

A 13-month restoration project comes to a successful conclusion as Kinsol Trestle reopens

By Kathryn Burnham, timescolonist.com July 28, 2011 10:13 PM

A side view of the grand reopening of the Kinsol Trestle.
Photograph by: Arnold Lim, timescolonist.com

Just five years ago the Kinsol Trestle seemed doomed. On Thursday, a reopening ceremony proved wrong anyone who doubted that a wooden bridge could still serve a community 90 years after its construction. Restoration work that began 13 months ago managed to



salvage about 45 per cent of the trestle's existing wood.

While it was former Duncan mayor Mike Coleman, accompanied by his two-year-old twin grandchildren, who made the first official crossing of the bridge in 32 years, he was followed closely by many members of the community who had taken on the cause.

Local support raised \$1.8 million, and came from individual donations as well as the Island Coastal Economic Trust, the Cowichan Valley Regional District and the Trans Canada Trail Foundation. The federal and provincial governments kicked in the rest of the \$7.2 million needed for the project.

"It is great when the government can come to the table and support the generosity of the community — the generosity and energy of the community," said Ron Cantelon, Liberal MLA for Parksville-Qualicum.

"It's a piece of engineering work, but also a piece of art, really. The community saw that and so we needed to support it," he said.

In particular, it was the owners of Macdonald and Lawrence Timber Framing Ltd. who endorsed this project as their cause, taking the initiative to prove that restoration was possible.

"It is a very worthy cause," said Steve Lawrence, the company's production manager. "It's a marvellous piece of industrial heritage."

After examining the neglected bridge, Lawrence said it was "too good to be taken down" and persuaded the Cowichan Valley Regional District to look at restoration as a serious option.

"At that point, it really started to pick up momentum and a lot of the community got behind the project and pushed it to happen," he said.

The restoration work on the trestle, which is 45 metres high and spans 187 metres, was anything but simple.

"It has kept us on our toes and made us think," Lawrence said.

The challenge included lifting parts of the trestle to replace old beams with new ones.

This was possible because the new bridge actually spans the old structure, without sitting on top of it.

The final product uses only 17 of the original 46 vertical bents, meaning the old trestle isn't burdened with carrying the weight of those using the bridge.

Completion of the bridge — which is open to the public — enables runners, cyclists and horses to use the Cowichan Valley Trail to go between Shawnigan Lake and Lake Cowichan — a distance of 70 kilometres.

The trestle is part of the Trans Canada Trail, a proposed 18,078-kilometre corridor that goes all the way to St. John's, N.L.

The bridge is reinforced with steel as part of "significant, but sympathetic upgrades to the structure to make sure it's safe for the public to use," Lawrence said. "We really tried to do so in a way that doesn't detract from the overall character of the bridge and the sense of place."

The new wood used in the structure was taken from the Alberni Valley and milled locally and on the mainland.

The opening event attracted cyclists, walkers and even some tourists, all checking out the tallest wooden rail trestle in Canada. Gerry Giles, chairwoman of the Cowichan Valley Regional District board, said she hopes the trestle will contribute to tourism.

"If you came out and looked at this structure when it was in disrepair, you couldn't help [but] still marvel at the engineering and the blood, sweat and tears our pioneering families put into building this trestle," Giles said. "To tear it down, to me, would have been a sad commentary of the value we place on history."

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