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Goldworthy's 'Spire' celebrates Presidio reforestation

By Lisa M. Krieger

Mercury News

Posted: 01/07/2009 12:24:31 PM PST

A new man-made monument to nature is welcoming tree seedlings planted in San Francisco's Presidio.

Artist Andy Goldworthy's 90-foot sculpture "The Spire" is built of logs harvested from the park's historic Monterey cypress trees, now old and dying. Surrounding "The Spire" are dozens of baby cypresses, planted this winter as part of the park's ambitious reforestation project.

Over time, the youngsters will grow up to meet the tall sculpture — and "The Spire" will disappear into the forest, then decay, according to Goldworthy's vision.

The project, completed in late October, is a poetic reference to the forest's natural rhythms. It is twice as tall as Goldworthy's 1984 work, "Seven Spires," made of logged trees from the Grizedale Forest in the Lake District of northwest England.

Crafted from 35 tree trunks, it stands in a grove along the Bay Area Ridge Trail near the Arguello Gate. It peers down upon the San Francisco Bay, with Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge in the distance.

It presented an engineering challenge for Goldworthy, renowned for his creation of ephemeral works — art that decays, melts or washes away.

"I don't think anyone ever built something like this before," said Jason Thurm, forestry supervisor of the Presidio Trust. "There were a bunch of things we had to figure out."

His team of eight men first had to anchor a steel sleeve into a 14-foot deep hole, which was surrounded by concrete and a rebar "root" structure. Then holes were drilled into each log. Next, they oiled and threaded long metal rods, sinking them into each hole. Finally a 350-foot crane was used to hoist the logs into position.

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"It was literally wrestling wood into place. We were hanging off the crane, trying to get them straight. One tree, it took a whole day," Thurm said. The entire project took two weeks.

Goldworthy watched from below, his eyes bloodshot from hours of staring into the sun.

"It'll decompose slowly" over the next several decades, Thurm said.

But the new seedlings, just youngsters, will grow and endure another century.

"The Spire" is located west of Inspiration Point Overlook and north of the Presidio Golf Course Clubhouse. An exhibit called "Goldworthy at the

Presidio" in the park's Building 49 is open Wednesdays through Sundays until May 3.