

Work Begins on revitalizing the historic Kinsol Trestle

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Work finally began yesterday to fix up the historic Kinsol Trestle, one of the world's highest wooden trestles.

Close to \$7.4 million has been raised through government and other contributions to refurbish the structure, which measures 44 metres high and 188 metres in length and crosses the Koksilah River in the Cowichan Valley.

But up to \$765,000 is required to finish the project to a standard where it can become part of the Trans Canada Trail and Cowichan Trail.

"We've had donations from all across Canada -- that shows how important this is for the entire country," said Jack Peake, chairman of the Cowichan Foundation's Kinsol capital campaign, at a press conference yesterday on the north end of the span.

As heavy machinery rumbled below, Peake and other dignitaries asked for help in the final push.

"We want to raise every nickel that's required to make this a complete project, so when the ribbon is cut next spring, this [will be] a completed, restored bridge and we don't have to think about a little more fundraising."

For years, the Cowichan Valley Regional District board debated whether to dismantle the bridge before opting to save the deteriorating structure, which is more than 90 years old.

Construction of the trestle was begun in 1911 by the Canadian Northern Pacific Railway and completed in 1920 by the Canadian National Railway.

The trestle was used by trains until 1979 and abandoned in 1980. It has been closed to pedestrian traffic for years and is now dilapidated, with rotting timbers falling away.

Peake said he's happy refurbishment is finally beginning: "We could have done this work for a quarter what we're spending now ... but it's better late than never."

Cowichan Valley Regional District board chairwoman Gerry Giles said she visited the trestle recently with her young granddaughter. "I said I hoped that one day she'd be able to bring her granddaughter out and look at this magnificent structure that is so much a part of our Canadian heritage."

The trestle "is one of the really precious treasures in the Cowichan Valley," said Giles.

Those who donated to the project will have a chance at driving in the last spike and being the first members of the public to cross the trestle.

Donations can be made online at www.kinsol.ca. Information is also available through Twitter and Facebook.

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