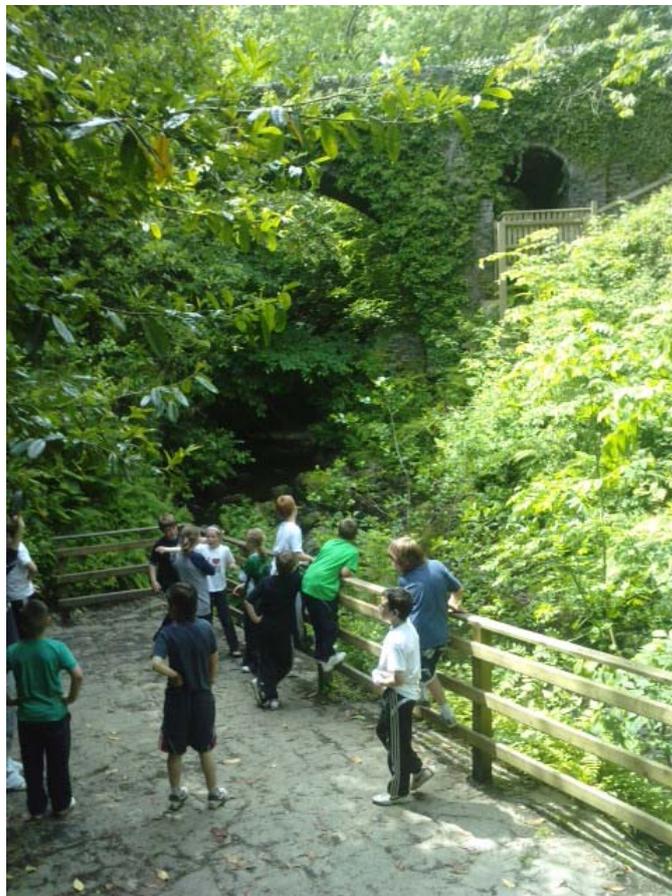


Dún a Rí
Sculptural Commission
Joey Burns, Irish Wood Sculpture

Artist Statement

Dún a Rí is a beautiful forest park outside Kingscourt in County Cavan. As a very important local amenity with a rich history and ecological life, it is popular with locals and the many visitors it attracts. Dún a Rí has a number of mapped walks revealing the mysteries of the forest environment and taking visitors through a series of stunning views.

