



ZOO HISTORY

Pre-history

The Chumash people camp on the future site of the Santa Barbara Zoo while fishing in the Pacific Ocean. Evidence of their presence is found throughout the site in the form of middens— refuse heaps containing shells from food supplies, primitive implements from building and chipped stones from hunting.

1896

John Beale, a tea merchant from New York, falls in love with this property and builds a mansion named *Vegamar*. It is an impressive structure built of pink stucco, a red tile roof, and a tall tower that becomes a familiar Santa Barbara landmark.

1914

When Beale dies, his widow Lillian marries John H. Child. In time, *Vegamar* becomes known locally as the Child Estate. Lillian Child is a gracious hostess at the social galas for which *Vegamar* becomes famous.

1935

A few men, victims of the Depression, stop for awhile on Mrs. Child's property. To the chagrin of local authorities, she doesn't drive them off, but instead allows them to settle there and eventually build a permanent, self-policed community. She insists on order and neatness, occasionally visits them to inspect the premises, hand out advice and, on holidays, half-dollars.

1945

It is estimated that between 40–50 men live on the property by the mid-1940s. They establish a community called "Jungleville," complete with a governing body, communications and even a judicial system.

1947

Mrs. Child offers her estate to the Santa Barbara Foundation, to be disposed of upon her death in such a fashion benefiting the community. The Foundation accepts her gift, and takes over the deed to *Vegamar*. Mrs. Child and her squatters remain in residence and the Foundation assumes responsibility for city and state taxes on the property.

1951-52

Mrs. Child dies in August 1951 and the estate formally passes to the Foundation in 1952. At the time, 32 single men all over the age of 50 live in the shanty village on the property; seven of them had lived there since 1935. Mrs. Child asked that the men not be made homeless as a result of her death, and the Foundation makes no alteration in living arrangements, except to install a Westmont College student and his family in the main house as caretakers.

1953

Santa Barbara Foundation President Archie M. Edwards recommends that the Foundation make the Child Estate a gift to the City, for use as a park. The Trustees concur and on October 27, 1953 Edwards writes to the Honorable Mayor and City Council, presenting the City the deed to the Child Estate property.

1950s

The City of Santa Barbara permits UCSB, then located on the Riviera, to use the estate as a fraternity house (the original “animal house”) an arrangement that lasts only a few years.

1958

A group from the Junior Chamber of Commerce forms the non-profit Child Estate Foundation, raises planning money, recruits volunteers, and begins development of the Park. The initial master plan is to open a “park for animals and people.”

1959

With the 63 year-old main house in bad repair, the City decides it could not be used for any civic purpose. The city fire department burns it down. “Jungleville” ceases to exist; three longtime residents of the shanty village are moved into cottages on nearby public property, where the Zoo parking lot is now.

1963

The Santa Barbara Zoological Gardens opens its doors to the public in August. The initial collection is modest, consisting of a llama, two sheep, a goat, a couple of turkeys and a woolly monkey. Other early residents include a black bear and an orangutan.

1966

Santa Barbara Zoo’s sea lion habitat opens as one of the first naturalistic habitats in California. The “sealarium” displays the animals in an educational manner in a watery habitat with artificial rock “haul outs.” The sea lion exhibit will later be remodeled four times.

1968

Volunteers install the first miniature railroad track to circle the hilltop. In order to purchase the locomotive and coaches, the Zoo secures its first and only bank loan; the train is an instant hit and the loan is repaid within six months.

1969

During the tragic oil spill along the South Coast, the Santa Barbara Zoo closes to the public and initiates a full-scale rehabilitation effort for oiled birds. The operation is so successful that the Zoo continues to clean and rehabilitate oiled birds for California State Fish and Game through the mid 1980s.

