

by Bill Moss

Imagine if you can an afternoon trek that takes you around the world.

You travel first to the African plains where giraffes, zebras and antelopes are grazing against a backdrop of the dark-green jungle. Next you see a pride of lions in their natural Asian habitat and from there you come upon a wide-eyed llama in her South American land.

You see bison in their dusty American home and an aviary with birds from every continent. A world of seas contains a whale, a walrus and an assortment of other aquatic creatures.

You are not on a futuristic jet tour nor caught in a time warp. You are five miles south of Asheboro at the North Carolina Zoological Park.

The Interim Zoo that serves as the temporary holding area for dozens of animals is already open. In fact, over 800,000 people from 48 states and several foreign countries have visited the animals 40-acre home. But while the Interim Zoo—still in its embryonic stages—is impressive, it is only a savory hint of what is to come.

The only major zoo between Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, the facility will have no bars and no cages. The animals will live in environments remarkably similar to their own. And the beautifully-forested site of Purgatory Mountain will be anything but a place for carrying out tasks of penance.

Instead, it will be a visual paradise of animals and plant life from the world over—"The perfect zoo," according to Director William Hoff.

The Zoological Park will be more than a recreational facility. The purposes of the Park include recreation, education, research, and the conservation, preservation and propagation of plant and animal life.

It will be a place where school children and college students from all over the state can come to view and study the zoology and vegetation of the earth.

According to Hoff, who was recruited from the St. Louis Zoo, the park will be divided by regions into seven zoogeographic clusters containing the life indigenous to the continents.

"The exhibits we are going to build will be as close to the natural habitats as they can be and still maintain the complete safety of the visitors," Hoff said. "The animals can be viewed from trails that will be separated by moats and pits. The plants will be imported."

Hoff added that most of the vegetation would be able to survive the winter so that only some will necessitate greenhousing.



Zoo to be a 'visual paradise'

Completion of the first of the zoogeographic clusters is scheduled for July, 1977. Basic structural work on the African cluster and "big cat area" is almost finished, but the job of building artificial rock is ahead.

Zoo designers plan to build rock walls and pits that look like they have always been there. Their approach is to create a visual effect of overall site unity by integrating man-made structures and natural landscapes into one.

Transforming the Carolina Piedmont into the continents of the world is no meager undertaking, financially speaking. Buying the elephants, rhinos and waterbucks will cost an estimated \$13 million. Raising the

funds for such purchases is the arduous task of the North Carolina Zoological Society, Inc.

In January of this year the Society sponsored a statewide telethon that raised \$360,000—the most ever for a telethon in this state. Douglass Aitken, Jr., president of the society, said that the telethon's success meant more than money.

"We had no idea that we would do that well," Aitken said. "The fact that 11,000 people and companies contributed showed us and the rest of the state that people were interested in this project. It accomplished more than raising money. It showed that the people in the state were interested in having a zoo."

The zoo dates from 1964 when the Raleigh Jaycees sponsored a professional football exhibition game and raised \$18,000 to study the possibility of establishing a zoo.

The N.C. Legislature passed a bill creating a study commission in 1967, and in 1969 the N.C. Zoological Authority, a 15-member board of directors, was established. The Legislature and various commissions laid the groundwork for the next five years and in February of 1973 Hoff was hired as the director.

In June, 1973, the N.C. Zoological Society began its statewide membership drive, and in that same month the first two animals—a pair of female Galapagos tortoises—were purchased by the Society and given to the Zoo. Since then many other animals of all shapes and forms have been obtained. These animals are housed at the Interim Zoo—their temporary home.

Located near rolling hills and alongside the winding trails are a trio of camels sullenly chewing grass in their pasture.

A giraffe hoofs clumsily around his domain, his elegant hide design a testament to the perfection of nature.

A white-bearded wildebeest (pronounced will-da-beest), looking a little like a Tibetan monk, wanders nearby and the llama,

unsurpassed in her queenly countenance, looks at visitors with an air of vanity unmatched.

The smaller, more active animals peer out from their home in the animal shelter. A new-born spider monkey clings to its mother's back as she hops from branch to branch. Other fascinating animals include a gorilla—that black-faced creature from which we are said to descent—and a lively baboon. There is also an animal called a Rock Hyrax which (according to its biography) is closely related to the elephant. Yet he's no larger than a beagle.

Zoology patterns are indeed strange.

One of the zoo's features is the otter pool, the only example of the man-made habitats that will characterize North Carolina's zoo. Criteria considered in designing the pool were authenticity of the artificial rock, ease with which it could be cleaned, satisfaction of the animals' needs and the ability of the plants around the pool to survive and grow.

The spot-necked otter slides up and down the rocks, apparently satisfied that his needs have sure enough been met.

This is what planners, designers and supporters of the North Carolina Zoological Park envision as one of the giant project's major objectives. They are painfully aware that 75 species of animals throughout the world have been wiped out this century and that 922 more are endangered. Builders, designers and supporters are working towards the preservation of these and all other species.

Beyond that, the recreational, educational and economic benefits from the zoo are immeasurable, for its value is greater than the size of the whale and as noble as the majesty of the lioness.

Talented gorilla finds home

by Bill Moss
Staff Writer

Watching a gorilla can be a startling experience. They act so much like humans that we can't help but be reminded we too are animals, albeit, animals a little further advanced than these moody creatures.

Of all the animals at the zoo, the gorilla is typically one of the more popular among visitors. The gorilla-in-residence at the North Carolina Interim Zoo south of Asheboro is no exception.

Crowds of people gather around Ramar's cage and watch him. He jumps around, beats his chest, pouts and, often just sits back on his haunches staring at those who stare at him.

"Ramar is kind of special," said Cherie Pittillo, one of the young zookeepers. "He is a trained gorilla. He's been on Merv Griffin and he played the night club circuit in Hawaii for a while."

Zoo director William Hoff thinks Ramar has the best disposition he's seen in a gorilla, according to Cherie. And Hoff, a former director at the St. Louis Zoo, has seen a few.

"He's really pretty shy," Cherie said. "Sometimes he'll beat the walls, get stiff-armed and puff out his lips before he gets adjusted to a new keeper. Other times he'll pick out a visitor he doesn't like and beat his knuckles on his chest. In his natural habitat that's a sign to other gorillas of his locality. It means 'don't come here.'"

What else does Ramar do all day?

Well, he eats six apples, six oranges, a pineapple, bananas and light bread. That's quite a breakfast. But Ramar, who is seven years old and just an adolescent in gorilla-hood, is hungry again very soon. He gets the same menu he had in the morning, plus a pound of beef. "He likes it boiled," Cherie said, "so we boil it for him."

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