

# MEDIA RELEASE



## CELEBRATE PUFFING BILLY MILESTONE WITH A GEM OF A DEAL

On Thursday 18 October, Puffing Billy is celebrating 20 years since the reopening of the Lakeside to Gembrook line and is offering a Buy 1 Get 1 Free deal on tickets to all passengers who travel this route on the anniversary.

The day will also celebrate the reintroduction of locomotive 14A, which hauled the first train on the line following the reopening in 1998. For the past 12 months Puffing Billy has been converting 14A from a coal fuelled loco to a light oil burning loco. The line from Lakeside to Gembrook is surrounded by thick forest, so converting the loco to oil reduces the risk of sparks and allows trains to safely use this section of the railway during the dry summer season.

The original Upper Ferntree Gully to Gembrook line was officially opened in December 1900, however services ceased in August 1953 following a series of landslides. In 1955, the Puffing Billy Preservation Society was formed to save the railway from permanent closure. This saw the railway return to operation between Belgrave and Menzies Creek by 1962, followed by additional sections of the line. It wasn't until February 1991 that reconstruction of the Lakeside to Gembrook section commenced.

This huge undertaking involved the reconstruction of four bridges, four stations and 11km of railway, most of which was completed by Puffing Billy Preservation Society Volunteers, with some help from the Army Reserves. The line officially reopened on Sunday 18 October 1998, with the first train to travel the line from Lakeside to Gembrook being hauled by 14A.

Puffing Billy Acting CEO, Jonathan Clancy, said projections indicate that Puffing Billy could attract up to 730,000 passengers by 2027 and the Lakeside to Gembrook section, combined with the reintroduction of 14A as an oil burning loco, will play a pivotal role in helping the railway cater for this increased demand.

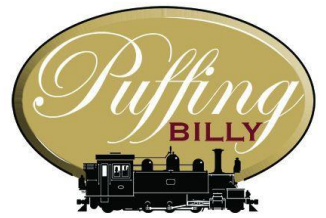
"The Lakeside to Gembrook journey is perfect for families with young children, those wanting to beat the crowds, and passengers who want to explore this lesser known part of the railway," Jonathan said.

"The train takes passengers over three historic timber rail bridges and winds through the unspoilt Wright State Forest. As the train climbs towards Gembrook, the lineside bush gives way to extensive views of rolling farmlands and distant mountain ranges. It is a spectacular experience!"

"The reopening of the Lakeside to Gembrook section of the railway was significant 20 years ago, and even more significant today as Puffing Billy's popularity continues to increase year on year. The conversion of 14A will allow us to run more trains along this unique section of line, therefore catering for more visitors."

"I am looking forward to celebrating this milestone with past and present members of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society, including those that were involved in the reconstruction of the line over 20 years ago, as well as passengers who come to help us mark this special occasion," he said.

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Volunteers who worked on the rebuilding of the Lakeside to Gembrook restoration have been invited to the anniversary celebration, which will see them travel on the train and enjoy afternoon tea to reminisce about their experience.

Members of the public wishing to travel on the train on 18 October and secure their Buy 1 Get 1 Free special should quote online promo code **BUY1GET1**. Ticket prices are \$59 for adults, \$46.50 for concession, \$30.50 for children (4-16 years).

For further details or to book your tickets, please visit [www.puffingbilly.com.au](http://www.puffingbilly.com.au)