1970

Zoo’s first African lion “Dandy Lion” arrives to become, as Director Ted McToldridge states: “the beginning of our exotic animal collection.” Dandy originally belonged to Samuel Mosher, who received him as a gift from a friend who won him in a golf tournament. Mosher raised Dandy to maturity at his home. After his death, Mrs. Mosher offers to finance the lion exhibit and support Dandy’s care for his life. The Mosher’s generous support of the Zoo continues to this day through Mosher Foundation. “Dolly Lion” joins Dandy in 1973 and the pair delights visitors until their deaths in 1984 and 1985.

1970s

William Dentzel, a local resident and descendant of the famous German carousel maker, donates a custom carousel to the Zoo. Renovated in 1986, youngsters are still riding the pig, horse and fish characters today.

The hilltop has always been an ideal venue for special events, big and small – especially weddings. The first nuptial is held here in the early 1970s when Bill and Mary Turner are wed.

1971

Santa Barbara Zoo's education programs are formalized when the Assistant Director Susan Engfer begins offering programs for the public and touring school groups.

1972

Asian elephants Sujatha and Little Mac arrive in July. The one-and-a-half-year olds stand not even four feet high. Their first home is in the old barnyard area of the Zoo, now the restaurant courtyard. Their first barn is where the public restrooms are now located.

The Zoo Auxiliary holds the first "Zoo-B-Que" daylong fundraiser, which continues annually until 2002.

1975

The Zoo's popular summer Zoo Camp begins with a handful of day campers; today it serves over 1,200 eager campers. The most popular educational offering at the Zoo, the camp is often voted "Best of" in the *Santa Barbara News-Press* and *Independent* reader polls.

1978

Gibbon Island opens. This moat-surrounded exhibit overlooks the Andree Clark Bird Refuge. As gibbons will not cross water, an open design allows visitors to view the animals on their island home.

1981

The first Members' Night is held to thank supporters. This event includes a barbecue dinner, music, dancing, fun and games and continues to the present. The Zoo currently has over 12,000 member households.

1982

The Zoo is accredited by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA), three years before accreditation becomes mandatory. It is the 51st zoo or aquarium to become an accredited member of AZA, has been accredited in subsequent reviews and will again in 2005.

The Docents are formed as an offshoot of a dedicated group of volunteer "guides" who lead school tours. Docents remain an important component of the Zoo's education program today and their role has expanded to include more interpretive activities and responsibilities.

1983

The Zoo Train is such a success that the Board of Directors decides to expand the rail line to run around the entire perimeter of the Zoo. Volunteers participate in large weekend work parties, clearing the land, grading, laying ties and rail and gauging the track. The new rail line is nearly a mile long and lengthens the train experience to seven minutes.

The Zoo hosts the AZA Western Regional Conference, at which AZA's Board of Directors approve the initial Species Survival Plan proposal, creating the single most important cooperative conservation program in North America.

1985

Kali and Paka, young African lion litter mates, come to the Santa Barbara Zoo as cubs. Kali remains on view to this day; Paka died in 2001.

1986

The first Zoofari Ball is held and quickly becomes one of Santa Barbara's most popular parties. In addition to introducing many good friends to the Zoo, the annual event has raised over half a million dollars between 1986 and 2002.

1987

The African Veldt is the largest expansion in Zoo history, covering over an acre and opening the east slope for the first time. The exhibit opens with two female and one male Baringo giraffes, a group of African crowned cranes, two ground hornbills and two Marabou storks. The giraffe Gemina, one of the three original animals, becomes famous for her crooked neck. No one knows for sure why she has a crooked neck, but the condition has not interfered with her ability to give birth, eat normally or interact with the herd. She continues to thrive in her Veldt environment.

As early as 1986 the Zoo's staff veterinarian was involved with the California condor recovery effort led by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and in 1987 Zoo staff is part of the team that rescues the last bird in the wild. The 27 birds are housed in breeding compounds at the Los Angeles Zoo and San Diego Wild Animal Park.

1990

The Zoo's entrance renovation begins thanks to actress Norma Varden (housekeeper in "The Sound of Music," among other roles) who bequeaths her entire estate to the Zoo in thanks for its care of her cherished cat Lovey. A statue of Lovey and plaque honoring the gift are located in the plaza entrance.