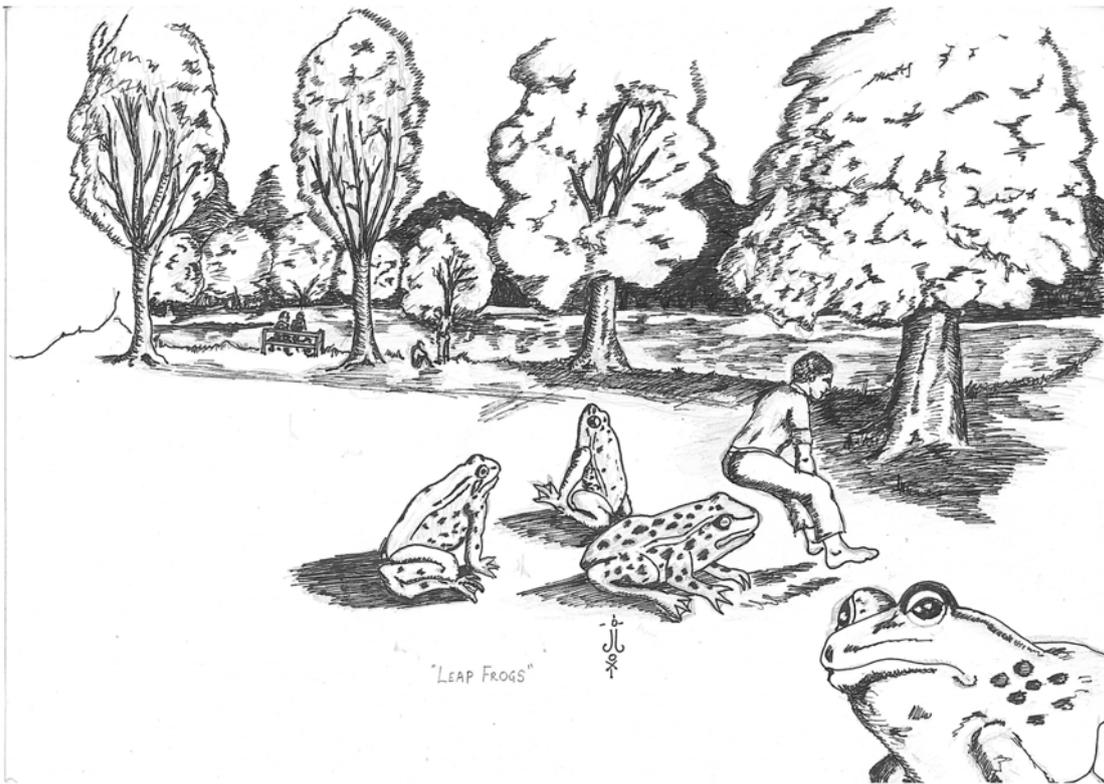


On a recent visit to Dún a Rí with Cavan Arts Office the upkeep of the grounds and the lack of litter was remarkable. Several coach-loads of school children were taking guided tours of the park, and it was a very encouraging and uplifting to see young people revelling in the freedom and splendour of the park. Tour guides reported that they did not cover any educational aspects about the forest and its ecological environment. They took designated routes arriving at landmark features

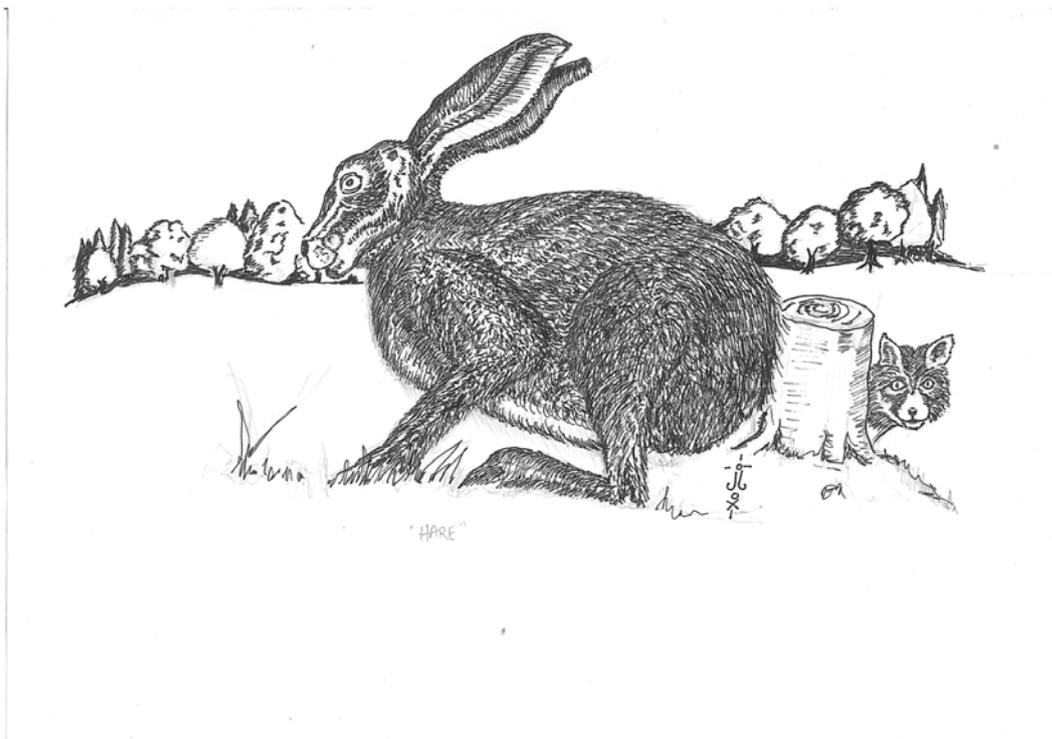
like “Rabbits Bridge” waterfall and the old military barracks, and gave a brief local history of each site. This investigation of the tours inspired me to bring about a greater awareness and appreciation of the ecological aspects of the Park through my work, but also to enhance the forests magical, enchanted nature. I began to conceive of interactive sculptures of indigenous creatures of the forest with reference to food and habitat.



Above is a prototype “Leap frog” out of wet lime and sealed it with oil to show the potential and scale of the proposed sculptures. I propose to sculpt a series of seven wildlife creatures: a series of frogs, a pine martin, fox, hare, badger and an otter. Below are preliminary sketches for sculptures of frogs, a hare, a badger and a pine martin. Suggestions are welcome from schools, the public and Coillte.



