scrub and tussock clad slopes. The northern and western slopes of Coronet Peak fall steeply down the craggy slopes of the Dirty Four Creek and Deep Creek catchment to meet Skippers Canyon. Its easterly slopes more gently roll towards the Arrow River through Coronet Creek and Bush Creek, which are separated by a long alpine ridge connecting Coronet Peak to Brow Peak (1,407masl). Coronet Peak's south face has a more consistent grade and tumbles down gently towards the Wakatipu Basin. This easterly face holds the Coronet Peak Ski Field and the Coronet Peak Recreation Reserve (**Figure 1**).

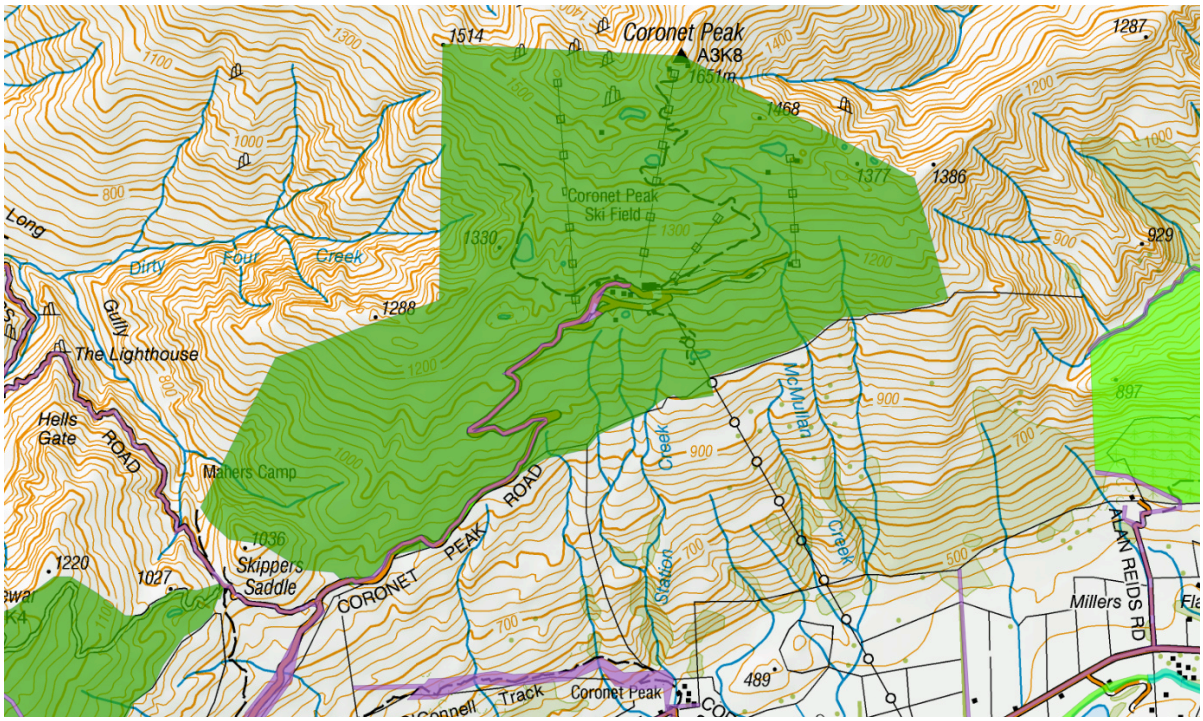

***Figure 1**: The Coronet Peak Recreation Reserve in green.*

2.3. The Coronet Peak Ski Area Sub-zone exists within a parcel of land known as the Coronet Peak Recreation Reserve, a Recreation Reserve under section 17 of the Reserves Act 1977, and also on a Crown Pastoral Lease administered by Land Information New Zealand. It is also subject to Queen Elizabeth the Second Nation Trust open space covenant.

2.4. The Coronet Peak Recreation Reserve is set across the mountain's south facing slopes from approximately 900 masl to the summit. It takes in some of the north-facing land north of the Greengates Express top terminal and closely follows the ridge which connects Coronet Peak to Brow Peak to the east. The eastern and northeastern extents of the Sub-zone are better defined by natural features than the northwestern and western extents.

