

## FOOD AND REST

When working, each horse eats a 20-litre container full of oaten chaff horse mix (grains) and two layers of lucerne hay each day. When not working, the horse gets one layer of lucerne hay.

A typical working week for a horse is about six hours work. No horse ever does more than two hours work in a day. So there is lots of moving horses in and out of teams and harness, and through the Outdoor Museum to the stables and back. As well, every horse has a complete spell from work 2-3 times a year.



## SOVEREIGN HILL'S HORSES



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## ABOUT OUR HORSES

Horses are a special part of the experience of visiting Sovereign Hill. Horses were a rich part of the sounds and smells of Ballarat's diggings and Main Road during the fantastic days of the gold rushes of the 1850s. In those days, horses were the main way of powering vehicles transporting people and goods and for driving farming and mining machinery (such as the puddler and the whim in Sovereign Hill's Diggings).



“ Over the years, our horses have been named after Roman and Greek gods, flowers, or after a unique characteristic in their build or behaviour. ”



Sovereign Hill's horses are working horses. You can see them in teams of two, four or more pulling a variety of vehicles – coaches, carriages, lorries, wagons and drags.

There are normally between 50 and 60 horses living and working at Sovereign Hill. We need that many to ensure that the work is shared around all the horses over 364 days a year. No horse does more than 2 hours work a day in any area of our Outdoor Museum. And like the Sovereign Hill staff, horses have Christmas Day off!

Our horses are a diversity of breeds. Clydesdales and Percherons are the biggest and strongest. They pull the larger vehicles. An adult 'Clydie' weighs over 800 kgs and lives to about 25 years of age. At Sovereign Hill, they have a working life of about 15 years before they are retired.

We have Percherons and Clydies cross-bred with thoroughbreds and standard breeds to produce a lighter horse which is still strong enough to work, but has a slightly smaller body, is faster and more nimble. We use them to pull the coaches.

Quarter Horses are used for riding; staff and volunteers can ride horses as part of their roles at Sovereign Hill (provided they can satisfy our requirements for safe handling of horses).



It takes 2-3 years to train a horse to work in a team. No horse is put to work until it is comfortable in harness and with being driven in a team. Our horses have friends and siblings they prefer to work and play with, just as we do. So wherever possible, we team those horses together. Some horses also have a preferred position in the harness – either in the lead or following (in the 'pole' position). They let you know when they are happy by pulling really well. And by 'bludging' (not pulling as hard as they should) when they are not! A good team is one where each horse works for the others.

No horse is forced to work – if it protests at being harnessed, it is spelled. We have a Ballarat veterinarian who knows the horses and provides regular health checks, and any special assistance we need if a horse is unwell or behaving unusually. A farrier comes in to shoe the horses – each horse has its shoes replaced every 6-8 weeks.

The horses live in a large Stables Complex at Sovereign Hill. It is open to the public on special days and sometimes as part of our holiday programs. Each horse has its own stall, water supply and feeding box. Every day, we spread fresh sawdust or wood shavings on the rubberised floor mat so that it makes a soft surface for the feet and knees of these large animals.