Rother Valley Country Park – decision not to prosecute

HSE / police investigation into sledging fatal accident

After the conclusion of the inquest into a sledging accident which resulted in the death of teenager Francesca Anobile in February 2009, South Yorkshire Police and the HSE concluded their enquiries and announced that they would not be taking any further action.

The accident happened at Rother Valley Country Park in Rotherham following heavy snowfall. The park at the time was owned and managed by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

Francesca and four other friends were sledging down a 270-metre disused grass ski slope on an upturned roof of a Land Rover. Francesca sustained fatal head injuries when she was thrown from the makeshift sledge as it went through a section of wire stock fencing that had been erected to control stock grazing 18 months earlier. Some witnesses estimated the speed of the sledge to have been in the region of 50 mph when the accident occurred. Three of Francesca’s friends also sustained serious injuries.

The HSE enquiry concentrated on the role of Rotherham Council to ascertain whether the management on site took sensible precautions to manage the risk arising from the recreational use of the land. The way the park was managed was not found to be at fault in relation to the accident.

An HSE Inspector said - “Our enquiries focused on the role of the Council to determine whether any member of park management was aware that people were sledging on the Land Rover roof, or whether they had been complicit in its use. It soon became clear that although staff were aware that members of the public were in the park, they were not aware that the Land Rover roof had been brought to site and was being used as a sledge. It was the combination of the weight of this improvised sledge, the height of the slope from which it was launched and the resulting speed which caused this tragic accident.”

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