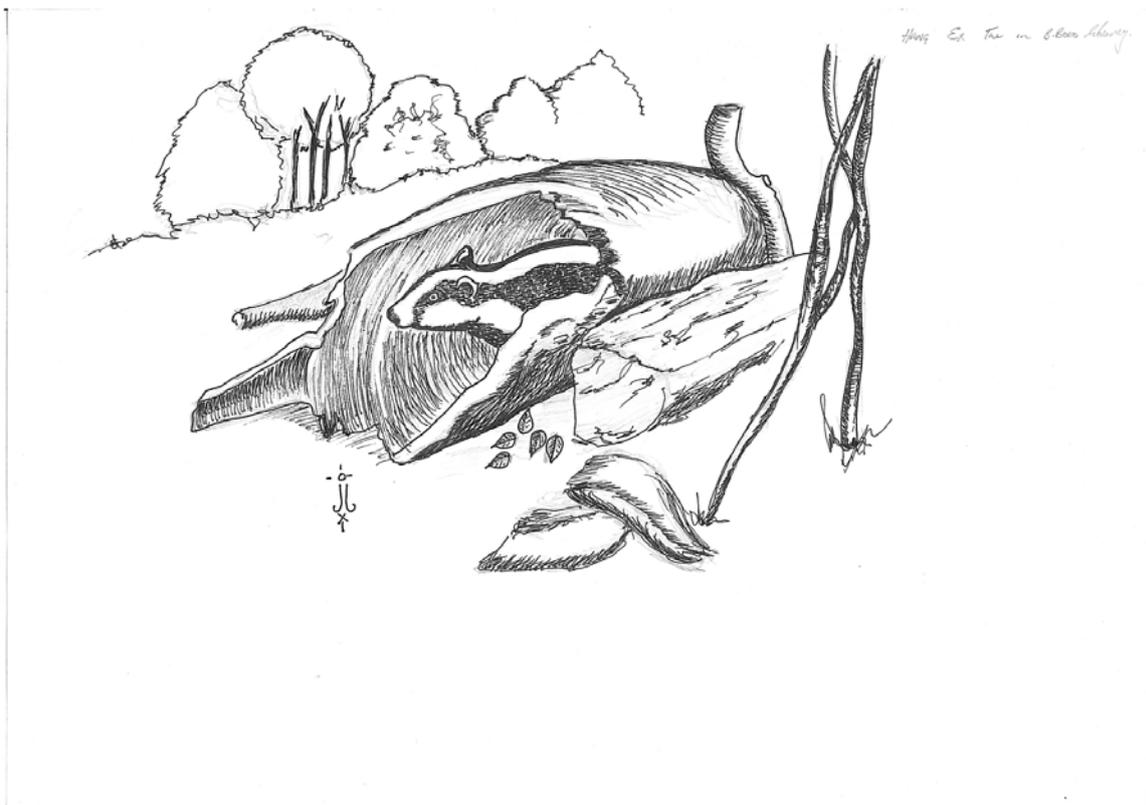
Leap Frogs



The Hare is the oldest known resident of Ireland and is believed to have been here before the last ice age and is a recognised sub-species exclusive to Ireland.



The forest presents natural opportunities for the creation of artwork that visitors can stumble across.



