

Press Release

The Lithgow State Mine Railway Limited - Rising from the Ashes

The State Mine Railway had its beginnings in 1994 initially as a sub committee of the Greater Lithgow Mining Museum Inc. Its charter was to restore the State Mine branch line and to operate a tourist train to connect some of Lithgow's major heritage sites which included Eskbank Station, Blast Furnace Park, the Lithgow State Mine and the Zig Zag Railway to produce what would have been the largest cultural heritage tourism precinct in Australia.

In the years that followed the organization went from strength to strength. It sort and gained considerable grant funding to enable the line to be extended into the Eskbank yard and build a number of platforms along the line. BHP Port Kembla donated a number of diesel locomotives which provided motive power for the tourist train operations. It became an accredited rail operator and was only a few weeks off operating a regular passenger service on the branch for the first time when disaster struck. In October 2001 a fire which was deliberately lit in the carriage shed brought everything to an abrupt halt.

Unfortunately the fire not only destroyed the shed and carriages but also took with it the willing band of volunteers, some of whom had been with the project since its inception. In the aftermath of the fire a new shed was erected and the remaining collection of locos and rolling stock were moth balled, in the hope that one day the volunteers would return to have another crack at establishing that much anticipated tourist attraction that Lithgow was desperately looking for.

In 2006 that call finally came. The Lithgow State Mine Railway Limited was registered as not for profit Company limited by guarantee. The separation of interests between the GLMM Inc. (Mining Museum) and the LSMR Ltd enabled the LSMR to pursue its rail orientated activities on the State Mine Branch and the Eskbank Yard leaving the GLMM Inc to continue the preservation of the State Mine site showcasing Lithgow's coal mining history.

A considerable amount of time and effort was devoted to establishing the new Company and developing a strategy that would hopefully enable the organization to become self-sufficient and sustainable without having to rely on government handouts to survive. Unfortunately during this time there was not a great deal of physical activity happening on the ground. However, all of this was about to change dramatically when the project was to receive its biggest boost since the allocation of funding under the Centenary of Federation grants in 2000.

In 2010 Tim Elderton of Elderton Engineering Services decided to establish his rail maintenance and servicing operations at the Lithgow State Mine Railway Workshops. Elderton Engineering together with State and Regional Development were instrumental in providing in excess of \$140000 to upgrade the branch and carry out extensive repairs to the two rail bridges located on the line. Without this upgrade the opportunity to operate a tourist service on the State Mine branch line at some future date would not have been made possible.

More recently Elderton Engineering Services and Southern Shorthaul Railroad have joined forces to provide maintenance and servicing for SSR's fleet of locomotives. Southern Shorthaul Railroad are fast becoming a household name in the area as they recently won a contract for Centennial Coal to haul coal from a number of our local mines for export. Working together under the banner of SSRE Pty Ltd, Elderton Engineering and SSR currently employ 20 people including 4 apprentices based at the Lithgow State Mine Workshop. As a result SSRE have become a strategic partner to the Lithgow State Mine Railway in providing the necessary maintenance and certification for the tourist railway's locomotives and rolling stock.

Tim Elderton has had many years of experience in the rail industry both commercially and in the rail heritage field. Prior to coming to Lithgow, he held the position of Maintenance Manager for the Office of Rail Heritage at the Rail Transport Museum at Thirlmere. Realizing Tim's expertise in most facets of the rail industry, the Board of the Lithgow State Mine Railway moved quickly to appoint him as the General Manager of the State Mine Railway, a move that has proved to be most beneficial for the long term development of the organization. Tim has made Lithgow his home and also shares the passion and vision to see a viable tourist railway established in the town.

Whilst a tremendous amount of work has already been undertaken there is still a great deal to be done before this project can realize its full potential. As with most community based developments there is always one ingredient you can never have too many of and that is volunteers. We have a small band of dedicated people working on locomotives, both steam and diesel as well as carriages and rail motors. For the outdoor types there is track maintenance and line side presentation (landscaping).....in fact there is something for everybody. Working bees are held every Sunday from 9am at the Lithgow State Mine Railway Workshops.

National Volunteer Week (NVW) is the largest celebration of volunteers and volunteerism in Australia, and provides an opportunity to highlight the role of volunteers in our communities and to say thank you to the more than 6.1 million Australians who volunteer. As part of our contribution to National Volunteer's Week, Lithgow State Mine Railway will be holding an Information Meeting and BBQ in our Workshop at the Lithgow State Mine on Sunday 6th May at 10am. All members as well as interested members of the community are welcome to attend. The day will kick off with a tour of the workshop and some updates on our current projects as well as an insight into where the organisation will be heading in the short and long term. The presentation will be

followed by a BBQ lunch and for those who wish to stop may like to get involved in a particular project.

Whilst the Information Day and BBQ is about thanking our volunteers it is also about raising the profile of the Lithgow State Mine Railway and the importance of volunteering. We are also putting the call out to the community seeking their assistance to get behind the many facets of this project that will have long term benefits for the community as a whole. You don't have to be a "rail enthusiast" to get involved, anyone with an interest in the community and helping Lithgow's tourism potential is most welcome to join and be part of this rewarding adventure. Contact details and further information can be found at www.stateminerailway.com.au or by contacting Tim Elderton 0429140654, Ben Hudson 0432843870 or Michael Wilson 0427455580.

It has been 10 years since the fire devastated the carriage shed essentially putting the brakes on what was to be one of the most exciting heritage tourism projects of its kind. Like the phoenix, the Lithgow State Mine Railway is also rising from the ashes with a renewed interest and enthusiasm.

Lithgow's future lies in its past and this project incorporating the tourist railway as its centre piece will play its part in building a heritage tourism base for Lithgow. Once established it will encourage people to visit the area to learn about the role the town has played in building a nation and above all enjoy what the Lithgow Valley and the surrounding area has to offer.

Michael J Wilson
Chairman
Lithgow State Mine Railway Limited