

Kinsol Trestle: past and future

**BY JACK PEAKE, CHAIR, KINSOL TRESTLE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN
SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN**

Editor's Note: The push is on to save the Cowichan Valley's magnificent Kinsol Trestle. Every month the Citizen will bring you a special feature on the Trestle. Watch for updates, history and contests.

When I was asked to Chair the Cowichan Foundation campaign to raise \$2 million to save the spectacular Kinsol Trestle, I replied with an unhesitating, resounding YES. There are so many compelling reasons why saving the Trestle makes sense. I have made my gift to support rehabilitation of the Trestle. I hope, after reading this information, you will join me and do the same.

There aren't many opportunities in a lifetime to make a difference for generations to come. Saving the Trestle for its rich history is a powerful reason to support this campaign. I imagine school children walking across the Trestle in the years ahead. I can see them staring down at the Koksilah River through the graceful curve and weathered beams and being told of the industry, skills, audacity and sheer tenacity of those who built this engineering marvel in the wilderness. I also imagine myself going back in time, travelling by steam-powered train across the Trestle with the crews and passengers of a bygone era.

Seeing the Trestle brings history to life in such a powerful way. The Trestle is one of the few accessible and visible reminders of the early mining and logging industries on Southern Vancouver Island.

At the end of the 19th century, the race was on to build railways so that lumber and minerals could be more easily shipped nationally and internationally. Construction of the Kinsol Trestle started in 1911 when forestry had gained some ground on Vancouver Island and a more efficient way to transport the region's huge, old-growth timber was needed. The Trestle was completed by Canadian National Railways in 1920 as part of the "Gallopig Goose" rail line.

Designed by engineers but built by local farmers and loggers, the Kinsol Trestle is one of the tallest free-standing and most spectacular timber rail trestle structures in the world. At 614 feet in length and standing 145 feet above the salmon bearing Koksilah River, the Kinsol is an incredible structure worth preserving.

Equally important to me is that rehabilitating the Trestle will help our economy. Supporting the Kinsol rehabilitation is a positive way to invest short term in an infrastructure project and long term in our tourism industry both of which support small businesses in the region.

One of the most exciting economic and recreational benefits of rehabilitating the Trestle is that it will complete the "missing link" in the section of the Trans Canada Trail between Shawnigan Lake and the Town of Lake Cowichan.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the transcontinental railroad connected all Canadian provinces. Today, the 21,500-kilometre Trans Canada Trail route links every province and territory, from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic oceans.

When completed, the Trans Canada Trail will be the world's longest recreational trail, connecting close to 1,000 communities and over 33 million Canadians. The Kinsol Trestle will be part of that national link. The Kinsol Trestle is the only missing link in the section of the Cowichan Valley Trail route. Successful completion of this capital campaign and the rehabilitation of the Kinsol will allow bikers, hikers and equestrians to experience the full Trans Canada Trail in the Cowichan Region. Eventually this trail will connect to the Gallopig Goose Trail in the Capital Region and the Nanaimo trail system.

No trains have crossed the Trestle since 1979 and it has been closed to foot passengers for decades. Last maintained and repaired over 30 years ago, the Trestle has deteriorated to the point where major rehabilitation is required. In 2008, Commonwealth Historic Resource Management Limited, heritage structure experts, brought a team together consisting of timber construction experts, structural engineers, quantity surveyors and an environmental consultant to examine the Trestle. They determined that the Trestle could be rehabilitated at a cost of \$5.7 million.

The rehabilitation work will replace unsound timbers, reinforce eight structural piers and build a new 614-foot walkway atop the structure for hikers, runners, cyclists and equestrians.

The rehabilitation will ensure that the historic characteristics -- the span, height and timbered design qualities -- of this wonderful structure are preserved as the original timbers get replaced due to age and deterioration; not unlike the ongoing maintenance requirements of any active wooden trestle serving a railway line.

Included in the rehabilitation project are landscaping improvements on both ends of the Trestle, a walkway going down into the Koksilah gorge from which the true visual impact of the Trestle will be appreciated, and information kiosks that will display the proud story of the Trestle as well as the contributions of the donors.

I am excited to be working with a great group of capable, community-minded people who have joined me on the Kinsol Campaign Cabinet. They too believe that we must save the Trestle.

Together, we are asking you to donate to rehabilitate the historic Kinsol Trestle. Your gift matters. Help save history for generations to come and support our Valley economy.

KINSOL TRESTLE HISTORICAL TIMELINE:

- 1911 Canadian Northern Pacific Railway (CNPR) begins 250-mile line through southern interior of Vancouver Island linking Victoria to Port Alberni.
- 1918 Construction resumed by federal government, who took control of Canadian Northern Railway (and subsidiary, CNPR) in 1917. Downgraded to logging railway with wood trestles, rather than steel bridges.
- 1920 Construction of Trestle completed by Canadian National Railways (CNR), successor to CNPR. Featured high-level Howe Truss. Officially named Koksilah River Trestle; popular name Kinsol Trestle refers to nearby King Solomon copper mine.
- 1921 CNR ceased work, ending at south end of Cowichan Lake, half its intended length.
- 1922 Daily passenger and freight service began on main line.
- 1925 CNR builds Tidewater Subdivision to Cowichan Bay and main line extended north to Youbou and Kissinger at head of Lake Cowichan (completed 1928). Freight mainly logs and sawn lumber.
- 1931 Koksilah River floods cause extensive damage to Trestle, which is repaired by CNR.
- 1934-36 CNR repairs/rebuilds Trestle with low-level Howe Truss.
- 1950s Trucks begin to supplant railways for hauling logs on Vancouver Island.
- 1958 Major repairs to Trestle.
- 1973-74 CNR repairs Trestle for last time.
- 1979 Last train passes over Kinsol Trestle on May 30. Trestle abandoned one year later.
- 1984 Province of B.C. acquires CNR right-of-way, including Kinsol Trestle. Structural assessment and feasibility study for preservation and/or reuse undertaken.
- 1988 Fire burns portion of Trestle.
- 1999-2008 CVRD conducts several studies to see if Kinsol Trestle can be saved and to measure the economic impact of the investment. In 2008, CVRD receives final report and decides to rehabilitate Kinsol Trestle.
- June 2009 Launch of Cowichan Foundation fundraising campaign for the Kinsol Trestle rehabilitation project.