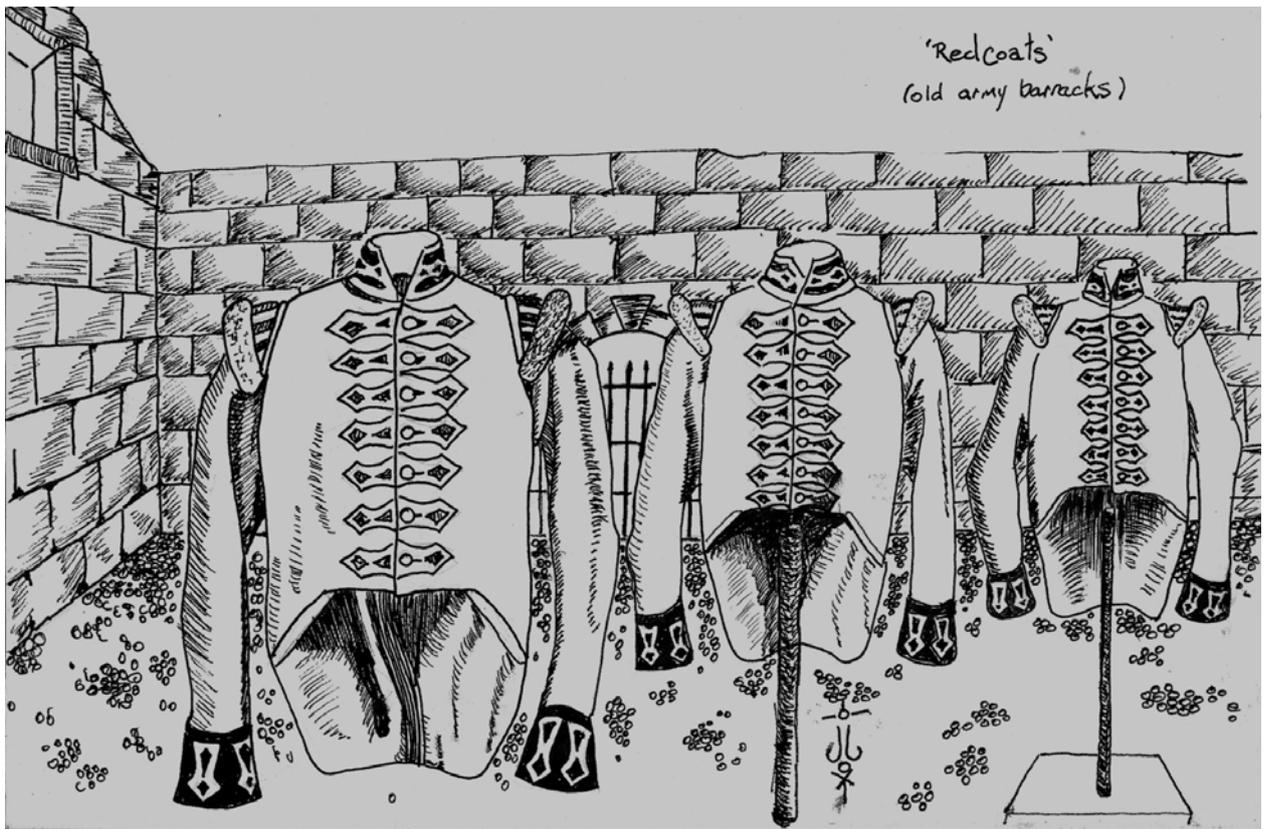


The Pine Martin: One of our lesser-spotted indigenous creatures.



Old Military Barracks

Red Coats once occupied this old military barracks, which is situated in the Park. This is a beautiful stone ruin, sound in structure but closed to the public. Although its historic use is not immediately evident it is difficult to ignore its presence as a key feature of the forest, therefore it is perfect for an installation of sculptures. It is my intention that responding to this structure will reveal the historical truths of the Park in a positive way, and that the work at this location will also stand in stark contrast to the sculptures of indigenous wildlife which are purposefully located in their 'natural habitat' rather than a man-made structure.



I propose to sculpt six 'Red Ghosts', one for each county in Northern Ireland, to symbolise the British occupation of the barracks, and as a very sensitive way of dealing with a significant part of the building and Parks history.

Formal in nature, these regimented works will also affect the viewers conception of the wildlife sculptures that will occupy the wider forest environs.

Materials and Process

I also see this project as an opportunity to promote Irish hardwoods, forestry and the importance of our forests in the life and history of the community.

Materials

The quality and durability of the sculptural work depends on the availability and procurement of suitable hardwoods for the sculptures, preferably air dried planks for laminating.

Laminating v's log carving

Laminating is the process of binding planks of wood together with glue to form a rough shape for sculpting. Crossing the grain on each join reduces the chance of structural cracks therefore prolonging the lifespan of the sculpture. The only drawback with this process is that it is very time consuming. Ideally I will adopt this approach for the 'Red Ghosts'.

Log Carving

As the name suggests, this is a much quicker process as the logs are generally wet and therefore easy to work with a chainsaw. On the negative side, because the logs are wet there is a greater chance of the sculptures cracking during the drying out process. This can be retarded somewhat by sealing the sculptures with oil. I have done this with the prototype "Leap frog" and so far no cracks. I may need to use this method for the remainder of the wildlife sculptures.

I am currently sourcing wood for the wildlife sculptures, largely through in-kind support. I am also seeking sponsorship for the chainsaws required for the initial carving of each wildlife sculpture. As Dún a Rí is a Coillte forest park I am hoping that Coillte will assist the project with Irish hardwoods from its forests and sawmills.

Community Engagement

For my part, I intend to hold a one-day workshop in several schools so that the young people in the surrounding area are familiarised with the project concept and have the opportunity to do some sculptural work themselves.

The Arts Office are proposing to assist with wider community engagement via a digital eBook project whereby they invite emerging writers to engage with this body of work by generating a new legend inspired by the work and its unique environs. This legend will be in keeping with our own traditions of myth and folklore yet should provide a more modern slant. A panel of experts will select the winning work, which will be published in digital book format with reference to the sculptural work. This can be used to incentivise visitors to the area and, along with the sculptural work, bring a meaningful and lasting legacy to the Park.

Life-Span of sculptural Work

The natural life-span of the sculptural work is approximately fifty years. This can be extended somewhat by planned maintenance and upkeep of the work. Basic maintenance is quite straight forward. I recommend treating the work in the first two years and every second year thereafter.

Completion

It is envisaged that the sculptures will be completed and installed in June and July 2012, and that the launch will take place the first bank holiday weekend in August to coincide with the Kingscourt Festival.

Joey Burns

January 2012