

Cowichan Valley's Kinsol trestle restoration to be complete next month

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The restoration of the Kinsol trestle, one of the largest wooden bridges in the world, will be complete next month and the span, which has been closed for 22 years, will be open to the public later in the spring.

The bridge, which crosses the Koksilah River in the Cowichan Valley, is 187 metres long and 44 metres high, and has had extensive repairs and renovations, with the addition of steel trusses and 288,000 board feet of new timber.

It was an ambitious and rewarding project, said Gord Macdonald, managing director of Macdonald and Lawrence Timber Framing Ltd., based in Mill Bay.

"It's been going absolutely fabulous," Macdonald said of the project on Tuesday.

"It's definitely kept me awake at night on several occasions but it's been a tremendous amount of fun."

The trestle restoration has been the focus of Macdonald's life for more than a year. "I'm a little bit reluctant to move on," he said.

The challenges include co-ordinating the repair and rehabilitation of the timber structure with a new steel superstructure. The steel supports strengthened the trestle without workers having to go over every single bolt, thereby making the repairs less expensive.

"There are two designs that have to be married together quite carefully," said Macdonald.

"Our solution has been to repair a small number of ... cross sections to a very high standard and then span between them with new structural steel. We don't have to do as much replacement of wood."

The new, yellow wood is a stark contrast to the older, silver wood timbers, but time will make the trestle look more uniform, Macdonald said.

The project is expected to be completed at the end of March but a formal opening could be months away, after landscaping is completed on the approaches to the trestle.

The trestle was completed in 1920 by the Canadian National Railway. The last train crossed the trestle in 1979 and CNR abandoned the trestle a year later. In 2008, Cowichan Valley Regional District decided to rehabilitate the trestle. The province contributed \$3.4 million, the federal government \$1.9 million, and the CVRD \$600,000. In addition, the Island Coastal Economic Trust raised \$600,000.

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