2.5. The Coronet Peak Recreation Reserve is a popular place for passive and active recreation. In summertime, the road to the Reserve is used by tourism operators and independent travelers who seek elevated views of the wider Wakatipu Basin. The primary summertime recreation activities within the Reserve include paragliding and mountain biking, both as part of independent and guided trips. While much of the summertime recreation activity currently takes place near and below the Coronet Peak Ski Area's base facilities, it is understood that some

mountain bikers, hikers and paragliders use the mid and upper mountain above the ski area base facilities. In winter the primary users of the Reserve are participating in snow sports, while some paragliding and backcountry access activity is understood to occur.

2.6. The Coronet Peak Recreation Reserve currently hosts:

- Three chair lifts, from west to east being the Greengates Express 6-seater, the Coronet Express quad and the Meadows Express quad. Rocky Gully T-bar provides lift access to the area known as Rocky Gully. The mountain also has 4 conveyors near the base of the Meadows Express chair. Each chair lift and the T-bar has a top and bottom terminal building;
- A base building and first aid building near the base of Coronet Express chair, a maintenance building below Rocky Gully, a maintenance building below the base building, a maintenance building to the west of the Greengates Express lift line, a restaurant known as Heidi's Hut near the base of the Rocky Gully T-bar and another maintenance building near the midway point up Coronet Express chair;
- A series of snowmaking machines;
- Three reservoirs;
- Snowfencing and signage;
- Car park areas near and below the base building and Greengates Express chair;
- Earthworked areas with formed ski runs and mountain bike tracks;
- Six buildings which act as accommodation and club rooms for various ski club related activities;
- The summit of Coronet Peak hosts an 'observation tower' and various telecommunications equipment.

2.7. In terms of character, the south face of Coronet Peak is part of a modified alpine landscape. This modified character is the consequence of earthworks which have formed roads, parking areas, reservoirs, ski trails and mountain bike trails across the mountain face as well as the presence of structures including lift towers, snow making machines and buildings. This modified character is the result the public's attraction to snow activities in winter and hiking, mountain biking and air sport activities in summer. The balance of the Coronet Peak Recreation Reserve on the lower, western extents are largely unaffected by this modification and retain a highly natural alpine

landscape character. The ski field infrastructure described above forms part of a modified landscape character which exists within the frame of a much larger, natural mountain landscape.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

3.1. The full details of the proposal are contained within the body of the application. In summary the proposal seeks to add 12 gondola cabins to the approved Coronet Express 6-seater chairlift with the potential to increase the number of gondola cabins to 16. Overall, the Coronet Peak Express chairlift will have a maximum of 72 carriers, most of which will be 6-seater chairs. The lift line closely follows the lift line of the old chairlift. The gondola cabins will be 2.39m in height and 1.882m wide. They will be clad mostly in glass. Parts of the cabins which are not in glass will be blue in colour with the Coronet Peak decal in white text on a gray carbonite backing located on the lower part of the cabin's elevations.

3.2. Operationally, the gondola cabins may be in use in the summer and winter months but will not be in use through October, November, April and May. A cabin and chair storage area is located near the base building and the gondola cabins will be stored in this facility while the line is not running, including during the night time.

4. METHOD AND CONSIDERATIONS

4.1. In undertaking this assessment, the site was visited on 9 May 2019 and again on 5 June 2019 and the line of the lift was traversed. Images were taken from key view points within the Recreation Reserve and from outside the Reserve including from the Coronet Peak Road and from the Wakatipu Basin.

4.2. In undertaking this assessment, the *Guide to Preparing Your Environmental Impact Assessment for Concessions Applications* was referred to and particular regard is given to:

Structures *This includes baches, hotels, campgrounds, huts, and ski area modifications, telecommunication sites, pipelines and wharves.*

Areas that have already been modified could be more acceptable for consideration for development than untouched areas.

Design, Location and Colour System

The design/location and colour systems proposed for the project are relevant to an assessment of environmental effects. It is expected that concept plans, designs, and landscape details will be provided as part of your overall application package.

Transport and Access

Will access to the site, either by foot, road or by services, result in:

Disturbance of any conservation values?
Result in any impact upon the areas landscape features?
Lead to any erosion or slippage?

