

Chapter 10

Zoos as Tourist Attractions: Theme Parks, Protected Areas or Museums?

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Introduction

In order to understand zoos and the zoo experience, there is value in making comparisons with other tourist attractions. Three types of attractions – theme parks, protected natural areas and museums – have sufficient in common with zoos to deserve examination. At times in their history, these institutions have crossed paths and almost merged, at other times the distinction has been quite marked. Understanding their distinctive evolution allows us to make better sense of the paradoxical history of zoos.

A note of caution. In considering history, we must be careful to avoid taking a teleological approach. Just because zoos are the way they are now at the beginning of the 21st century, is no reason to believe that they were always destined to evolve this way. The same may be said for the other related tourist attractions. Rather than looking for a seamless path to the present, we need to look for the turning points and the box canyons in their evolution. We cannot see zoos as unique and separate institutions; rather there is value in considering them in relation to other tourist attractions. To borrow from James (1963) – we don't know about zoos if all we know about are zoos.

The Age of Revolution

Histories of zoos always start with royal menageries. As far back as classical times, rulers all over the world kept impressive collections of animals (Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier, 2002; Hancocks, 2001). This regal domination of the animal world was simply one of a number of ways in which monarchs demonstrated their superiority over their subjects. Numerous examples of this are given in the zoos literature, however, I will utilise just one to demonstrate the principle. In 1955, Grace Kelly, the American film star, was attending the Cannes Film Festival. The editor of *Paris Match* had an idea for a story – how about if the glamorous Kelly met Prince Rainier of Monaco. The 'playboy' Rainier was now at an



age where he had to settle down and he needed to marry and have children, for if he was childless the principality reverted to France. The 'date' was arranged, but what were the celebrities to do? The prince took charge, leading Kelly into the grounds of his palace and to his private zoo: 'As camera shutters clicked, Rainier put his hand through the bars of the tiger's cage and nonchalantly patted the beast. Grace was impressed with his courage and his affinity for animals' (Spada, 1988: 172). Not only was the princess-to-be impressed, but so were the millions of readers who saw the syndicated photos.

Some royals also kept zoos because they were interested in science and, occasionally, some of these zoos were opened to the public (Rothfels, 2002). However, as the Age of Enlightenment slipped into the Age of Revolution, royal menageries increasingly became the focus of criticism and opposition. Symbols of absolute power, they demonstrated a divine right to dominate nature; just as the people were subjects of the monarch, so were the animals (Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier, 2002). When the French Revolution overthrew the monarchy, it also closed the royal menagerie at Versailles. After debating their options (with some arguing to simply let the exotic animals free), the revolutionaries decided to shift them to Paris, installing them in the Jardin des Plantes, which became, arguably, the first truly public zoo (Rothfels, 2002).

Elsewhere in Europe, zoos became symbolic of the increasing dominance by the bourgeoisie. Rapidly growing urban conglomerations demonstrated their political independence and economic importance by establishing a range of public institutions. These included parks, museums, libraries, art galleries and zoos. As David Friedrich Weinland, Director of Frankfurt Zoo, observed in 1862:

Neither princes, nor scholars, nor pedagogues, nor ministers of education founded the zoological gardens of Frankfurt, Dresden, Cologne, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Rotterdam and Brussels. Rather they were created by the majority of the citizens of these cities. (Quoted in Rothfels, 2002: 18)

In Britain, zoos were established by societies and joint stock companies, drawing on the new middle classes for their subscribers and members. Professionals and businessmen dominated their management committees. The working classes were welcome to visit, for zoos were imagined as a cultural institution to encourage them to improve themselves (Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier, 2002). Zoos in Britain's colonies followed a similar model. In the USA, zoo establishment did not become widespread until the late 19th century. Nonetheless, here again it was tied to urbanisation and economic prosperity, seemingly zoos being a marker of progress. One distinction of the USA was that zoos were owned and managed by town governments (Hancocks, 2001).

