

Kinsol Trestle

Location: Cowichan Valley Trail, Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia, Canada

Formally Recognized: 2009/06/10

Other Names: Koksilah River Trestle

Construction Dates: 1914-1920



North Side View of the Kinsol Trestle

Statement of Significance for Kinsol Trestle

Description of Historic Place

The historic place is the Kinsol Trestle (also known as the Koksilah River Trestle), a large timber crossing over the Koksilah River that was built by the Canadian National Railways. The historic place includes the trestle structure, its concrete foundations, the river banks beneath it and nearby, and the two approaches at the top of the banks. A trestle first spanned the river at this location in 1920. The present structure is the product of several subsequent partial rebuildings, the last being in 1958. It has stood unused and unmaintained since 1979. The Trestle is situated in a rural area within the Cowichan Valley Regional District on southeastern Vancouver Island. It is owned by the BC Ministry of Transport.

Heritage Value

The historic place has value for its scientific / engineering features, for its socio-economic / historical associations, and for its cultural and spiritual qualities.

As a work of engineering, the Kinsol Trestle has heritage value as an extant representative of the manner in which Canadian railways built large timber structures across deep ravines and for (reportedly) being the highest and possibly the largest surviving timber trestle in Canada. The technology used tried and true components and assembly methods, combining them in a unique configuration that responded to the particular conditions.

The railway's engineers used large old-growth Douglas-fir timbers to create a hybrid structure that combines 8 parallel low-level Howe Trusses (built in 1934) resting on concrete piers and supporting six decks of framed trestlework. The spans at either side of the trusses consist of multi-decked timber bents. A total of 46 bents combine for a length of 614 feet and a maximum height of 145 feet, all aligned in a 7-degree curve.

The present assembly replaced the original high-level Howe Truss (1919-20) in a pragmatic response to damage by high waters in 1931. The patchwork of repairs and the changing techniques of repair and replacement are also representative of trestle maintenance and speak to long-term usage.

The trestle also has aesthetic value for the sublime elegance of its scale and gentle curve, for the dramatic impact of 'discovering' the trestle from the two approaches, and for the patina of its weathered and deteriorating timbers.

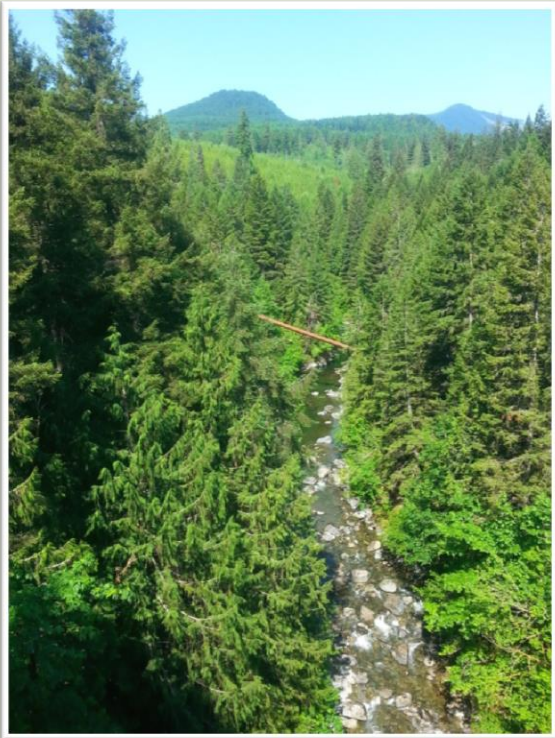
As a relic of twentieth-century transportation history, the trestle has value for illustrating the national optimism over resource extraction, primarily timber resources. It provides a window into the logging industry and to anticipated agricultural settlement in the Cowichan Valley and the southern interior of Vancouver Island. Part of a permanent line begun in 1911 by the Canadian Northern Pacific Railway, in direct competition to the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway, the Kinsol Trestle was begun in 1914 and finally completed in 1920 by the Canadian Northern's successor, the Canadian National Railways. Abandoned when the line was closed in 1979, the trestle's proposed new use (or replacement) as a recreational trail represents the eclipse of the resource economy by the leisure and tourism economies.