Landscape values

Damage to landforms.
Impingement on the landscape i.e. stands out as being 'non-natural'.
Damage to geological features.
Reduction of the natural character of wetlands, rivers and streams.
Loss of open space.

Any activity that has an impact on landscape values is likely to have other significant impacts on vegetation, wildlife or their habitat.
For the construction of any facility you are required to look at alternative locations outside the conservation area or the national park.
Can any existing buildings/structures be used?
Examine alternative designs that will blend the facility into the landscape. Designs that have relief, as few levels as possible, that use natural materials and colours that harmonise with the environment will be preferred.
Colour schemes should always have dark roofs and all colours should have low light reflectivity.
For telecommunications, look at alternative locations, co-siting and other options to blend in facility.

4.3. Following the site visits, the gondola cabins were constructed in a 3D modelling software. Using the GPS location of our photos and a model of the site, the lift line and the gondola cabins were placed into four photographs. The resultant four images (**Attachment A**) show a simulated view of the gondola cabins from key view points within the Recreation Reserve.

5. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

Landscape Character Effects

5.1. The Coronet Peak Ski Area Sub-zone exists within the Coronet Peak Recreation Reserve. As discussed above in part 2.6 of this report, the Ski Area Sub-zone contains significant infrastructure to support the ski area activities. It is understood the applicant seeks additional summertime activities within the Recreation Reserve which would require the use of the Express Chairlift and gondola cabins in the summer months as well as the winter months.

5.2. While much of the Ski Area Sub-zone is modified due to earthworks and structures, it contains areas of land which remain natural in character and is framed by a much wider natural area.

5.3. In the winter months the ski area is an active place throughout the day and night with ski activities operating between 8am and 9pm. Prior to and following those recreation activities NZSki performs grooming and snow making activities. In summer the recreation reserve is currently less active with limited maintenance and operational requirements. It is understood that the applicant seeks to establish summertime activities using the Coronet Peak Express chair lift to support site seeing and recreation uses.

5.4. The increased use in the Recreation Reserve in summertime will slightly change the summertime character of the ski area part of the reserve. In summertime once a user is above the base area the experience can be one of solitude, albeit the user will still be in the presence of the ski area infrastructure. By activating the upper mountain with recreational activities supported by the chairlifts, the character of the upper mountain will be changed. The gondola cabins will play a role in this change of character. They will present another element to an area already affected by the existing chair lift. I consider the gondola cabins will slightly increase the character effects of the chair lift but will not lead to any actual, potential or cumulative adverse effects beyond that which would be expected in a Ski Area Sub-zone, either in summer or winter months.

5.5. It is worth noting that in the hours while the lift is not in operation, the cabins and chairs will be taken off line. During these hours the mountain is less populated with users and the experience of solitude and natural character will be unchanged by the proposal. Similarly, the areas north of Coronet Peak and west of the Greengates area which are much more natural than the more modified areas around the Coronet Express Chairlift area will be unaffected by the proposal.

5.6. Overall, the proposed gondola cabins will result in no more than **very low**[1] adverse effects on the any landscape features, open character or landscape values.

Visual Effects

5.7. The visual amenity experienced from the Recreation Reserve is varied and diverse, ranging from views of the tawny coloured, rolling mountains slopes and the rocky tors which often emerge from the mountain itself, to views across the Reserve to the Wakatipu Basin, Lake Wakatipu and its associated features. The Coronet Peak Express chairlift lift towers and 6-seater chairs and proposed gondola cabins will form part of this view when the observer is within the vicinity of the lift line.

5.8. Approximately every 6th chair is proposed to be a gondola cabin. The proposed gondola cabins will be in motion while they are in use and when not in use will be stored. Therefore, any visual effects of the cabins will be fleeting and only present during operating hours, when the mountain is an active place with recreation users. Many of these users may be using the gondola cabins to provide for their recreational activity pursuits and access to the upper mountain.

