

Cowichan district needs help to restore old trestle

By Darrell Bellaart, The Daily News
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It will cost \$2M to fix the structure and put trail across it

The call is going out for help restoring the historic Kinsol wooden train trestle near Shawnigan Lake.

The Cowichan Foundation, a non-profit society, wants to raise \$2 million to fix the trestle and put a hiking trail across it.

Its restoration would finish the 120-kilometre Cowichan Valley Trail, the Cowichan Valley Regional District's contribution to the 200 km southern Vancouver Island portion of the Trans Canada Trail. The trail route runs from Departure Bay in Nanaimo to Victoria, where it becomes the Galloping Goose Trail.

At 44 metres in height, the Kinsol Trestle is one of the tallest such structures in Canada, but no trains have used it since 1979. Hikers using the Trans-Canada Trail now have to traverse about 10 km through difficult terrain to cross the Koksilah River.

"We're looking for support for this, quite frankly, across Canada, if not North America," said Brian Farquhar, CVRD parks and trails manager.

"We believe it is of national heritage significance."

Curving six degrees as it spans 188 metres across the gorge north of Shawnigan Lake, the 89-year-old bridge towers more than 14 storeys from the gorge bottom below, dwarfing towering Douglas firs.

It is the last and largest of eight trestles to be repaired along the rail line that was originally planned to serve Port Alberni. The line ends at Youbou, where the project was shelved during the Great Depression, then was killed after the Second World War, when automobiles supplanted rail travel.

Although the trestle is unsafe, engineers say it can be fixed with sufficient funding. The goal is to create a new 200-metre pathway for hikers, cyclists and horseback riders. Unsound timbers will be replaced and the structure reinforced, but organizers plan to preserve the trestle's historic characteristics, including the span, height and timbered design qualities of the original structure.

"I look forward to the day I'm looking at the rehabilitated trestle and I'm standing in the middle of it looking down at history and booking back and forth both ways at the future," said Jack Peake, who is heading up the fundraising campaign.

The province of B.C., which owns the railway, has already committed \$1.6 million from its Localmotion funding program, \$1.5 million from the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and \$1 million from the \$50-million Island Coastal Economic Trust fund created to bolster the Island economy.

The fundraising goal includes \$340,000 to create an endowment fund, which the CVRD would use for ongoing maintenance costs.

DBellaart@nanaimodailynews.com

250-729-4235

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