

Mountains rail marks 150 years

Celebrating history with a puff of steam

BY B. C LEWIS

WHEN the Great Western Line opened up 150 years ago there was no pomp and ceremony, unlike the bacchanalian feast in February of the same year of 1867, to celebrate the opening of the Great Southern Railway from Picton to Mittagong.

As Professor Robert Lee, Emeritus Professor of History at Western Sydney University told the crowd of 300 in Coronation Park at Wentworth Falls, "there were no festivities, because there was nothing here other than an inn known as the Weatherboard, the very name suggestive of gimcrack, cheerless and chilly accommodation".

But last Friday July 21, the community of the Mountains and beyond celebrated on a NSW Rail Museum steam train, the 3642 Blue Mountains Flyer, marking



CELEBRATING: Volunteer Paul Cale has been riding trains with the Rail Museum for 19 years. Pictured here with steam aficionados on Friday heading up the Mountains.

the advent of that first passenger train from Penrith to Weatherboard years earlier.

Back then the train stop was "merely a transfer point in the middle of the bush for Bathurst mail and passengers between train and coach" but the line opened up the Mountains to the world, Professor Lee said. It brought tourists and

saw the Mountains grow quickly as land and jobs became available.

Professor Lee, biographer of John Whitton, engineer in chief of the NSW Railways from 1856 to 1890, said Whitton "fought tooth and nail" to have the railway built.

"Governor Denison was a Royal engineer, and thought he knew better how to cross

the Mountains, he wanted to lay a cheap horse-drawn tramway on Cox's Road. Whitton took Denison on [and] proved the more expensively and better built a railway was, the better it was as a long-term investment."

The 2017 community celebrated in the park with a donated cake from Patisserie Schwarz and music and speeches from Wentworth Falls Public School and Blue Mountains Grammar students. Station master Edward Griffiths cut the cake with Blue Mountains MP Trish Doyle.

Transport Heritage chairman Rob Mason said Friday's commemorative trip - travelling up a 1 in 33 metre incline - had been so popular, "we could have sold it 10 times over". Heritage trains traversed the Mountains all weekend to mark the occasion.



HERE COMES THE TRAIN: The weekend of steam events was organised by the NSW Rail Museum and the Valley Heights Rail Museum. Photo: Daniel Lewis