

The anticipation for the reopening of the historic Zig Zag Railway is palpable

industrial centre, Lithgow Blast Furnace. Lake Pillars wetlands flank it, where you can walk off lunch to the soundtrack of frogs and birdcalls mingled with the clangs or clunks of the surrounding industry.

Nearby Eskbank House - the former home of colonial mining magnate Thomas Brown - is a museum of Lithgow ironworks history and 19th century refinement. But it's the art exhibitions, concerts, plays and themed events, celebrating everything from steampunk (a science-fiction subgenre) to Halloween, which give the venue its modern relevance.

Likewise, Lithgow State Mine Heritage Park is keeping up with the times. Although full of fascinating artefacts, the Fire in the Mine hologram presentation tells the horrific story of the 1953 underground fire in the State Coal Mine and is an emotional must-see.

Adrian Schindler, who owns Zig Zag Brewery and Lithgow Valley Springs with his sister Malina, conducts tours of the site and runs a cellar door and café on weekends. "I see more and more people coming to Lithgow every weekend," he says. "There's the nature, the heritage and the events. It's just waiting to be discovered."


The site is a local treasure and Adrian is a natural storyteller. His yarns include the time the creek ran with 11,000 gallons of beer in the 1930s, when Norm Wilds had to empty his old tanks to make way for the new stainless steel ones. And it was also around the time that Constable Bell shot dead Alexander Lions for stealing.

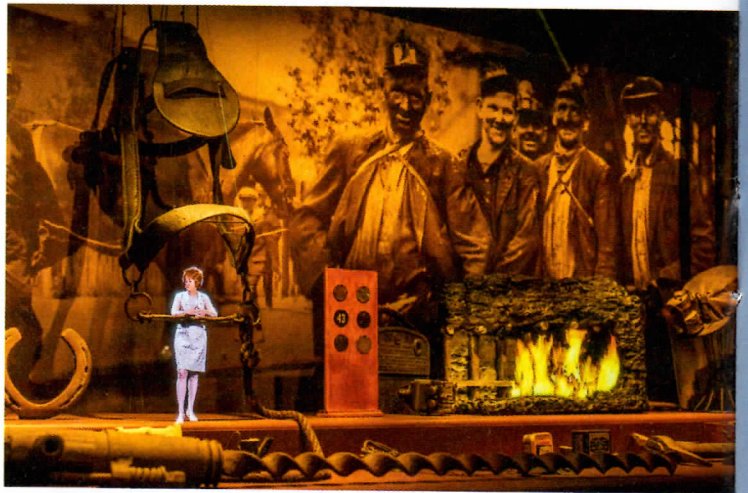
At the other end of town, the Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum is a fascinating stroll through the highs and lows of Lithgow history and the adaptability of its residents. This is seen through the displays of golf irons, sewing machines, gearboxes, movie projectors and, as the museum name suggests, a staggering array of firearms.

Between those industrial monoliths is a vibrant shopping strip filled with street art and an eclectic mix of familiar Aussie country town stalwarts and chic newcomers. On weekends there's an influx of those participating in athletics, soccer, bowls, motocross and other sports. There's even a statue of former Olympian Marjorie Jackson (nicknamed "The Lithgow Flash") in Cook Street Plaza.

Ironfest is a festival where metal art meets medieval re-enactors and it attracts the weird and the wonderful in April, while Halloween celebrations entice them in October. Even the mayor and local MP conduct official duties in jaw-dropping getups during the events.

The anticipation for the reopening of the historic Zig Zag Railway is palpable in Lithgow. The steam trains were sent to the sidings in 2012 and damaged in the October 2013 bushfires. People demanding to know when they'll whistle again bale up board chairman, Lee Wiggins, about five times a week. He's optimistic they'll be back on track in the first half of 2017.

"Tourism is definitely the future, no doubt about it, and we're going to be a part of it," he says. And it seems the entire town of Lithgow is behind him. 



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