

# PRESERVING HISTORY

BALLARAT'S ICONIC SOVEREIGN HILL HAS BEEN HOME TO RECENT WORKS SHOWCASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INNOVATIVE PRECAST METHODS.

**C**overing 15 hectares of a former gold mining site, Sovereign Hill's Outdoor Museum is a renowned living museum located in Ballarat, Victoria. It brings the gold rush to life through a living township with diggings, underground mines, costumed characters, coach rides, and 1850s shops, trades, schools, and dwellings.

Historically, the Museum used timber for its retaining walls, to align with the 1850s gold rush era aesthetics. Being readily available and easily workable, timber helped recreate the authentic look of the period. However, it required frequent maintenance and replacement.

Adding to this, the Museum's existing infrastructure did not enable mobility

impaired visitors to experience gold panning.

Tasked with the responsibility of operating the Museum, the Sovereign Hill Museum Association embarked on a project to improve the Museum's infrastructure. Its priority was to find a solution that would enhance durability while preserving the site's historical appearance, and to make the gold panning experience accessible to all.

#### QUEST FOR A DURABLE SOLUTION

The Association decided on a scope of works that included a concealed, sustainable and robust precast concrete retaining wall system to enhance its infrastructure, and the construction of



The use of a durable concrete sleeper retaining wall that sits behind timber panels, has helped to preserve the authentic appearance of Ballarat's famous Sovereign Hill.

**PROJECT TITLE:** Sovereign Hill Museum Association  
**PRECASTER:** Sunset Sleepers  
**PROJECT LOCATION:** Ballarat, VIC



Multiple challenges, such as a strict engineering criterion and scheduling demands, were overcome over the duration of the works.

a platform – which required additional retaining walls – to provide wheelchair access to a new all-ability gold panning area.

National Precast member Sunset Sleepers was selected to manufacture and supply 800 purpose-built concrete sleepers for the project.

Known for its reliability and professional approach, Sunset Sleepers delivered custom-made sleepers that were reinforced according to specific engineering requirements, to meet the project's durability requirements.

The use of R6 ties in the sleepers, as specified in the project drawings, played a crucial role in preventing shear failure, holding longitudinal reinforcement in place pre-pour, and controlling shrinkage.

#### PRESERVING HISTORICAL AESTHETICS

With its tailored and client-focused approach, the company devised a solution to meet the unique aesthetic challenges of the Sovereign Hill project. To preserve the museum's authentic

gold rush era appearance, the company concealed the new concrete sleepers behind timber panels, replacing the old timber retaining walls with modern materials while maintaining historical aesthetics.

Being a busy tourist attraction, ensuring seamless integration of new infrastructure without impacting the visitor experience was essential.

That was no problem for the precaster, as it worked to schedule deliveries and installation to minimise disruption.

Sunset Sleepers successfully coordinated the manufacturing process to align with the Museum's requirements, ensuring all products were delivered and installed as needed.

#### COMMITMENT TO HISTORICAL PRESERVATION

According to National Precast Chief Executive Officer Sarah Bachmann, Sunset Sleepers' involvement in the Sovereign Hill project showcases their dedication to client

#### SOVEREIGN HILL MUSEUM: A PILLAR OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Sovereign Hill Museum, a renowned living museum in Ballarat, Victoria, plays a vital role in supporting the local economy by attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors annually. It contributes significantly to tourism, generates jobs and boosts local businesses. The Museum is primarily funded through the Australian Federal Government's National Tourism Icons Program, philanthropic donations and private sector investments. It is operated by the Sovereign Hill Museum Association, a non-profit organisation dedicated to preserving and presenting the history of the Australian gold rushes, ensuring a rich cultural and educational experience for visitors.

service, innovation, quality and historical preservation.

"Through careful planning and execution, they have successfully contributed to the enhancement of this iconic museum, ensuring its infrastructure meets modern standards and accessibility to all, while retaining its historical charm," Bachmann says.

The Sovereign Hill Museum Association project's seamless integration of modern materials within a historical setting, not only improves the site's infrastructure but also enhances the overall visitor experience, making history accessible and engaging for all. ■



The concealed retaining walls have improved accessibility by providing wheelchair access to a new gold panning area.