

We're about to become a world-class destination for trails fans

By T.W. Paterson, The Citizen
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If you haven't noticed, trails are in. Big time.

Not just the Cowichan Valley's section of the Trans Canada and Cowichan Valley Trails (the former Canadian National and E&N Railway grades), but miles of new and scenic pathways courtesy of Duncan and North Cowichan.

For its part, the CVRD has upgraded the CV Trail with handsome entry points on Sherman Road, at Glenora and at Lake Cowichan, a first class bridge over Holmes Creek and miles of crushed gravel from that point west to Greendale Road.

All that and the Kinsol Trestle is nearing completion.

Which has been one of the more intriguing points of the whole exercise, for me. Seldom have I seen all levels of government -- municipal, regional, provincial and federal -- on the same page in such a proactive way. The funding of the Kinsol is a prime example of this multi-governmental approach to outdoor recreation and what has been termed, heritage tourism.

For those of us who are so blessed as to live in the Cowichan Valley, the result is miles and miles of outstanding hiking, cycling and equestrian opportunities, year-round. Talk about our tax dollars at work!

Last Thursday, a ribbon-cutting ceremony (the cupcakes were delicious) at Lake Cowichan marked completion of the CV Trail's make-over. On Friday, the annual general meeting of Trails B.C. was held at the Quw'utsun' Cultural and Conference Centre. Among those attending from around the province were Gerry Giles, CVRD chair person, Brian Farquhar, CVRD parks manager, Deborah Apps, CEO and president, Trans Canada Trail, and representatives from the provincial Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resources, the Capital and Nanaimo Regional Districts, and VISTA, the volunteer group which for several years has been working towards the establishment of the Vancouver Island Spine Trail.

Their project should be of particular interest to Valley residents as it's the natural extension of the Valley's Trans Canada Trail (which, at present, effectively ends at Lake Cowichan) to Port Alberni by following the same historic Canadian Pacific Northern (CNR) Railway grade that never made it beyond Kissinger, at the head of Cowichan Lake. Ultimately, the completed trails system will begin at Swartz Bay via the Lochsyde and Galloping Goose trails, and go overland for 400 miles, much of it through wilderness, to Cape Scott!

This would be nothing less than a world-class destination trail, one that is sure to draw visitors from all over. Visitors who pass through will, hopefully, do it at a leisurely pace. Meaning trade for local businesses, jobs for local citizens. If this isn't an example of win, win -- what is? The many accomplishments of Trans Canada Trails, Trails B.C. and VISTA are prime examples of what can happen when private citizens with vision and drive work together. Yes, as I noted, much of the funding for these trails has come from various government levels. But much, too, has come from public donations from people who saw the value in these projects long before governments, some of them quite reluctantly, came to the table. To this day, even with the recognition of trails by officialdom, private individuals continue to lead the charge.

For example, we in Cowichan don't have the only saved railway bridge. Last April, Princeton area's metal Bridge of Dreams over the Tulameen River was reopened to recreational traffic. Built in 1915 as part of the Kettle Valley Railway and later deconstructed but for its concrete piers, it has been returned to service for recreational traffic. Much of the credit for the bridge's reconstruction goes to volunteers of the Vermilion Trail Society who chased down almost a million dollars in grants.

To put all this in context, let's take a quick look at the Trans Canada Trail which, in reality, isn't a single trail but a system of 400 trails "from coast to coast to coast." By 2017, Canada's 150th anniversary and the 25th year of

the TCT, the goal is to complete the missing dots across Canada. At 22,500 kilometres from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic Oceans, it'll be the longest "trail" in the world. Given Canada's mixed terrain and climate, this is a daunting challenge to say the least but one that is already well underway.

The work goes steadily on and we in the Cowichan Valley can certainly be said to have done our share with the extensive conversion to trails of our former railway lines, the building of new ones, and the rehabilitation of the Kinsol Trestle.

Speaking of which, for those readers who'd like to have a magazine cover worthy of framing, check out the current issue of CN Lines, available at the Cowichan Valley Museum gift shop.

Taken by the late and great railway photographer David Wilkie, it shows a steam locomotive pulling a load of logs across the Kinsol. The accompanying article on the trestle's rebuilding, by Victoria's well-known railway historian Bob Turner, has several other excellent photos, including the late Elwood White's iconic shot of the only passenger train ever to cross the Kinsol. It's worth every penny of the \$8 sales price!