With the shift to constitutional monarchy, royalty re-invented themselves as the paternal or maternal figureheads for the new nation states and zoos became a stage for highlighting this new role. William IV emptied the royal menagerie at Windsor Castle and the Tower of London to stock the new London Zoo. His niece, Queen Victoria, was a regular visitor with her children, giving a royal imprint to the attraction (Hancocks, 2001). In the 20th century, royalty took on the role of patronage, providing much needed publicity for fund raising and linking zoos with conservation. Thus, Prince Rainier and Princess Grace, whose romance so publicly started in a zoo, were recruited by Gerald Durrell as patrons of the Wildlife Preservation Trust International (Botting, 1999).

The growth of zoos in the 19th century is well documented in the zoos literature, but two key aspects are often overlooked. The first is that zoos were a direct result of economic and political changes. They occurred in towns and reflected major changes in the nature and organisation of urban centres. In the 18th century, menageries were symbolic of royal power, by the end of the 19th century they symbolised the power of cities and their citizens. The second aspect to note is that zoos were not alone in this role. A whole suite of new institutions came to prominence in this period. Parks, gardens, galleries, museums and libraries all proliferated, were enthusiastically embraced as symbols of urban status and became attractions for the new mass markets. At the beginning of the 21st century, we can see these same processes being repeated in Asia, with the governments of modern cities looking to zoos and other cultural attractions as symbols of their modernity. Accordingly, we are seeing a geographical shift in the re-imagining of zoos, exemplified by the success of Singapore Zoo (see Henderson, this volume) and the debate over the future direction of Mumbai Zoo (see Hannam, this volume).

Zoos as Museums

It has been suggested that zoos are 'a form of museum'. Both zoos and museums 'are essentially educational in purpose, have a professional staff, are frequently non-profit making, and own and conserve tangible objects that are exhibited to the public'. The major difference being 'that a zoo's exhibits are living' (Mason, 2000: 333).

In the 19th century, zoos and museums were often closely related. William Hornaday was a young taxidermist who worked for the National Museum in Washington and later for the Smithsonian Institution. On an expedition to acquire bison for a planned diorama, he was appalled to find that they were rapidly heading for extinction. Hornaday embarked on a campaign for a refuge for the bison and other endangered North American animals. This became the National Zoo in Washington, with Hornaday as its first director (De Courcy, 1995; Hancocks, 2001). In

Europe, zoo promoters combined them with museums, libraries and even conference centres in order to attract the widest range of potential subscribers (Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier, 2002). When Hagenbeck brought his animal show from Germany to the 1893 World Fair in Chicago, it was billed as a 'Museum and Menagerie' (Rothfels, 2002: 135). Even today, the distinction is blurred for many institutions, e.g. the bioregional zoo in Tuscon (USA) is the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.

The simple distinction between museums and zoos is that one keeps and displays live animals and the other does the same for dead preserved ones. However, there may be an overlap. Some museums display small numbers of live animals, usually as part of a larger ecosystem display. Thus, Melbourne Museum features a rainforest area with living trees and a number of captive and roaming birds, reptiles, insects and amphibians. Some major museums have gone as far as simulated animals. The Museum of Natural History in London displays animatronic dinosaurs, including a *Tyrannosaurus rex* and raptors. In Sydney, the Australian Museum utilises a life-like puppet of an *Allosaurus*. The Queensland Museum in Brisbane has animatronic versions of *Thylacaleo* and *Megalania*, while the visitors' centre of the Naracoorte Caves National Park in South Australia also features prehistoric megafauna. The temptation must be to move from robot versions of the extinct to the endangered.

How displays are presented and interpreted may also be different. In the 19th century, museums and zoos were often compared by the way their collections were grouped and ordered. Zoos, like museums, followed what was seen as a logical scientific rationale. Related species, e.g. monkeys, were grouped together in what was then seen as the optimal educational presentation. When zoos embarked on naturalistic exhibits in the late 20th century, it was then argued that they were consciously moving away from the museum approach. However, as zoos changed, so did museums, with many curators exploring new and different modes of exhibition.