1991

Admissions building is built, modeled on the old Hollister Road gas station featured in the movie, "The Postman Only Rings Twice." The Santa Barbara Zoological Society, under the leadership of President William A. Brace, funds the building and it is dedicated to Brace at a surprise party upon opening.

1993

The Zoo partners with Old Spanish Days to throw a Fiesta party to honor Santa Barbara's elected officials: Celebracion De Los Dignatarios! The not-to-be-missed, jam-packed event now kicks off Fiesta each year.

The Zoo first celebrates El Dia del Nino, a national holiday in Mexico for children. Held on a Sunday in April, this is always the most heavily attended day of the year for the Zoo -- in 2002, over 6,000 people filled the hilltop area.

Lord and Lady Ridley-Tree donate half a million dollars to build the restaurant and the building that houses the gift shop (ground floor) and executive office (second floor).

1994

A new playground is installed with modern play equipment and a handicap-accessible surface.

1996

After two years and a budget of \$750,000, the Zoo's gorilla exhibit, *The Forest's Edge*, opens in June, on schedule and on budget. Thousands of people line up to catch a glimpse of gorilla Max, a shy 28-year old silverback from the Topeka Zoo who never did venture far outside. Six months later two young, half-sibling gorillas from Buffalo join Max to form a bachelor troop. Max passed away in 2003, and Goma and Kivu have grown into active mature silverbacks.

1997

The final new administration building is completed, housing security functions, administrative, development and membership offices. The building is dedicated to Peter Jordano, Zoological Society President at the time and a generous supporter. The entire courtyard area is now called the McToldridge Administrative Center in honor of retiring Zoo Director Ted McToldridge.

1998

In July, Richard Block is named CEO/Zoo Director and is charged with leading the organization into the future. A new master plan is created and fundraising strategies put in place.

1999

Zoo opens a new exhibit featuring Channel Island foxes, a threatened species that lives only on the islands off Santa Barbara's coast. The foxes become part of a breeding program, in cooperation with efforts by the Channel Islands National Park. Offspring are sent to other nearby Zoos, including the Los Angeles Zoo and the Charles Paddock Zoo in Atascadero.

2002

The Zoo officially becomes part of the California Condor Recovery Team, and will house birds transitioning between locations, work with the species in the wild, provide much needed research and veterinary care – and will develop a public display of this remarkable species.

Jane Goodall visits the Zoo and local school children create a mural celebrating the tree of life - a reminder of the involvement of children in protecting the environment and the interest they have in conserving the natural world.

2003

Santa Barbara Zoo celebrates its 40th anniversary in style with a public celebration, special video hosted by John Cleese, landscape artists “paint in” and sale, historic display at the Santa Barbara Historical Society and story in their journal *Noticias*, and many special events throughout the year.

The new lion habitat opens in March. Cats of Africa features African lions and small black-footed cats, a highly endangered species. The new habitat accommodates animal groupings similar to those in the wild, and can eventually house up to six lions. The African Lion Species Survival Plan designates the male and female as a breeding pair.

Summer “Zoovies” premieres with “A Bug’s Life”, the first of several family friendly films shown on a big screen at the Zoo’s scenic hilltop.

“Boo at the Zoo” provides three nights of safe, traffic-free trick-or-treating at this merry-not-too-scary event for children aged 3 to 12.

Renovation begins on the elephant yard and surrounding areas to enlarge the animal space and create more accessible pathways. Suzi and Little Mac are transferred to a private facility and later to the Fresno Zoo during the construction project.

2004

Kiki is the first lion cub ever born at the Zoo. When mother Gingerbread does not display maternal care, the cub is hand raised. Sam, a four-year old Chesapeake Bay retriever, becomes Kiki’s animal companion for several months before the cub is reintroduced to the other female lions. Kali, the Zoo’s senior citizen lion, moves to Cat of Africa.

