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Memphis Zoo's Teton Trek will give a sense of travel to national parks

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Memphis Zoo's Teton Trek will give a sense of travel to national parks

By Linda A. Moore

Posted September 26, 2009 at midnight

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PHOTO BY KAREN FOCHT

Workmen put the finishing touches on The Great Lodge and exhibit space at the Memphis Zoo's Teton Trek. The redwood lodge is modeled after the Old Faithful Inn at Yellowstone.

Soaring mountain peaks, catapulting waterfalls and erupting geysers are common in the Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks 1,500 miles away.

But when Teton Trek opens next month at the Memphis Zoo, Mid-Southerners will be saturated in what has been called the most famous ecosystem in North America.

"I think that the concept of having a hike through a famous national park, where you see the artifacts and the features of the park as well as the animals that frequent that habitat, I think that experience is what sets it off," said Chuck Brady, zoo president and CEO.

Teton Trek opens to zoo members Friday and to the general public on Oct. 10.

At the entrance of the four-acre exhibit is the zoo's interpretation of the Old Faithful geyser and the Great Lodge, modeled after the Old Faithful Inn at Yellowstone. Features include educational touch-screens and a short film on the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone.



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Three orphaned grizzly bear cubs from Montana (including this one) and two from Alaska will have a new home in the Memphis Zoo's Teton Trek exhibit, whose star attractions are the grizzlies, wolves, elk and waterfowl native to the Yellowstone region.

However, the animals are the main attraction at Teton Trek, and they'll include grizzly bears, wolves, elk, cranes, swans and other waterfowl, all living in exhibits that mimic their native terrain.

"From the public's standpoint, it makes you feel like you're in Yellowstone looking at wildlife," said Matt Thompson, zoo curator.



PHOTO BY KAREN FOCHT // BUY THIS PHOTO

The Great Lodge and exhibit space at Teton Trek will offer visitors a chance to view wildlife in a national parklike setting.

At center stage are five grizzly bears, including three orphaned cubs from Wyoming. The other two grizzlies, both more than a year old, were orphaned in Alaska.

"The (bears) exhibit itself is pushing an acre in size, so there's all kinds of room to roam around," Thompson said.

The enclosure includes a waterfall and stream stocked with trout so the bears can fish. A window at water level will allow visitors to watch the bears underwater.

Visitors will be also be able to view the grizzlies from the upper level of the Great Lodge and along an elevated path to the rear of the space.

Because of the nearly 100-pound difference between the older bears and the cubs, they'll alternate use of the outdoor space, Thompson said. They'll have an opportunity to get to know each other through a "howdy" area out of public view.

"So when the time comes to introduce each other, they'll know each other pretty well," Thompson said. "We're hoping for friendly bears."

Next to the bears are waterfowl, including two sandhill cranes that have gray feathers, spindly legs and red foreheads. They were bred at SeaWorld in Orlando, Fla.

Two trumpet swans, ducks and other water birds will be moved from an existing exhibit at the zoo into Teton

Trek.

The wolves, three females and a male, were raised at a private facility near Chicago and are the bears' other next-door neighbors, Thompson said.

"The wolves really have a commanding view. They can look out over the bear yard and see elk on the other side," he said.

Because of their reclusive nature, their enclosure has big trees and areas of privacy, he said.

The elk enclosure is about three-quarters of an acre, with mature trees for the three females and one male, all about 14 months old, Thompson said. They were bred at a private preserve in McMinnville, Tenn.

Published 1/29/2014 at 2:11 p.m. 7 comments

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A Few Clouds
Wind: S 6mph

Today
33°
19°

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Teton Trek is another of the zoo exhibits that take visitors to a specific place.

"So many people in Memphis don't get to travel outside of Memphis. So with China, with Northwest Passage, with Teton, we've done a pretty good job of bringing that here with the architecture and building materials," Thompson said. "We call them immersion exhibits. Teton is a going to be a really great addition to our repertoire."

Teton Trek is among the last projects left on the zoo's 1988 master plan. The \$16 million project was paid for through corporate and private donations, including a \$10 million gift from Fred and Diane Smith, the largest in the zoo's history.

Fundraising began in 2005.

Early in 2008, controversy erupted over the exhibit when the zoo removed 139 trees that were part of Overton Park's old-growth forest at the start of construction.

"We just think it's a shame that the Memphis Zoo didn't redevelop some of their older exhibits instead of clear-cutting an old-growth forest," said Naomi Van Tol, co-founder of Citizens to Preserve Overton Park.

With a master plan that dated to 1988, the forest advocates' ire caught Brady off guard.

"We don't operate without getting the word out, including Teton Trek," Brady said. "We were talking to the media, we had a capital campaign going."

Now that Teton Trek is built, that battle is over for CPOP.

"We're focusing on the 17 acres that they still have fenced off," Van Tol said. "We would like to see that fence come down and returned to the forest."

Those acres are slated to become Chickasaw Bluffs, a low-impact exhibit that takes visitors into the forest via a boardwalk. It will be designed to minimize disturbance to the trees, Brady said.

The zoo plans to open the Zambezi River Hippo Camp in 2011, replacing the 1950s-era hippo exhibit. And a new master plan is being developed, one that does not involve expanding beyond the zoo's 76 acres but which will deal with outdated exhibits, Brady said.

The zoo is taking suggestions for Chickasaw Bluffs at its Web site and updates are available to zoo fans on Facebook.com.

"We're reaching far more people electronically than we ever have and part of our message is where we're going in the future," Brady said.

-- Linda A. Moore: 529-2702


About Teton Trek

The Memphis Zoo's new 4-acre, \$16 million exhibit re-creates the western expanse of Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks.


Opening: Preview for zoo members only Oct. 2-9; Ribbon cutting at 10 a.m. on Oct. 10.

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









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