The biggest difference between zoos and museums may be in how we view their place in society. Mullan and Marvin (1987) argue that museums and art galleries are commonly seen as places of 'high culture', critical for maintaining our civilisation. They are accordingly highly respected, seen as worthy of funding and support. By contrast, zoos are 'popular culture', an enjoyable experience, easy to digest, but with no higher purpose. As Mullan and Marvin (1987: 132) argue, it then becomes too easy to dismiss zoos as not important, for 'museums and galleries are adult institutions; zoos are not'. Clearly, this is a vision that many zoos would like to counter. It was notable that in 1975, when Seattle decided to redevelop Woodland Park Zoo, aspirations of a higher status led to it being branded as a 'Life Science Institution' (Mullan & Marvin, 1987: 62).

Zoos as Theme Parks

In 2007, members of TRINET (an online forum for tourism researchers) discussed the origins of theme parks. Broadly defined, theme parks are amusement parks that have a strong over-arching theme or image. Accordingly, the discussion was about when did amusement parks begin to market themselves with distinctive and attractive themes. Disneyland, established in 1955 by Walt Disney using characters and images from his movies, is often referred to as the first theme park. A number of attractions were suggested as predating Disneyland, e.g. Corrigan's Ranch on the fringes of Los Angeles. After the discussion had continued for some time, Peter Mason made a bold suggestion. Given the definition of a theme park as an attraction with a strong unifying theme, Mason argued that London Zoo, established in 1828, qualifies as the first theme park. In this section, I want to take Mason's idea even further and argue that zoos, such as London Zoo, became the template for future developments in attractions such as amusement and theme parks. To couch it in evolutionary terms, from this common ancestor, one family branch evolved as modern zoos, while another went in the different direction of theme parks.

Initially, London Zoo was conceived as a scientific institution, open only to learned members of the Zoological Society of London. However, guests could be signed in and there was a rapid progression to more and more days of general admittance. As its popularity grew, the animals were complemented with rides and entertainments. Formally, it was London Zoological Gardens, imitating the Jardin des Plantes in Paris (the shortened term 'zoo' was coined in a popular music hall song in 1867). From the beginning, this was an institution that combined animals and plants, and the extensive lawns and flower plantings were an important attraction.

London Zoo functioned as a pressure release valve for the rapidly growing city. On the fringe of the metropolis, it could be reached by walking. As London rapidly expanded, public transport networks tapped a huge market that was hungry for green space. A peak annual attendance of 3 million visitors was achieved in 1950 (Shackley, 1996: 116). Subsequently, increased car ownership and demographic changes (combined with changing tastes, competition from other attractions – particularly wildlife and safari parks – and growing concerns about conditions for animals) led to a decline in visitation. Currently, London Zoo attracts about 1 million visitors per year (Tribe, 2004: 37). London is an instructive case study, but it is important to see that it is not alone. There are quite a number of inner-city zoos, established in the 19th century, which are now struggling to be viable and relevant in the 21st century.

The problem is that zoos were expensive to establish and operate (Tribe, 2004). They required large areas on the urban fringe, ideally with some sort of transport access (just as theme parks would in the 20th century). As urban areas continued to expand, there was increasing pressure from housing on land values. Other capital costs were in visitor facilities, exhibits and the animals. Economies of scale applied, small zoos were constrained by limited revenue streams (see e.g. the financial struggles of Healesville Sanctuary in Australia as outlined in Fleay-Thomson, 2007). One solution was to broaden their appeal as attractions. Developing and promoting zoos as pleasure gardens appealing to a broad market was important to attract subscribers and customers and to satisfy stakeholders, such as local government officials (Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier, 2002). Accordingly, for most of their existence, zoos have also featured concerts, restaurants, rides, conference venues and picnic facilities (Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier, 2002; Conway, 1991). These were features of the early zoos and they continue to be an important part of zoo operations today. In turn, a number of theme parks also feature live animals (Broad & Weiler, 1998).

The provision of rides was the most striking parallel with amusement and theme parks. In many cases, the rides seemed interchangeable, with no obvious linkage to animals (Figure 10.1). In the 1960s, Melbourne Zoo



Figure 10.1 A train ride in the zoo; but it could be at any attraction. (Photo: Warwick Frost)

featured a train ride snaking through its grounds with a replica of the modern diesel, the Southern Aurora. It still proudly maintains a working 19th century merry-go-round (or carousel). What was distinctive was animal rides, ranging from donkeys and ponies to elephants, camels and tortoises (De Courcey, 1995). In the modern mechanised world, these and petting zoo exhibits gave urban children one of their few chances to interact with animals.

