



Northern expertise keeps observatory tracking

They've been dubbed the 'bogie men' – the technicians from TEi Services in Townsville who ensured Australia's largest telescope continues to scan the night sky.

The TEi crew recently completed a contract to refurbish the bogies that support the 560-tonne dome at the Australian Astronomical Observatory in New South Wales, allowing it to rotate.

General manager Richard Parker said it was TEi's methodology that landed the job.

"We put a lot of thought into it and came up with a way of removing these bogies," he said.

"We designed a purpose-built frame to remove them, which we call the bogie picker of course, and I call my crew the bogie men.

"Everyone else was going to put a forklift into that space. Our offer gave them greater certainty that things would not go wrong."

Their working environment was unusual – essentially being inside a large piece of scientific equipment, with parquet flooring.

Mr Parker said among the constraints was the need to return the telescope to the AAO's control each evening for observations.

"There are 32 of these bogies (plus one

"We put a lot of thought into it and came up with a way of removing these bogies"

Richard Parker



Above - TEi has refurbished the bogies that allow the observatory's dome to rotate.

Below - The Australian Astronomical Observatory.



spare) and they can be taken out two at a time and it will still operate, but of course you can't be halfway through taking one out when evening comes," he said. "The bogies support the dome on a rail and allow it to rotate so the telescope can track objects across the sky."

Australian Astronomical Observatory operations manager Doug Gray said TEI had presented the AAO with a novel idea for extracting the bogies and had been very diligent in their pre-tender work.

While such a project would usually probably involve downtime, he said the bogie refurbishment had been completed without losing any observing time.

"They really have excelled, they've been exceptionally good," he said.

TEI's solution was a frame (the bogie picker) that could run on a trolley usually used to lift the optical telescope's mirror out for maintenance. The three-tonne bogies were shifted to a position where they could be accessed by crane and taken through a hatch in the floor to the workshop area 26m below.

Mr Parker said the job had been completed in five three-week swings, winding up in August. During that time the crew also secured a contract to replace the chains that operate a large shutter door on top of the dome.

The work for the observatory near Coonabaraban was not the first such heavenly contract for TEI.

"In the past, we've done a couple of very

large azimuth rings for radio telescopes - two in Tidbinbilla near Canberra and one in Goldstone, California - basically working for NASA," Mr Parker said.

"The business owner is very interested in space."

Mr Parker said TEI tried to diversify - as a matter of survival.

"I guess we have a philosophy where we're not going to compete with every little workshop in town to do carports for people - we're going to look for something a bit different," he said.

It also has broad horizons geographically.

Mr Parker said TEI was looking at overseas opportunities and had employed a business development officer in South Africa.



The 'bogie picker' could run on a trolley usually used to lift the optical telescope's mirror out for maintenance.



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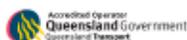
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