

Steam train heads to Coffs

COFFS Coasters can enjoy a snort of steam this afternoon when a heritage steam train from the Lachlan Valley Railway pulls into Coffs Harbour Railway Station and takes on passengers.

Restored steam locomotive 3237 and its heritage passenger carriages are touring the North Coast and interested people can board the train for a one-way trip to Grafton at 3pm.

Tickets are \$20 adults, \$18 pensioners, \$10 children. Youngsters under 5 are free but will have no seat allocation.

Passengers pay on the train for their tickets but have to make their own arrangements to return to Coffs Harbour. The LVR steam train will be running local steam train rides around Grafton on Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday, before moving on to Casino from May 27-30.

Limited tickets are available for Saturday's Grafton to Casino Dinner Special and are available from Grafton Railway Station in South Grafton phone 6641 5170.

The train will arrive back in Coffs Harbour in July for steam train excursion rides to Raleigh and Coramba on July 3 and 4. Bookings for these trips can be made at Coffs Harbour Railway Station on 6648 3700.

Arriving today: Loco 3237 is on its way here.

Crowd welcomes steam locomotive

Belinda Scott 22nd May 2010

IRIS Hardcastle says she has forgiven the steam trains the soot they used to leave on her washing.

The senior Sawtell resident was among the crowd at hand at Coffs Harbour Railway Station yesterday to welcome restored steam locomotive 3237 and its string of heritage passenger carriages as it pulled into the station with a snort of steam and a shrill whistle.

"I used to hate them as a kid because they weren't good for the washing," Mrs Hardcastle said. "The train was about 100 metres away at the back of our yard at Sawtell."

Businessmen Wayne Webber and John Irving interrupted an afternoon's business to meet and photograph the train.

Mr Webber recalled the 1988 Bicentennial year, when he saw three steam locomotives lined up on sidings at Coffs

Harbour Railway Station. Those sidings and rail loops have since been removed.

Yesterday's steam train stopover was part of the North Coast tour by the Lachlan Valley Railway, which is taking the steam engine to Grafton and Casino for Casino Beef Week.

Excursion trips can be booked through Grafton and Casino railway stations

Senior train driver Sid Bender, who has been driving trains for half a century and is at home at the wheel of steam trains, diesel locos and electric trains, said the 3237 would be taking tours from Grafton and Casino until May 30.

It is a return home for Mr Bender, who now lives in Maitland, but grew up in Grafton.

Mr Bender said the 3237 was 'light on water and coal' because at just 130 tonnes, it was one of the smaller steam locos.

"It puts water into its own boiler under steam pressure and uses about 45 gallons a minute," Mr Bender said.

The 3237 pulling this excursion train was built in 1893 and is still going strong.

As well as its carriages it is pulling seven tonnes of high-quality Newcastle coal to keep its boiler firing.

"The 32 P class engines were the backbone of the railways before and during the war, before the 36 and 38ers," Mr Bender said.

Among those admiring the train were a local engineer who said he was fascinated by the simplicity of design of the steam trains and the fact he could see and understand all the technology involved.'

Six-year-old Kieran Finn and his older brother Murray, 7, were looking forward to travelling on the train to Grafton, although they are already steam train veterans.

Excursion trips from Coffs Harbour in July can be booked through Coffs Harbour Railway Station on 6648 3700.