MEZIADIN FISH LADDERS

In 2011 the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine recognized the Meziadin Fish Ladders as a heritage site by adding it to its Community Heritage Registry.

The current facility was built in 1966 by Fisheries and Oceans Canada to replace an earlier fish ladder built in 1914. This site is significant to the Regional District as a representation of the importance of salmon to the region and the history of fisheries enhancement.

In 1912, C.P. Hickman, Provincial Fisheries Inspector, travelled to the Meziadin River from Stewart on his annual investigation of the Nass River. In his report to W.J. Bowser, Provincial Commissioner of Fisheries, Hickman noted the need of a fish ladder because of the “great difficulty” the fish had in passing over the falls.

The original fishway, built in 1914, was made by blasting out a channel parallel to the river and building a series of cross-channel concrete weirs that created five pools, each with a rise of about two feet. The original fishway was only 126 feet long and 20–30 feet wide. Though the original structure increased the number of salmon reaching the spawning beds, in some years of low water, many fish still died. As a result, in 1966, the original structure was removed and replaced with a longer fishway that spanned the entire length of the falls. The current fishway is a 670-foot-long concrete structure with a series of 33 ascending pools that enable fish to bypass the falls and reach the spawning grounds beyond.

The falls of the Meziadin River have long been a seasonal fishing site for local First Nations. In his 1912 report, Hickman noted that several families were camping “on the north bank of the Meziadin River at the falls and there catch and smoke a winter’s supply of salmon.” Today, local First Nations still dip-net salmon from the river downstream of the fish ladder.

The Meziadin River flows from Meziadin Lake and enters the Nass River only 500 metres below the fish ladders. The Nass River supports all five species of Pacific salmon and the Meziadin system produces 70–80% of the sockeye salmon in the river. On average, about 200,000 sockeye are counted annually at the facility.

Today, Fisheries and Oceans Canada in conjunction with local First Nations operate the fish ladder facility. Operation of the enumeration station usually begins in early July and ends in early October. During this time the public can view salmon attempting to jump over the weir at the bottom of the fish ladder on their way upstream.