

Celebrating B.C.'s Built Heritage



Kinsol Trestle, 2019.

Photo credit: Lindsay Foreman.



THE KINSOL TRESTLE

Cowichan Valley Regional District

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Logging train on the Kinsol Trestle, 1958.
Photo credit: David Wilkie.

When the Canadian National Railway (CNR) abandoned its Cowichan Subdivision corridor in 1979, the Province of B.C. became its new owner. After the corridor was decommissioned, various organizations and individuals started petitioning the provincial and federal governments to officially designate the Kinsol Trestle as a heritage structure. Unfortunately, in the 1980s and 1990s, the standards for determining heritage value, specifically, 'a unique example of railway engineering,' could not be applied to the Kinsol Trestle. This bridge was considered to be 'representative' of its time and therefore was not eligible for heritage status.

In 1982, the province approved, in principle, the acquisition of this abandoned CNR right-of-way; it was officially acquired in 1984. That same year, the Heritage Branch reviewed the Kinsol Trestle and observed:

it has been recommended by the public and the press that the Trestle be designated a heritage site under Sec. 4 of the Heritage Conservation Act . . . in the public mind, this Ministry would be under a moral obligation to refurbish and maintain the structure.

The report concluded by recommending that an alternate designation be placed on the Kinsol Trestle – a *Notification of Interest – Extended Term*, which would be effective for five years. With a *Notification of Interest*, the Kinsol Trestle would not receive any maintenance.

Once a well-maintained working railway bridge, the Kinsol Trestle was ignored by the Province until 2006, when it was announced that \$1.5 million had been set aside to dismantle it. This action was meant to mitigate any potential liability issues resulting from the deterioration of the bridge between 1979 and 2006. The Province suggested that the Kinsol Trestle be replaced by an imitation bridge, constructed with all new materials and with fewer bents. Dubbed “Kinsol Lite” by the media, this bridge could not compare with the original.

Nearly three decades of commissioned reports, feasibility studies, petitions, exhibitions, and media coverage could not sway the provincial decision makers. The potential tourism draw and projected regional revenue was not a compelling enough argument for the conservation and designation of the Kinsol Trestle. As such, the 2006 provincial announcement resulted in a firestorm of letter writing by public and political restoration advocates, a last-ditch effort campaign.

And it worked! With committed stakeholders, community support, and a talented timber framing team that specialized in the conservation and repair of historic wood buildings, the Kinsol Trestle was finally rehabilitated in 2010-2011. Not surprisingly, it has become a popular destination for locals and tourists alike, with more than 150,000 visitors each year. Not even the COVID-19 pandemic can keep people away!



The Kinsol Trestle turned 100 in February 2020; it is a true survivor. During its life, the Kinsol Trestle has overcome vandalism, fire, severe neglect, and the effects of encroaching nature. Many of B.C.'s historic wood buildings and bridges have come and gone, but the Kinsol Trestle remains.

To learn more about the Kinsol Trestle's story, visit the Shawnigan Lake Museum on your next visit to the Cowichan Valley.

Resources

Abandoned, Then Embraced: The Kinsol Trestle, Virtual Museum of Canada Community Stories, www.communitystories.ca/v1/pm_v2.php?id=exhibit_home&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000722

Kinsol Trestle Fire, 1988.

Photo credit:
Shawnigan Lake Museum.

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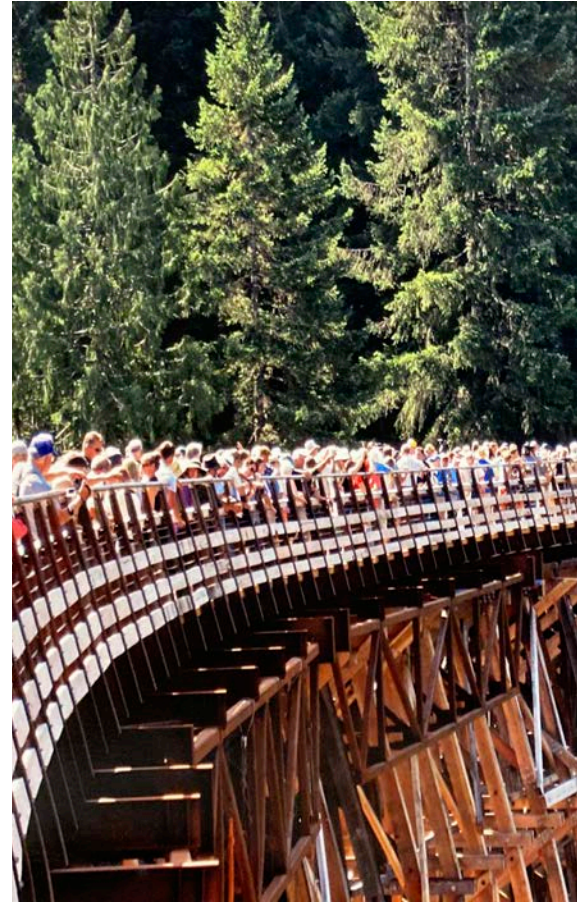
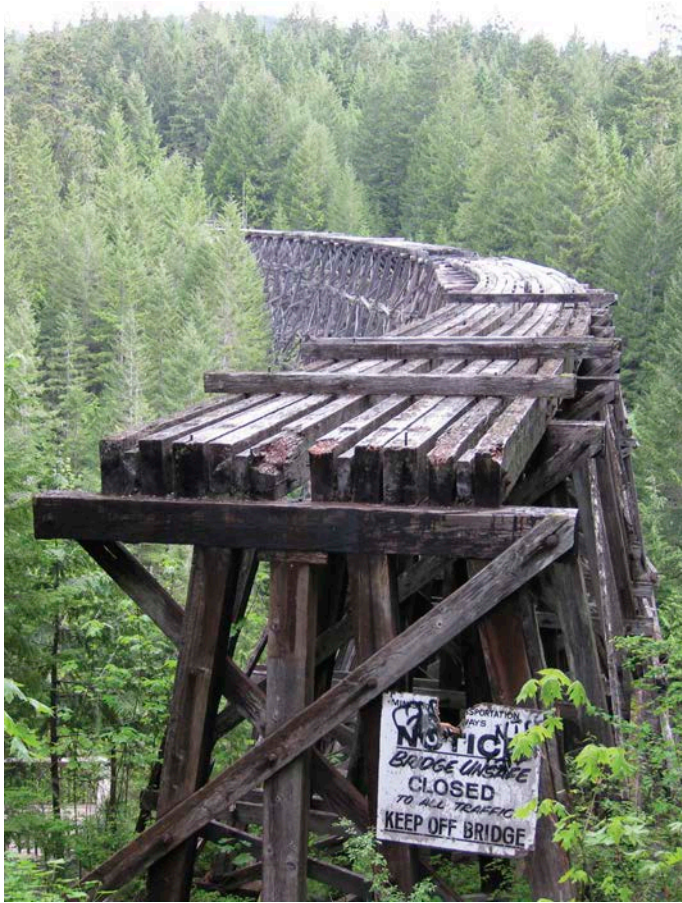
Poor, inaccessible condition of the Kinsol Trestle, 2006.

Photo credit:
Shawnigan Lake Museum.

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Rehabilitated Kinsol Trestle crowd on Opening Day, 2011.

Photo credit:
Shawnigan Lake Museum.



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