

Great Central Railway to be 'reunified' at 125th anniversary weekend

March 7, 2024



Leicestershire's heritage railway, [Great Central Railway](#), is set to be 'reunified' with Great Central Railway Nottingham for the first time in over 50 years. The reunification will take place in March, as part of a weekend of events to celebrate the award-winning railway line's 125th anniversary.

Originally opened to passenger traffic in 1899, the Great Central Railway later became part of the London and North Eastern Railway in 1923, then part of British Rail in 1948. Closed in stages, the last trains ran in 1969. Volunteers began to preserve the line and infrastructure immediately.

Today, the Great Central Railway is one of Leicestershire's most important visitor attractions and boasts the longest piece of preserved double track – in essence, two train tracks where two steam trains can pass one another – in the World at over eight miles in length and running between Loughborough and Leicester North.

Making history

Over the 125th anniversary weekend, history will be made as the Leicestershire track is 'reunified' once

again with the Great Central Railway Nottingham track in Ruddington (Nottingham Transport Heritage Centre), offering visitors a glimpse into the future when reunification will be permanent, an ongoing project and part of GCR's active fundraising campaign. For now, the two halves will be joined by a specially commissioned 125th-anniversary rail replacement bus service using vintage Routemaster buses.

Celebration highlights

GCR said that the 125th-anniversary open weekend is one of the jewels in its 2024 calendar of activities. All stations along the tracks will be open throughout the weekend, offering an exciting opportunity to get up close and personal with many of the GCR fleet of heritage steam and diesel engines. There will also be opportunities to visit the footplate of some of these engines – a must for kids, big and small.

Great Central Railway Visitors will be invited to explore history with its family-friendly guided tour, where they will discover the railway's past and delve into the story of Loughborough Central station.

There will also be expert-led, behind-the-scenes tours of the Loughborough loco sheds, during which visitors will see trains being lovingly stripped down, restored and repaired, and even get exclusive access to some of the buildings that are usually restricted access and out of the public eye.

Both Loughborough and Ruddington stations will be running their popular miniature ride on trains, while visitors to Ruddington will also have the chance to take control and drive a train on the model railway or visit the collection of heritage buses from the Nottingham Area Bus Society.

Steam trains will be making regular journeys along the heritage line between Loughborough and Leicester North, allowing visitors to take a seat and experience the magic of this heritage railway as they travel through the beautiful Leicestershire countryside.

If visitors need to wet their whistle, a selection of food and drinks will be available at any of the many cafes along the line. Passengers can even board the train from the railway's Griddle Car, whilst those looking for a souvenir from their day at the station peruse the shops at both Loughborough and Ruddington Stations.

Malcolm Holmes, General Manager of the Great Central Railway said: "We're extremely excited to invite train enthusiasts and families alike to our celebratory 125th anniversary open weekend in March. Whether you've been to Great Central Railway or the Great Central Railway Nottingham before or visiting us for the first time, this is the perfect opportunity to experience our historic railways in a way that has never been seen before!"

Ticket to ride:

A day ticket allows visitors full access to all attractions across both the Leicestershire and Nottingham sites and includes both the train travel and 'reunification' bus service. For children aged three – 15, tickets cost just £1 (under 13s must be accompanied by an adult).

For more information, or to book a ticket, visit <https://www.gcrailway.co.uk/whatson2024/>