

Kinsol restoration due to a ‘perfect storm’

By [Ashley Degraaf](#) - Cowichan News Leader Pictorial

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It has become the object of many a Cowichanian’s love affair.

And it came to be saved due to a number of curious but exhilarating events.

Local historian and trestle devotee Tom Paterson goes as far as to coin the victory in the battle to restore the Kinsol Trestle a “perfect storm.”

Thronged of people gathered Thursday to celebrate the reopening of Cowichan’s “Jewel in the Crown” of the Trans-Canada Trail with former Duncan mayor Mike Coleman driving the ceremonial last spike and leading the first public charge across the revamped rail line structure.

“So many have done a lot,” a modest Paterson said Wednesday.

But when pressed, the local history buff pointed to a crucial save-the-trestle petition launched by locals Dave Elliot and Marlene Spaeth.

It eventually gathered 17,000 names and was presented to the legislature by former Malahat/Juan de Fuca MLA John Horgan.

Also between 1999 to 2008, the Cowichan Valley Regional District spearheaded several studies on the cost of restoration and the possible economic impact of restoration investment. This came both before and after a 2006 Ministry of Transportation’s news flash the trestle was dangerous and therefore should be demolished.

Paterson was among the many heritage and railway buffs who knew the structure — which operated from 1920 to 1979 — was one of the four largest wooden structures in the world.

He, like many Cowichan folk, agonized for weeks about what to do.

“I had no clue as to what you have to do to save a derelict trestle,” Paterson said.

After reading an editorial in the News Leader Pictorial urging the CVRD to step up, Paterson’s passion fueled him to start researching.

“The first thing I did was Google,” he said. “I started looking for allies.”

And followers he found during his web surfings.

Although Paterson didn’t follow up with any of the biker, hiker, horseback rider groups chatting about the trestle, he discovered the Cowichan gem was getting shout outs from all over the world, including Australia.

“The more I Googled, the more ripples I got.”



Duncan’s Hal Adam pedals his recumbent tricycle across the Kinsol Trestle yesterday as a big crowd turned out to celebrate the official opening of the \$7.2-million restored heritage bridge, which will connect the central and northern portions of Cowichan’s Trans-Canada route to those sections south of the Koksilah River.

Paterson became an advocate, began showing his face at CVRD meetings and the television news and was quoted in several newspaper outlets.

“Everyone I talked to who saw the trestle was in absolute awe of it,” he said.

One such Cowichanian was Gord Macdonald of Macdonald & Lawrence Timber Framing, who eventually became the contractor for the restoration project.

“It never really occurred to anyone to ask the question, ‘What is the minimum that could be done in order to conserve the Kinsol and preserve it?’” Macdonald said.

Also in the mix was David Pollock.

Pollock, a heritage contractor from Victoria, happened to be at home with a broken leg watching the bootube, Paterson explained.

He saw T.W. being interviewed on TV about the trestle and was hooked.

The two are now good buddies.

“He’s a pit-bull,” Paterson described. “He got the private phone numbers for many government officials and would call them at home and yes, he may have alienated some people and ruffled some feathers, but he hit gold.”

During one particular phone call, Pollock found out about a fellow named Ralph Morris.

Morris happened to be the chief bridge engineer responsible for the Kinsol Trestle, and who had retired in Edmonton.

Pollock and Paterson got a hold of Morris’ plans on the trestle, which Morris had decided to donate to the Cowichan museum. “That set of plans was critical to Macdonald and Lawrence’s presentation. It was everything they needed from an engineer’s standpoint... dimensions, measurements, etc.”

M&L then made a presentation to the CVRD, which, in Paterson’s point of view, established concrete details and a trust with the locals pushing restoration.

Paterson recalls CVRD chairwoman, and then Cobble Hill Director Gerry Giles saying at that particular meeting, “We owe it to history.”

From there, government grants rolled in, and local support kept sailing.

In June 2009, the Cowichan Foundation launched a fundraising campaign.

The \$7.2-million restoration project included replacing unsound timber, reinforcing 17 structural piers, and finishing a new 614-foot walkway atop the structure for hikers, cyclists and equestrians.

Landscaping, a walkway into the Koksilah River canyon, and an information kiosk are also in the plan.

Paterson salutes many key figures in the effort. They include the late Jack Fleetwood, who bid to save the trestle in 1984, Richard Pope, who carried the torch from 1986 to 1990, and former CVRD chairman Jack Peake, who, according to Paterson, once said, I’d rather pay \$500,000 to save the trestle, rather than spend \$5 to tear it down.

Paterson maintains tourism dollars will roll in if the trestle is promoted properly.

“I’ve argued all along that the trestle will one day pay for itself.

“Now I say to the trestle, it’s your turn.”