Character-Defining Elements

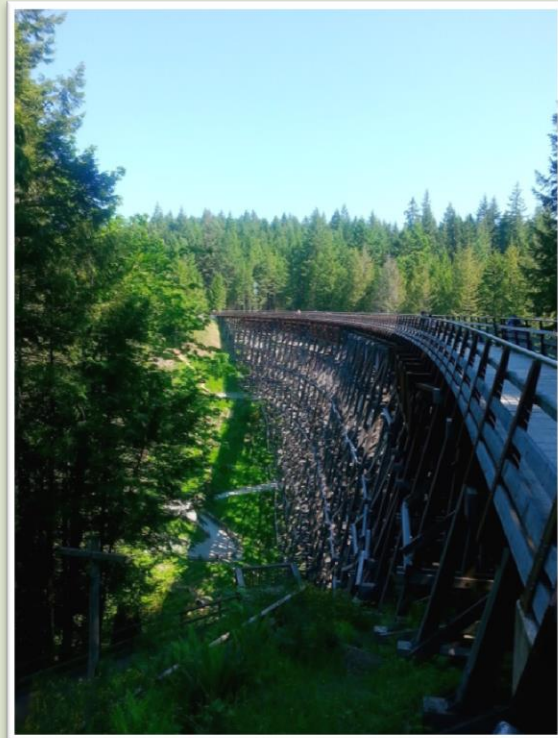
The character-defining elements of the Kinsol Trestle include:

- Immense scale and complexity
- Common techniques of timber trestle construction evident in the Trestle, including the multi-decked framed and braced bents with inclined outer posts and intermediate sills and girts (struts) defining the intermediate decks (storeys); the bracing together of groups of bents for form towers; the eight Howe trusses; the caps and stringers that form the top deck; and the mud sills at the base.

- Large timbers of coastal Douglas fir, discoloured by preservatives, weathering, and the patina of age
- Wide, curved, flat bridge deck with strong horizontal emphasis
- Barrel stands to support water barrels for fire-fighting
- Complex connections, some with metal hardware such as shoes and washers
- Limited use of concrete for piers, abutments, and foundations
- Unique numbers hand-chiselled into primary timbers
- Tool/blade marks on the timbers
- Inspection ladders
- Signs of damage and neglect, including the damage from the 1988 arson
- The Koksilah River flowing below
- The steep banks at either side of the river
- Clean uncluttered approaches along former rail right of way
- The dramatic views of the curved trestle from both approaches
- View of the trestle from the banks



East View from the Kinsol Trestle



Full View of the Kinsol Trestle

Historical Information

Timeline

- 1911. The Canadian Northern Pacific Railway (CNPR) begins to build a permanent 250-mile line through the southern interior of Vancouver Island, intending to link Victoria, via Sooke Lake and Cowichan Lake, to Port Alberni.
- 1914. The CNPR begins construction of a steel viaduct over the Koksilah River. This is abandoned, only partially rebuilt, when construction on the line is suspended in August 1914.
- 1918. Construction of the line is resumed by the federal government, which has taken control of the Canadian Northern Railway (and its subsidiary, the CNPR) in 1917. The end of World War I later that year caused the collapse of the spruce market (used for airplanes) and reduced the economic importance of the Vancouver Island line, which was downgraded to a logging railway with wood trestles, rather than a main line with steel bridges.
- 1920. Construction of the wood trestle is completed (February) by the Canadian National railways (CNR), successor to the CNPR. This initial trestle featured a high-level Howe Truss. The CNR calls it the 'Koksilah River Trestle'; the popular name 'Kinsol Trestle' refers to the nearby Kinsol (KING SOLomon) copper mine.
- 1934. The CNR repairs/rebuilds the trestle to a modified design, with a low-level Howe Truss.
- 1935. (-1936) Further major repairs / rebuilding is done to the trestle.
- 1958. Major repairs are done to the trestle.
- 1973. (-1974) The CNR inspects and does major repairs to the Kinsol Trestle for the last time.
- 1979. May 30; The last train passes over the Kinsol Trestle. The CNR abandons it a year later.
- 1984. The Province of BC acquires the CNR ROW, including the Kinsol Trestle, for transportation, utility, and recreation purposes. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Culture undertake a structural assessment and feasibility study for preservation and/or reuse.
- 1988. June 26; Fire burns a portion of the deck and structure of the trestle.
- 1999. (-2010) After years of neglect and vandalism, the CVRD is commissioned to restore the Kinsol Trestle for park use. The BC Gov. proposes to remove the trestle, but it was determined that rehabilitation will take place instead.
- 2011. July 28; Rehabilitation of the Kinsol Trestle finishes with a grand re-opening.

Current Information

Function

- As a new addition to the Cowichan Valley Regional Trail, the Kinsol Trestle is currently used for recreational purposes including hiking, cycling, and equestrian activities.
- The Kinsol Trestle is managed by the CVRD under the Regional Parks program.
- For more information visit: www.cvrld.bc.ca/parks under Regional Parks.

Construction

- The Kinsol Trestle was rehabilitated through a joint project between the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Government of Canada, and the Province of British Columbia.

Heritage Status

- The Kinsol Trestle is nationally recognized for its heritage value on the Canadian Register of Historic Places
- The Kinsol Trestle is provincially recognized for its heritage value on the BC Register of Historic Places.



View of the Cowichan Valley Regional Trail along the Kinsol Trestle