

The Maentwrog (Coed y Bleiddiau) Living Willow Wolf. - March 2010

Beryl had already created a wicker sculpture of a howling wolf which stood in the Coedydd Maentwrog National Nature Reserve at the top of the magnificent oak woods. It had been beside the main footpath and the Ffestiniog Railway in a part of the woods known as Coed y Bleiddiau (wood of the wolves), where local legend has it that this was the place where the last wolf in Wales was killed.

The wicker wolf had a definite life span and a definite purpose. As the wicker wolf gradually reached then end of its life, we watched sadly and started contemplating life without the wolf, when someone came up with the suggestion of replacing it with a permanent living willow sculpture.

I rang Beryl, who was instantly enthusiastic and who immediately had various very useful ideas about the proposed new sculpture. She felt that it would be best done in a sitting, howling position which would lend itself better to the way that living willow wants to grow. She also suggested that, rather than having a sculpture that you simply stood and admired, the sculpture could be constructed in such a way that it was inter-active, in other words so that it was hollow inside with openings at the front in the space between the front legs and at the tip of the tail so that people could actually get inside it. Beryl said that she would produce some drawings for us to have some idea of what she had envisaged.

The drawings, and the quality of Beryl's website was enough to convince the person in CCW who held the purse strings to proceed with the project, provided the price was right. Beryl produced a very favourable quote to supply the materials for the sculpture and to construct it, and the deal was clinched and an order issued but with a tight deadline for when the project had to be completed and invoiced (end of financial year).

On the appointed day, Beryl arrived in Maentwrog with everything required to construct the wolf, a plethora of bits and pieces of willow poles, tree tying twine, scissors, metal bars for making holes, secateurs, the ground mat for mulching the ground, knives, buckets, watering cans, in fact everything that was required. The wolf was erected and complete within 5 days, quite an achievement especially since it required over 400 8 inch deep holes to be made a regular intervals in rocky ground as the sculpture progressed. She was lucky with the weather during that week, but I had the definite impression that Beryl would have carried on working whatever the weather, as the deadline for completion was rapidly approaching.

All in all, because of Beryl's well organised approach, the project went smoothly and

efficiently as planned and was completed and invoiced as per the deadline. Now 5 weeks later, and following a long period of dry weather, the willow poles which make up the wolf sculpture are all growing leaves and a mist of green is developing around the skeletal structure and filling it out. Beryl has kindly agreed to return to replace any poles that don't strike, and to help us carry out the first trim on the wolf, necessary annually to keep it in shape.

It was a pleasure working with Beryl on the project, both in terms of her very pleasant company, her in depth knowledge about the materials she's dealing with and her efficiency and organisation. The project was completed on time and to budget, and we were left with detailed instructions on caring for the sculpture, especially in its first year.

Doug Oliver - Senior Reserve Manager
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