5.9. Blue is a colour which is associated with winter and snow activities. This colour will, to a limited extent harmonise with the natural environment in wintertime and with the colours of the distant Lake Wakatipu. However, in summer the blue will not harmonise with the natural environment. Despite this the blue colour will be consistent with other elements throughout much of the modified parts of the ski area including signage, parts of the snow making machines and buildings. This will bring a level of coherence to the ski area infrastructure.

5.10. The gondola cabins will result in a **negligible** visual effect as viewed from the valley floor. They will be viewed in the context of all other ski area infrastructure (**Attachment A, View 5**) and will only be seen in motion. The gondola cabins will result in a no advere cumulative effects as viewed from the valley floor.

[11] In assessing the extent of effects, this report uses the seven-point scale recommended by the *NZILA 6.0 Practice Support Documentation, Best Practice Note, Landscape Assessment and Sustainable Management 10.1*, (02/11/10). The scale is: Extreme, very high, high, moderate, low, very low, negligible.

5.11. The gondola cabins have been assessed throughout the length of the lift line and surrounding area and from wider valley views. It is considered there are four main character areas where the gondola cabins may have an effect; the base area (**Attachment A, View 1**) the mid-mountain (**Attachment A, View 2**), and the upper-mountain (**Attachment A, View 3**). Simulations have been prepared to represent the visual effects of the gondola cabins from these areas. A simulation was also prepared from the Skippers Road viewpoint (**Attachment A, View 4**). It is considered the gondola cabins will be indiscernible from this viewpoint.

5.12. The gondola cabins may also be visible from other areas within the Reserve, but the visual effects of the gondola cabins will diminish with distance.

5.13. From the base area (**View 1**), the gondola cabins may be visible in views across and towards the mountain slopes. Some cabins may be visible on the skyline in the upper parts of the mountain. All cabins will be visible in tandem with the chairs and towers. It is considered the cabins will result in a slight increase in the adverse visual effects of the Coronet Express Chairlift but will not result in a level of adverse visual effect beyond what is anticipated in a ski are sub-zone or Recreation Reserve which allows for lift accessed recreational uses. From the base gondola cabins will result in a **very low** adverse effect on visual amenity.

5.14. From the mid-mountain (**View 2**) and upper mountain (**View 3**), the dominant visual amenity is embodied in views across the mountain to the wider Wakatipu Basin. The proposed gondola chairs will increase the visual effect of the approved chairlifts and towers. This will result in a slightly increased cumulative visual effect. This visual effect will be limited to users in the immediate vicinity of the lift line and much of the Recreation Reserve will be unaffected by the proposal. Cabins will be moving and if they are screening a valued view, that screening effect will be quickly released. It is considered from the mid and upper mountain, when a user is in the vicinity of the gondola cabins, that the cabins will result in a cumulative adverse visual effect, but that this effect will be **low** in scale.

5.15. There will be parts of the Reserve where the gondola cabins are not visible and will have no adverse effects. The gondola cabins will have a **negligible** adverse visual effect as experienced

from near the summit of Coronet Peak and from areas where the lift line is screened with landform.

5.16. It is relevant to consider the contribution the gondola cabins make to the potential opportunities for users to experience the visual amenity and character of the Coronet Peak Recreation Reserve. Views will be available from the gondola as users ride the gondola. Similarly, the cabins will facilitate access to the upper mountain for users who otherwise might not be able to access this alpine environment and the visual amenity it provides.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Overall it is considered that the use of lift-accessible infrastructure within the Coronet Peak Recreation Reserve and Ski Area Sub-zone is an expected activity. The proposed cabins will result in a very low change in landscape character beyond what is anticipated by the use of chairlifts. The form and colour of the proposed gondola cabins may result in some adverse and cumulative visual effects, but these effects will be no more than **low** in extent.