A different approach to the same problem is to bring zoos into tourism precincts, where they can cluster with other attractions. While there are financial and logistical impediments to doing this with conventional large zoos, it is feasible for smaller operations, particularly aquaria, and this is a growing trend (Judd, 1999; Shackley, 1996; Dobson *this volume*). Accordingly, Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco is the home of the Aquarium of the Bay. Sydney's Darling Harbour, another redeveloped dock area, hosts the Sydney Aquarium. Crocosaurus, an attraction focused on crocodiles, opened recently in the main street of Darwin, Australia. In Christchurch, New Zealand, Cathedral Square is the main tourism hub and it contains the Southern Encounter Aquarium and Kiwi House, accessible through the city's visitor information centre.

A penchant for fantasy architecture reinforces the image of zoos as theme parks. Disneyland was notable for creating a self-contained world, harkening back to earlier and simpler times, an 'architecture of reassurance' that allowed visitors to temporarily forget their modern woes (Marling, 1997). However, zoos went down this same path over a century before Disneyland. Influenced by Romanticism, 19th century zoos excelled in fantasy display houses, reflecting the architectural style of the countries where the animals came from (Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier, 2002; Hancocks, 2001; Hoage & Deiss, 1996). Thus, African animals at Antwerp Zoo (Belgium) were housed (and still are) in a faux Egyptian temple, while the antelopes were accommodated in a replica Arabian mosque (Figure 10.2).

The use of fantasy design is still widespread. Rainforests are now highly popular, even if some are entirely constructed of concrete and plastic (Hancocks, 2001). So ubiquitous are the rainforest exhibits that one can hardly be considered a modern zoo without one. Indeed, even Vancouver Aquarium in Canada has an attractive (indoor) tropical rainforest. This choice of emphasising rainforests illustrates how easily the concept of the 'architecture of reassurance' is adapted for zoos. With modern concerns about the environment and climate change (and indeed whether we should have zoos), these exhibits provide reassurance that rainforests are being valued and protected, albeit in a city tourist attraction. Nor has human architecture been forgotten, with many zoos looking to replicate human habitations to provide the right ambience.

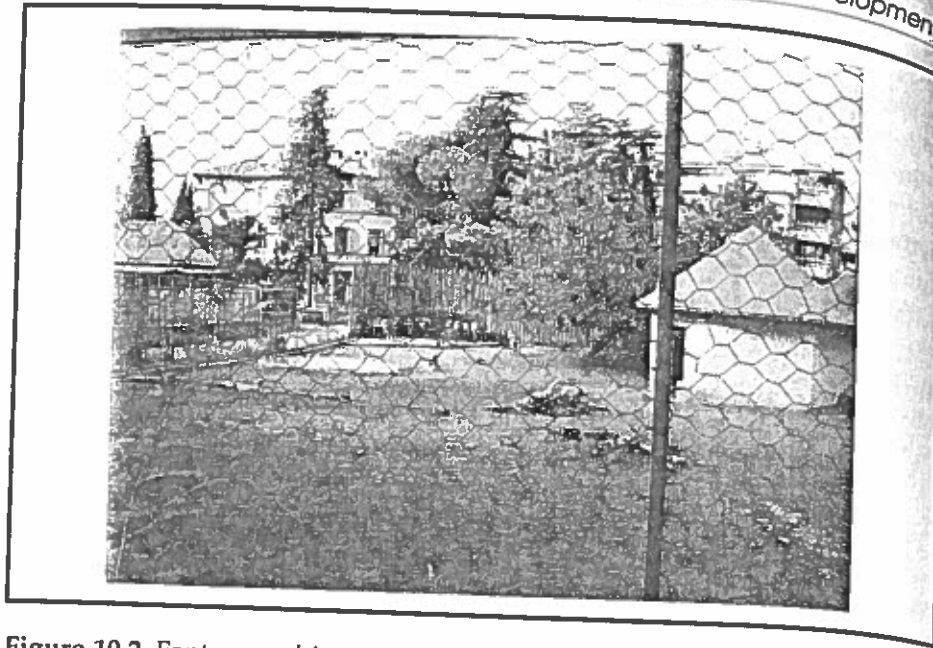


Figure 10.2 Fantasy architecture: A faux Egyptian hut contrasts with nearby housing blocks. (Photo: Warwick Frost)

Thus, Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo has an African village and the Trail of the Elephants in Melbourne Zoo features a South-East Asian village and hawkers market.

