

## **Kinsol Trestle marks historic day**

Hundreds pack inspiring former railroad bridge as people allowed back on span for first time since 1980s

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Citizen

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The Cowichan Valley's past, present and future came together on Thursday morning when the restored Kinsol Trestle opened.

The last spike was driven into the span by Mike Coleman, a lawyer and former Duncan mayor whose name was drawn following a raffle. Fittingly, he was aided by his two-year-old grandchildren, Grace and Blake. The Coleman family then had the honour of being the first to walk across, their footsteps becoming the first of millions that will use the bridge over the next century.

"This is a very powerful reminder of our history and what brought us to be the community we are today," said Cowichan Valley Regional District Chair Gerry Giles, who presided over the ceremony.

Originally constructed in 1920, the Kinsol Trestle is the largest free-standing wooden trestle in Canada, and possibly in the world, spanning 187 metres (614 feet) long



CREDIT: Kevin Rothbauer, Citizen  
Mike Coleman, who won the raffle to drive the last spike in the Kinsol Trestle and to be the first to cross the restored bridge, was joined by his wife Barbara, daughter-in-law Pam and grandchildren Grace and Blake. Hundreds more made the trek shortly after their ceremonial walk.

and standing 44 metres (145 feet) above the Koksilah River. The last train crossed the bridge in 1979, and after years of decay and vandalism, it was slated six years ago to be removed and replaced by another structure. At that point, the people of the Cowichan Valley stepped in.

"The community has said, 'we've got to keep this wonderful piece of our history,'" said Parksville-Qualicum MLA Ron Cantelon, representing the provincial government.

Concerned Valley residents came forward and pursued funding, chipping in with their own money as well. Among the campaign's most vocal leaders was Cowichan Valley historian T.W. Paterson, who was at a loss for words to describe his feelings on Thursday, despite the fact that he makes his living as a writer.

"When you are really put to the test with an emotional challenge, what do you say?" he said. "Words sometimes seem cheap and meaningless. I'm still grappling with it; that's the magnitude of it. This is truly a great day."

Paterson was amazed by how the community and all levels of government answered the call to have the trestle restored.

"I've never seen anything like it," he said.

The \$7.2-million project received funding from the federal and provincial governments, the CVRD, the Island Coastal Economic Trust and the Trans Canada Trail Foundation. Additional funds are being raised from community members through the Cowichan Foundation, which has already generated well over half of its goal of \$2 million. That money will go toward enhancing the trestle and its surroundings.

"So many people and groups shared an idea to preserve this important aspect of the Cowichan Valley's history," Giles noted.

Paterson believes that the trestle will return that money to the local economy through the growing field of heritage tourism. "We want the old girl now to pay her way. She can do that by drawing visitors to the Valley."

Valley residents and tourists alike will get to enjoy the trestle, which Giles called "the jewel in the crown of the Cowichan Valley trail system," by hiking, running, cycling or riding horses to and across it. The span is a key connector in the 23,000-

kilometre Trans Canada Trail network, as evidenced by the Trans Canada Trail Foundation's \$250,000 contribution.

"We believe in this project, just as you have," said Trans Canada Trail Foundation chair Jim Bishop. "We are committed to bringing Canadians together."

As were the original builders of the trestle, as Giles remarked during the opening ceremony.

"When you pause and think about them building this, it was built with great ingenuity, with blood, with sweat, with tears," she said. "There was no heavy machinery to do the lifting at the time."

Paterson acknowledged the creators of the bridge as well, as he stood atop the structure.

"The men who built this trestle, we don't even know their names," he said. "What a tragedy. But look at this work."

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