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From Animal Menagerie to World-Class Zoo: The Evolution of the Memphis Zoo



The idea for the Memphis Zoo began as early as 1904, when Col. Robert Galloway started lobbying for funds to build a home for a Southern black bear named Natch. The bear, who was the mascot of the Memphis Turtles baseball team, was being kept chained to a tree in Overton Park.

Natch was soon joined by several other abandoned wild animals, and Galloway presented the city with a plan to form a zoo to house them. After several unsuccessful attempts to begin a zoo, the Memphis Park Commission finally allocated \$1,200 to establish the Memphis Zoo in 1906. Galloway was still using his own personal funds to care for the animals at the time, but he promised the commission that money for an animal building and the purchase of large animals would be obtained through citizen support.

The Memphis Zoo Association (incorporated in 1910 as the Memphis Zoological Society) was formed to generate the funds. The group held its first fund-raising event, a baseball game, in August 1906 and raised \$3,628. Combined with city funds, the money was used to build 23 simple cages and a row of concrete bear dens. Support continued, and in 1907 the first building at the Zoo, Galloway Hall, was built. In 1909 the Carnivora Building was built to house the big cats. The original elephant house, now part of the education complex, was also built in 1909.

In 1986 the Memphis Zoological Society commissioned a master plan for the Memphis Zoo. The plan, created by Design Consortium of New Orleans, has upgraded the 70-acre facility into one of the world's first-class zoos with exhibits like Primate Canyon, Animals of the Night, Cat Country, Once Upon A Farm and Dragon's Lair.

Today, the Memphis Zoo stands as a crown jewel for the city. It is Memphis's highest attended attraction and is ranked the top zoo in the country by two independent surveys. The Zoo's conservation programs circle the globe – from cooperative programs in China for giant pandas to local efforts to save the Louisiana pine snake. More than 90,000 children see the Zoo on annual field trips and more than 100,000 people visit on free admission every year.



The entrance complex to Northwest Passage



Memphis Zoo Timeline

And so the story goes that it all started with a bear — a bear named Natch. This black bear was the mascot for the Memphis Turtles baseball team in 1904, and he needed a place to live. After the season ended, Natch was chained to a tree in Overton Park where Col. Robert Galloway took pity on him and began lobbying for funds to build Natch a real home. And, the story begins ...

1906 - The Memphis Park Commission allocates \$1,200 to establish the Memphis Zoo on April 4. Spearheaded by Col. Galloway, \$3,628 is used to build 23 simple cages and a row of concrete bear dens in August.

1907 - The first building at the Zoo is built and named **Galloway Hall**.

1909 - The **Carnivora Building** is built to house big cats.

1910 - The Memphis Zoo Association is incorporated into the Memphis Zoological Society.



1910 - The **Elephant House** is built. It is now the Education Building, including the library.

1916 - The building that is now home to the Zoo's bird collection was originally built for botanical displays. In 1959, this building becomes the **Tropical Bird House**.

1923 - The Round Barn is moved to the Memphis Zoo. The original structure served as the Memphis Police Department's horse barn in downtown Memphis.

1936 - **Monkey Island** is constructed. Two lion statues (now at the entrance of the Rides area) are donated to the Zoo.



1959 - The **Aquarium** opens. This building is renovated and reopened twenty years later in 1979.

1960 - The **Herpetarium** is built, along with the **Pachyderm House**.

1990 - **Avenue of the Animals** becomes the main entrance into the Zoo, along with a parking lot and plaza area.

1993 - Lions, tigers and other felines are moved to their new home in **Cat Country** in April. The administration buildings and education complex also completed.

1994 - In November, the former Carnivora Building is renovated and opened as the **Cat House Café**.

1995 - The Zoo has a big year with the opening of **Animals of the Night, Once Upon A Farm, Primate Canyon** and **Madagascar** (lemurs).

1996 - The **Primate Picnic Pavilion**, along with the new parking entrance, is constructed in the summer to accommodate large gatherings at the Zoo.

1997 - A new **Nutrition Center** and maintenance complex are added to the Zoo early in the year.

1998 - In July, the **Dragon's Lair**, featuring Komodo dragons, opens.

1998 - In December, the Zoo opens the doors of the new animal hospital. This building has over 9,000 more square feet than the original hospital. Unlike the old hospital, the new one has separate holding and quarantine wings built on opposite ends of the building. Also, the sick wing separates sick or injured animals from others and allows for proper recovery time.



2000 - The Memphis Zoo's address is changed from Galloway Avenue to Prentiss Place in honor of long-time supporters and donors of the Zoo, Jim and Carol Prentiss.

2002 - **CHINA** opens in July and features 15 animal species native to China. Memphis Zoo launches a broad conservation and research program budgeted at \$1.5 million annually with an emphasis on Giant Panda conservation.

2003 - Chuck Brady succeeds Roger Knox as Zoo president. **A pair of giant pandas, Ya Ya and Le Le, arrives** from China and goes on display in the CHINA exhibit on April 25.

2004 - The **Animal Nursery** opens and welcomes its first inhabitants - a baby orangutan and a black-footed penguin. Construction begins on **Northwest Passage** - a \$23 million, three-acre exhibit built to incorporate the animals and Native American culture of the Pacific Northwest.

