

'Rickety old bridge' on Vancouver Island getting a heritage facelift

By ROBYN SMITH The Globe and Mail
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Link to Slide Show of Globe pictures of the Trestle
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/british-columbia/the-restoration-of-the-kinsol-trestle-bridge/article1933126/?from=1933310>

From a distance, the Kinsol Trestle, with its local reputation as that "rickety old bridge," looks just about as substantial as a child's popsicle-stick construction project.

Up close, on the foot bridge, the recently restored 200-metre wooden trestle bridge is a thing of beauty – a curving wooden path above the treetops, and a melding of new timber and history.

It's been more than 30 years since anyone has crossed the 44-metre-tall bridge, which was built to support B.C.'s booming forestry industry in the 1920s. But after a major rehabilitation project involving local government, residents and railway enthusiasts, the trestle will reopen to hikers, cyclists and horseback riders this spring.

When it's completed, the trestle will link two long-separated sections of the Trans Canada Trail, between the town of Lake Cowichan and the north end of Shawnigan Lake.

For project manager Gord Macdonald, restoring the trestle is about conserving an important part of B.C.'s architectural history. He's in the business of what he calls "heritage carpentry," having worked in the past on the restoration of English castles and the early expedition huts of Antarctic explorers.

"I've lost the most sleep over this one," Mr. Macdonald said of the trestle project. "It's rough, lumpy and bumpy, and that's part of its charm."

Most of restoration work involved replacing decaying timber and adding a steel truss to support the pedestrian bridge. The historic structure of the elegantly curved trestle remains unchanged, and many of the large timbers from the original structure remain, Mr. Macdonald said.

When Jack Peake, a former mayor of the town of Lake Cowichan, arrived in the Cowichan Valley in 1975, CN rail cars still hauled piles of timber and lumber across the trestle. But by the end of the 1970s, trucks had begun to replace railways for log transport. Four years later, the trestle saw its last haul.

"The saddest day that I can recall is when that last train came up to Youbou and hauled away the last few loads," Mr. Peake said.

The trestle provided passage for the transport of old-growth Douglas fir timbers for nearly 60 years as part of the Galloping Goose rail line. But after it was no longer needed for log hauling, it was abandoned and fell into disrepair.

The province debated for years whether to tear down the deteriorating trestle, Mr. Peake said.

In 2008, the Cowichan Valley Regional District created a team that included timber-construction experts, structural engineers and an environmental consultant to create a plan for restoring the trestle. It was adopted, and construction began in June, 2010.

The restoration is slated to cost \$7.5-million, with most of the funding provided by the provincial and federal governments. A local fundraising campaign pledged to come up with \$2-million. Mr. Peake, who runs the campaign, said it's just \$250,000 short of its goal.

Mr. Peake sees the restoration of the trestle as a potential economic boost for the Cowichan Valley, and hopes

it will become a major attraction in the area's burgeoning ecotourism industry. "Today's vacation dollar is spent differently," he said.

Mr. Macdonald, a lifelong B.C. resident, said he hopes local residents can be proud of the finished trestle. "People got to know it as a rickety old bridge," he said. "But there aren't a lot of these big-scale, ambitious structures left. It really is worth fighting for."