The Zoo hosts the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) Western Regional Workshop with over 400 delegates from around the country attending sessions at the Doubletree Resort. John Cleese gives a keynote address and screens his film “Fierce Creatures,” about a Zoo in England, to an enthusiastic crowd.

The Zoo welcomes a new locomotive, nicknamed Big Blue, to replace Engine 66, which was retired after a 36-year career at the Zoo. The handcrafted, scaled replica of a 1863 locomotive was built by the Chance Manufacturing Company of Wichita, Kansas.

The Zoo launches its first-ever major fundraising campaign with a goal of \$8.5 million to renovate the elephant exhibit, build a exhibit for the highly endangered California condor, create new and expand existing education programs and for endowment.

Eeeww! Hair-raising Helpers from Around the World opens in May and celebrates the unsung heroes of the animal world, the gross and the scary, the scaly and the slimy, the creepy and the crawly such as bugs, lizards, spiders, snakes.

The Asian elephant exhibit renovation is completed after 14 months of construction and \$2.8 million in improvements for Sujatha (Suzi) and Little Mac. Elephant Walk increases the exhibit space by three times and adds a new pool and “enrichment wall.” A new winding pathway to the new exhibit brings this area of the Zoo into compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

September brings another opening of a new exhibit: Wings of Asia, an exotically designed setting boasting two waterfalls, a pond and wooden guest walkways offering viewing of ten varieties of colorful and rare Asiatic birds.

The festive public party Zoo-B-Que makes its return after a several year hiatus.

A giant anteater is born on exhibit in September, the first offspring for the five-year-old female anteater, Madeline, who came to Santa Barbara from the San Francisco Zoo, and the Zoo’s longtime resident, a male named Sophie. A radio contest brings the new baby’s name: Mochila, meaning ‘backpack’ in Spanish.

2005

Santa Barbara Zoo was accredited for another five years by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association’s (AZA) Accreditation Commission following a rigorous investigation to insure it meets ever-rising industry standards in collection care, veterinary programs, conservation, education, and safety. The Zoo was first accredited in 1982.

Docha, a male African lion cub, is born the morning of April 10, 2005. He is hand reared after Gingerbread does not produce sufficient milk for the newborn. Once weaned, he is immediately reintroduced to the Zoo’s female lions.

Twin male black and white ruffed lemurs are born in May, making a total of 13 of this species born at the Zoo.

“Giraffe Encounter” allows Zoo guests to hand-feed giraffes from a newly constructed Giraffe Deck overlooking the exhibit. The deck’s railing, which is at their head-level, allows them to take the biscuits with their purple tongues, which are over a foot long.

Zoo guests are seeing spots -- two new highly endangered, snow leopards: a 13-year old female from the Louisville Zoo (Kentucky) and the six-year old male, named Beauregard, from Lake Superior Zoo in Duluth, Minnesota. There may be little spots in the future as they are a Species Survival Plan breeding pair.

The Zoo celebrates the twentieth birthday of African lion Kali on June 9, 2005, making her one of the most “senior” members of her species. There are only three African lions her age or older in all the AZA facilities.

Community benefactor and Zoo supporter Paul Ridley-Tree is honored with the naming the Condor Plaza in his honor. More than 100 people attended the evening festivities, which was hosted by John Cleese. The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians donate \$150,000 to Condor Country as part of the Zoo Campaign.

The Zoo’s aquarium complex is updated and makes a summer debut as Wonders of Water, including a new display of dozens of colorful South American dart frogs, all less than two inches long, from the South American rainforests.

Zoo Camp celebrates 30 years and is again voted “best summer camp” in both *Independent* and *Santa Barbara News-Press* readers polls.

The 20th annual Zoofari Ball “fun-raiser” for the animals at the Zoo is once again a smashing success. Zoo COO Nancy McToldridge, having attended all 20 balls, is crowned Zoofari Queen.

Noted artist Wyland brings his Ocean Challenge to the Zoo for two days as part of a 12-city coastal awareness tour.

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