2006 - **Northwest Passage** opens and houses polar bears, black bears, sea lions and bald eagles. The same year the Zoo celebrates its 100th birthday and surpasses 1 million visitors in a calendar year.

2007 - **Butterflies: In Living Color** returns to the Zoo, open Memorial Day through October 1.

2008 - Construction begins on **Teton Trek**, a four-acre tribute to Yellowstone National Park.



A Quick Look at Northwest Passage

A tribute to the animals, First Nations culture and architecture of the Pacific Northwest

Home to polar bears, sea lions, black bears, bald eagles and ravens

Includes a large underwater viewing area allowing guests to view polar bears and sea lions in a very naturalistic environment



Features a 500-seat amphitheater for sea lion shows and a longhouse classroom for educational classes

The exhibit has more than 500,000 gallons of purified fresh and saltwater for marine mammals.

Children are able to crawl inside a large plastic bubble on the side of the sea lion pool which gives the sensation of actually being inside the exhibit.

As you enter the exhibit you are greeted by five authentic Northwest totem poles. Each pole represents the culture of five different clans found in the Northwest region.

The Chief Seattle Donor Garden features Chief Seattle's speech given more than 100 years ago in response to the United States Government's attempt to purchase the land from the Native Americans.



A Quick Look at CHINA



Opened in July 2002

Sits on three acres of land and features a sampling of the culture, animals, architecture, horticulture and of China

Giant pandas Ya Ya and Le Le became residents of the exhibit in April 2003.

Houses white-cheeked gibbons, Pere David deer, Asian small-clawed otters, white-naped cranes, Francois Langurs, waterfowl, pheasants and other birds

A fifty-foot Chinese pagoda serves as the ticket and information booth.

Features a Cultural Exchange Bell Pavilion, which houses a large bronze bell made in China especially for the Memphis Zoo

Welcoming Guest Hall serves as a theatre where visitors view a film produced especially for the Memphis Zoo.

Two sides of the courtyard are bordered with loggias, open galleries with decorative columns supporting bright southern-style Chinese glazed tile roofs.

A Taste of China Food Service Pavilion and Deck gives visitors a place to relax and savor their trip through CHINA.

Endangered Species Carousel, a spectacular hand-carved carousel of animals, provides entertainment, but has a conservation and cultural message as well.



A Quick Look at Primate Canyon

Offers expansive exhibits for the Zoo's most popular residents

Features seven exhibits containing 10 species

Enhances conservation programs for several endangered species

Is a five-acre, multi-million dollar, state-of-the-art outdoor exhibit

Allows for multi-level viewing of primates

Created by Design Consortium, a top New Orleans architectural firm that specializes in zoo design

Includes cultural phenomena throughout time, including an Oriental pagoda and red lacquer bridge and a replica of an African fishing village

Includes natural phenomena represented by rock outcroppings, waterfalls, streams and rock caves

Includes play areas for the primates such as shallow pools, green spaces, waterfalls and climbing structures made from towering poles and ropes

Contains state-of-the-art graphic panels explaining pertinent facts about the biology of each species and conservationists' efforts to preserve them

Features interactive play areas for children where they can compare the size of their hands and feet with gorillas and learn about how they grow





A Quick Look at Cat Country

A four-acre, multi-million dollar, open-air cat exhibit

The construction of this exhibit was talked about for more than fifty years.

Allows for multi-level viewing of the cats

Separates cats from visitors using high tension wires and moats



Unique because it houses not only predators, but animals of prey as well

Allows the visitor to be completely surrounded by the flora of the animals' native habitats

Exhibit's design created by Design Consortium, a top New Orleans architectural firm that specializes in zoo design.

More than a cat exhibit — introduces man's involvement with nature over the course of more than 4,000 years

Includes cultural phenomena throughout time, including an Egyptian temple, remnants of an ancient Asian city and an Asian pagoda bridge

Includes natural phenomena represented by rock outcroppings called kopjes (kopees), broad grassy savannas, rock caves and a waterfall

Enhances preservation programs for several endangered species



A Quick Look at Once Upon A Farm

Is a multimillion dollar face-lift of the old children's area, transforming it into a charming community for all ages

Focuses on domesticated rather than exotic animals

Takes visitors back to 19th century farm life

Spotlights miniature versions of domesticated farm animals such as rabbits, cattle, chickens, pigs, goats and more

Invites visitors to tour old-fashioned barns, a gristmill and water wheel, a windmill and silo, a chicken coop and incubation area

Lets children observe and imitate prairie dog life by burrowing through an underground tunnel and surfacing to "bubble top" prairie dog holes inside the exhibit

Includes natural phenomena such as fruit and nut trees, vegetable gardens, ponds and streams



Explores such topics as weaving, blacksmithing, gardening, canning, and farming around the world and Amish life through the Expo Building

Contains Smithsonian-style artifacts showcasing pre-motorization farming techniques — plows, a wheat fan, looms and more

Offers an old-fashioned train for a scenic ride around the exhibit's perimeter