

The Churnside Projects

1989-1994

Joanna Winterburn - Project Co-ordinator

This was a 5 year environmental project over a 6 acre site including a lake at the Churnside Adventure Centre, Gloucestershire. The project was an initiative created by Grosvenor Youth Club of which Joanna was a member and a Trustee.

Aims of project

To create a nature reserve and area of interest for those visiting the Churnside Adventure Centre incorporating the planting of over 3,000 native trees, the creation of an ornamental arboretum, the reinstatement of a lake and creation of a conservation area.

There were several elements to this project:

- Lake
- Shelter belt and Arboretum
- Conservation and wildlife area
- Ornamental arboretum
- Adventure course
- Horticultural scheme
- (Phase 2 - Environmental Education)

Lake

The biggest challenge for this project was to dredge a severely silted up lake had up to 2 meters of silt in some places, not to mention tyres, rubbish and debris that had been deposited in the lake. As part of the reinstatement of the lake the weir required significant repair, the sluice and silt gate had to be refurbished and the banks shored up.

This cost £3,500 of which a large portion was provided from a grant that Joanna successfully applied for. The rest was from 8 months of hard fundraising by members of the youth club. This was the only part of the project that required specialist contractors using machinery equipped for dredging.

THE LAKE (OCT 1989)



THE LAKE (SEPT 1990)



Shelter Belt

The shelter belt and arboretum was designed to protect the lake and nature reserve from the wind. It was planted up with over 600 indigenous and non indigenous trees of 20 different species, planted in 8 bands growing to different heights. The shelter belt contained trees such as dogwood, hornbeam and sycamore and also provided food and shelter as well as protection. The shelter belt was hedged with over 200 meters of hedgerow together with post and rail fencing for protection.



Conservation and wildlife area

Extending from the shelter belt of trees down to the lakeside this area was carefully planted to provide food, shelter and protection for a wide variety of mammals, birds, insects and amphibians. The area was carefully planted with selected shrubs, wild flowers and grasses and was designed as a no go area except for maintenance and field study.

Ornamental Arboretum

The ornamental arboretum contained nearly 90 ornamental trees most of which were sponsored by supporters of the project. The arboretum, designed by members of the youth club, had an Acer Avenue and mentoring pathways bringing you to

each tree with a descriptive plaque. Trees included *Corylus avellana contorta*, Liquidambar, *Ginkgo biloba* and *Quercus robur*. The area was also planted to ground shrubs and wild flowers adding to those already identified on the site.

Adventure Course

The adventure course was an important factor to the overall development of Churnside, incorporating the Churnside Camp facilities hired out to schools and youth groups.

The construction of the course, replacing an derelict and dangerous course that was already there, gave every consideration to the conservation of the existing woodland, maintenance of natural vegetation and the protection of the wildlife. It was designed to blend in with the area using natural materials, landscaping and camouflage.

The Adventure course had two main benefits in that it provided a much needed facility for visitors to Churnside and a distraction from the conservation areas.

The course included a 30m long tunnel, climbing walls and zip slide.

Horticultural Scheme

The horticultural scheme was designed to create an income that would support the project as moved away from grant funded initiatives.

The construction of an 1800 square foot nursery bed enabled the project to grow 450 pot grown Christmas trees with drip irrigation. The Christmas trees started to show a return after 2 years. The plan was also to propagate a variety of pot grown wild flower, shrubs and trees, plus flowers for drying and hanging baskets.

Phase 2 Environmental Education (1994 onwards)

It was intended that this project and site be used for environmental education purposes serving schools, youth groups and conservation enthusiasts. Included in this plan were a mobile centre to promote environmental awareness through visits and talks, and at Churnside it was to include way markers nature trails, bird watching hides and observation points. Sadly the youth club was facing its own difficulties losing its home of several years and financial pressures, and was not able to initiate phase 2 of the project.