

Iconic tourist destination to get back on track



The majestic Sailors Falls in flood in September 2016. Photo: Stefan Nechwatal

A new public staircase and viewing area is now under construction at the iconic Sailors Falls south of Daylesford.

Local resident, Paradiso Arts proprietor and engineering enthusiast Stefan Nechwatal, has been watching the project with interest and has kindly shared details about the progress of the ambitious undertaking with the *Express*. Here is his story:

"The Sailors Falls Special Reserve comprises two long-drop waterfalls, a temperate rainforest gorge and loop walk track below, and at road level an electric pump mineral spring and picnic area.

Aeons ago, volcanic eruptions at Leonards Hill saw a massive lava flow stream northward towards Daylesford. Reaching the deep gorge, the lava flow cooled and formed basalt pillars, these are now truncating and vertically faulting at the eastern, southern and western sheer sides of this gorge. Sailors Creek flows as twin tributaries over the southern cliff, crashing to the bottom into rock formations which over the years have dislodged from the vertical faces.

After heavy rains in winter and spring, these twin waterfalls are a sight to behold, made more special by the fact they are situated only a short distance from a public

tourist highway.

Extensive land slippage in mid-2015 caused damage to the foundations of the only concrete staircase used for public access to the bottom of the falls and the walking tracks below and forced its closure.

Fortunately, while the staircase has been closed, the Sailors Falls Picnic Area remains open, still with very good views to both falls. The Mineral Springs loop walk, with access to the base of the falls, is also accessible via the Goldfields Track off Telegraph Road.

In the time since, Parks Victoria and the Victorian Mineral Springs Advisory Committee have been dedicated to a plan to design and build a new staircase and viewing platform infrastructure and the greater problem of sourcing funding of more than \$400,000 for the project.

In Spring 2016, things started happening as tenders were called and Melbourne company, Infracon, were appointed contractors.

In late December local stakeholders and residents were invited to a meeting by Parks Victoria to view the plans for the new infrastructure. Work commenced on January 10, 2017 and is expected to be completed by May this year.

The team from Infracon have been working steadily at the project site in the weeks



A member of the design team inspects the progress. Photo: Stefan Nechwatal

since, the difficult terrain a constant challenge.

Infracon onsite project manager Adam Bordonaro explained the whole footprint would remain the same, the old concrete was being broken up and removed and the new infrastructure comprising of concrete, spotted gum, and perforated, galvanised mesh would be erected in its place.

The workers have had the painstaking task of breaking up the concrete with sledgehammers and carrying the debris up to the upper level in backpacks.

A month to the day after work commenced at the site, the sounds and sight of heavy equipment perforated the spiritual silence at the falls. Locals were able to watch as a concrete pumping rig sent two loads of slurry down into the gorge via a series of extension of hoses to create new structural pads and footings.

I later met Parks Victoria project manager Frank Gleeson on site and noted the work team seemed to have "muscles on their muscles" by that point from their many trips up and down the sides of the cliff.

Again, the words "difficult terrain" came up as Frank described the unforeseen hazards, working in a site with bedrock so close to the surface and the limitations of working with hand tools because of the situation.

The staircase follows the steep slope down by a series of switchbacks and will link up with the existing concrete pathway at the bottom of the gorge.

All the concrete will be laid with split Castlemaine stone, giving a non-slip surface and this will match in with the extensive paving at the upper picnic area.

Frank said all of these materials would again be carried down and installed by hand.

The completion of this comprehensive undertaking will ensure a new, safer and less arduous trip down to the floor of the gorge for locals and visitors alike, where once again keen naturalists, photographers and bushwalkers will enjoy the spectacle of the twin falls up close, as well as being able to link in with the further trails that emanate to the Great Dividing Trail, and the Goldfields Track, towards Ballarat or Bendigo.



Contractors Infracon work on the challenging undertaking at Sailors Falls which is estimated will take 20 weeks to complete. Photo: Stefan Nechwatal