National Parks and Other Protected Areas

Yellowstone, the first national park, was established in 1872 and it wasn't really until after the First World War that the idea spread beyond the similar settler societies of the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Frost & Hall, 2009). In many places, zoos substantially predated national parks. Germany, for example, was a crucial player in the development of zoos, opening one in Berlin in 1844, but did not establish its first national park until 1969. However, as both institutions have evolved, there has been some curious interplay between them. This is not surprising, given that both zoos and national parks have similar generic goals of nature conservation, education and entertainment. Indeed, they have, at times, been seen as substitutes.

Early national parks sometimes contained small zoos. These not only allowed tourists to see animals with minimal exertion, but complemented the idea of national parks being primarily for recreation. Of course, such developments stimulated opposition. Perhaps the most notorious was the zoo at Yosemite National Park. It was established in 1918 to house orphaned mountain lion cubs, victims of a programme to eradicate

predators. They were then joined by a bear cub and a relocated herd of elk. Increasingly criticised as inappropriate, it was closed in 1932, with the mountain lions slaughtered to gain a bounty (Runte, 1990). In Australia, the Royal National Park (1879) and Belair National Park (1891) were established for the recreation of nearby urban populations and contained zoo enclosures (Frost & Hall, 2009). In 1908, plans for a National Park of Scotland included a wildlife reserve in the grounds of a stately home. Though eventually not designated a national park, it developed into a small zoo with a tropical birdhouse and baboons on display (Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier, 2002).

In 1954, Gerald Durrell began talks with Julian Huxley (founder of the IUCN) and Peter Scott regarding the establishment of a wildlife reserve cum national park, which could be used to breed endangered animals. Initially, Durrell's idea was to establish this in the West Indies, he then considered Cyprus. It was only after some time that he realised that it had to be more like a zoo than a national park, in that it had to be accessible to a sufficient potential market of paying tourists to be successful. His first attempt was at Bournemouth, UK, before moving to the island of Jersey (Botting, 1999).

Between the Wars, the success of African national parks, particularly Kruger National Park in South Africa, influenced a trend towards wildlife parks, such as Whipsnade in the UK (Baratay & Hardouin-Fugier, 2002). Here was a new type of zoo. Indeed, many were not even called zoos; instead names such as sanctuary and wildlife reserve signified their position somewhere between zoos and national parks. Located in rural areas, they could afford larger enclosures in which the animals could roam relatively free and they catered for the growing use of automobiles for day-trips and weekend holidays. Following the Second World War, high rates of motor car ownership further increased their appeal. For these wildlife parks, there were clear marketing benefits in not being identified exactly as a zoo, but rather something closer to a national park or other type of nature reserve. Thus, when David Fleay left Healesville Sanctuary in 1952, he established his own wildlife attraction on Queensland's Gold Coast, which he called Fleay's Fauna Reserve (nearby was Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, established in 1947). When he retired in the 1980s, his reserve was then purchased and subsequently operated by the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service (Fleay-Thomson, 2007).

Conclusion

The history of zoos has generated a substantial and fascinating literature. Much of it is concerned with the changes in how people relate to animals and the resulting developments in zoo exhibits and

conservation programmes. In this chapter, I have taken a different approach to zoo history. My aim was to consider zoos as tourist attractions by comparing their evolution to those of similar attractions, particularly museums, national parks and theme parks. Taking such an approach is valuable, as it highlights both the differences and similarities between these various competing attractions. Zoos are neither museums, or theme parks or national parks, but by examining their parallel developments and influence on each other, we gain a better understanding of zoos and their future.

