



PRESERVING HISTORICAL AUTHENTICITY WITH PRECAST SOLUTIONS

Project: Sovereign Hill Museum Association

Precaster: Sunset Sleepers

Project Location: Ballarat, VIC

Ballarat in Victoria is probably most well-known for 'Sovereign Hill', one of the state's premier tourist attractions that vividly brings the 1850's gold rush era to life.

Covering 15 hectares on a former gold mining site and run by the Sovereign Hill Museum Association, the outdoor living museum comes complete with a living township, featuring diggings, underground mines, costumed characters and coach rides, as well as shops, trades, schools, and dwelling. Offering a series of experiences, it's an immersive experience into Australia's historical past.

Tasked with enhancing the Museum's infrastructure, the Association embarked on a project aimed at improving durability using precast concrete, all while preserving the site's historical appearance and ensuring accessibility for all visitors.

INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES TO IMPROVE DURABILITY AND ACCESS FOR ALL

In keeping with the era's aesthetics, the museum had typically used timber for its retaining walls. While timber was originally chosen for its availability and workability, it necessitated frequent maintenance and replacement over time. As well, existing infrastructure did not provide access to the gold panning experience for visitors with mobility impairments.

INNOVATIVE PRESERVATION SOLUTION

The scope of works to overcome the challenges included devising a more durable solution for the museum's retaining walls and constructing a new accessible platform.

The solutions: a concealed, sustainable and robust precast concrete retaining wall system,

covered with timber to preserve the museum's authentic gold rush era appearance, plus the construction of a new platform. Requiring construction of additional retaining walls, the platform would facilitate wheelchair access to a new all-ability gold panning area.

National Precast member Sunset Sleepers was entrusted with manufacturing the much needed sleepers for the project.

Known for their reliability and expertise, Sunset Sleepers' commitment to quality, sustainability and innovation positions them as a leader in the concrete sleeper market, providing clever solutions for a wide range of construction projects.



According to Sunset Sleepers Director Miguel Donnenfeld, 800 custom-designed reinforced concrete sleepers were custom-manufactured, tailored to specific engineering requirements. R6 rebar was specified in the project drawings, to enhance durability and prevent shear failure. By distributing stresses more evenly throughout the sleepers, the reinforcement would also control shrinkage and potential cracking during construction.

National Precast CEO Sarah Bachmann says that replacing outdated timber retaining walls with modern, durable materials that are concealed to preserve historical authenticity, is an ingenious solution for one of Victoria's renowned tourist attractions.

"With fond memories of having visited the museum as a child, it's pleasing to see one of our members making a contribution to such a worthwhile project," Bachmann comments.

"Through meticulous planning and execution, Sunset Sleepers have effectively enhanced this iconic museum, ensuring its infrastructure meets contemporary standards and accessibility requirements, while preserving its historical charm," she adds.

SEAMLESS INTEGRATION

Despite being a busy tourist attraction with on average 2,500 visitors each day, the integration of the museum's new infrastructure was seamlessly managed, to minimise disruption. Sunset Sleepers coordinated its manufacturing and installation to align precisely with the museum's operational needs, ensuring a smooth process from start to finish.

SOVEREIGN HILL MUSEUM: A CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC HUB

Sovereign Hill Museum, situated in Ballarat, Victoria, is a prominent living museum that adds \$260 million annually to the local economy.

Attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors annually, it serves as a cornerstone of tourism, generating employment opportunities and bolstering local businesses.

The museum's funding primarily originates from the Australian Federal Government's National Tourism Icons Program, philanthropic contributions and investments from the private sector.

Managed by the Sovereign Hill Museum Association, a non-profit organisation, its mission is to conserve and showcase the history of the Australian gold rushes, providing visitors with a culturally enriching and educational experience.

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