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NZSKI LTD. - CORONET EXPRESS GONDOLA

VISUAL SIMULATIONS JUNE 2019 - IS03

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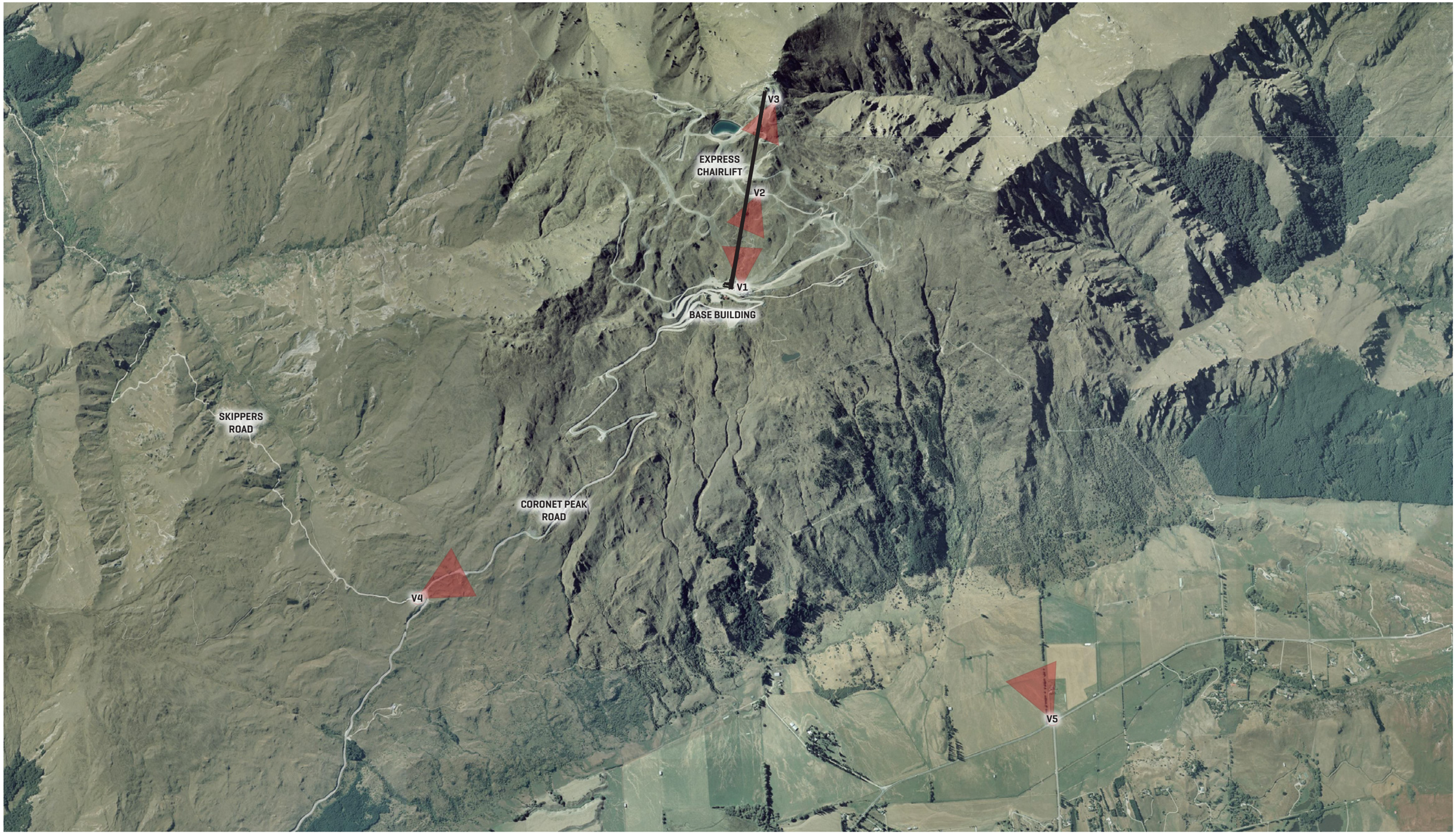

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Reference : PA18215 IS03

NZSKI LTD. - Coronet Express Gondola

View Point Location Map

18 June 2019

50mm photo - 9 May 2019

50mm photo - 5 June 2019

50mm photo - 5 June 2019

50mm photo - 9 May 2019

50mm photo - 5 June 2019

50mm photo - 5 June 2019

50mm photo - 9 May 2019

50mm photo - 5 June 2019

50mm photo - 5 June 2019

50mm photo - 5 June 2019

50mm photo - 5 June 2019

50mm photo - 2 October 2018

50mm photo - 5 June 2019

50mm photo - 5 June 2019