

Detailed Timeline of the Lake Superior Zoo

February 26-27, 1923

Bert Onsgard is granted permission from the city council and mayor to build and organize the Duluth Zoo. The dream becomes a reality as Bert and his friend Billy, a white-tailed deer, begin what is now the Lake Superior Zoo. Bert found Billy while in a logging camp during hunting season the previous year and kept it in his printing shop in West Duluth.

1920's

- Mayor Samuel F. Snively implements a WPA (Works Progress Administration). The bear dens, elephant house (new polar shores) and various stone bridges are built.

1924

- Zoo population: 2 buffalo, 3 foxes, 3 wolves, 2 coyotes, 9 deer, 7 bears, 75 fancy pigeons

1926

- Bert Onsgard named to Duluth Hall of Fame.
- Coyote dens are built.

1927

- The main building is constructed and for many years was home to a variety of primates on the main floor; and the majestic large cats which resided on the lower level.
- Children's Drive -- lions purchased
- City Council named special advisory committee to take over supervision and management of the development of the zoo: Mayor S.F. Snively, Commissioner W.S. McCormick, Commissioner Chris Evens
- Bert Onsgard named manager at salary of \$1.00/year

1928

- 2nd Annual Duluth Zoo Dance
- Bert Onsgard authorized by city council to have entire charge of all animal activities--under direction of special zoo committee
- By August zoo population: 220 animals, birds & reptiles
- Two large Stanley Paradise Cranes are donated to the zoo

1929

- Circular pony track build with 12 Shetland ponies drawing carts or saddled
- Zoo becomes separate department of city.
- A variety of animals find their new home at the Zoo. Including tigers, a zebra, unspecified monkeys, baboons, two baby chimpanzees, an Indian elephant and a variety of small mammals and birds.

1930-1935

- The Great Depression hits and the Zoo is almost closed.

1931

- After six years in temporary quarters, the Zoo took on permanence and official standing.
- Main building is completed. It housed primates and large cats.

1937-1945

- Chevier Howard is appointed as the full time, salaried curator by Duluth Mayor C.R. Berghult.

1943-1945

- Burt Onsgard takes the reigns again for a short period of two years.

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1945-1950

- Park superintendent Gus Johnson is acting director assisted by head zookeeper Bruer Hage.

1952

- A small aquarium is added featuring Minnesota fish.

1950's

- The zoo becomes the field for a 'political football' with a myriad of controversy surrounding the upcoming director positions.
- Mayor George W. Johnson appoints a 49 member citizen advisory committee to counsel the Mayor's office and parks department on matters affecting the zoo.
- Attitudes toward the Zoo begin to change from that of entertainment, to one of education and conservation.

February 27, 1959

- The Arrowhead Zoological Society receives its charter. It has flourished and remains today as an active, viable source of community involvement.

Late 1950's to Early 1960's

- Llyod Hackl is director, followed by a controversial Joseph Mayo and Robert Wahlstein

1962

- 'Mr. Magoo', the only federally sanctioned mongoose allowed residence in the United States, makes his home at the Lake Superior Zoo.

1964

- The Zoo gains a variety of animals including a rhinoceros, hippopotamus, two sea lions, toucans, myna birds, gibbons, a zebra and a baby and mother mouflon.

1965

- An exotic dancer donates 3 of her snakes to the Zoo including a Kingsnake and a Boa Constrictor.
- Other additions include an African Crested porcupine, black bear cub, one female spotted leopard, South American Tapirs, a pair of Coatimundis and a pair of Liongos (both are related to the raccoon) and two Galapagos tortoises.

1966

- The new arrivals include 4 hedgehog Tenrecs, a gift from the Stuttgart Germany Zoo. Two South American Ostriches, traded for three lion cubs. A mountain lion, a lion cub won in a drawing sponsored by the Sunbeam Corporation, and two young Bennetts Wallabies

1967

- Basil Norton takes over as director of the zoo. He begins a master plan for modernization and expansion of the zoo.
- New arrivals include the births of a polar bear cub named snowflake, and a total of five Bengal tiger cubs, two in February and three in October. The acquisition of a Tayra, Rheas, mountain lions, pronghorn antelope, mouflon sheep, squirrel monkeys, margay and wallabies.

1968

- Three more cubs are born to Bengal tigers Shea and Sultan, this was the fourth litter of cubs born at the Duluth Zoo for Sheba.
- Alice and Joe become the proud parents of a 1 1/2 pound baby baboon.

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- Acquisitions included a pair of coyotes, a male dingo, a female Aoudad, female spotted hyena, bald eagle, a pair of hallstrom's wild dogs, gibbons, black bears, jaguars, and five timber wolves.
- Richard Griggs donates \$25,000.00 to construct a trophy building at the zoo.

1969

- Richard Griggs donates a portion of his taxidermy collection to a new wing downstairs.
- Sheba again gives birth to seven more Bengal tiger cubs throughout the year.
- New acquisitions include a pair of jaguars, an African lion, swans, prairie dogs, several monkeys, and two fawns.
- Carmen, a jaguar gives birth to two cubs.
- Minnesota state legislature receive a house passed bill allowing a state zoological board to make grants to zoos in the state.

1970

- Nemo, a male lion is donated out of the back of a Volkswagen bus. Eighteen years later he sired three cubs, two years after his vasectomy.
- A pair of bison is added to the roster acquired from the U.S. Wild Life Refuge in Nebraska. Other arrivals include a female puma, Brazilian tapir, silver langur, red foxes, coyotes, and several species of birds.

1971

- Newest acquisitions are bush babies of Southern Africa, a large variety of birds, mongoose lemurs, ringtail lemurs, boa constrictor, and a hognosed snake
- Sheba the fertile Bengal tiger gave birth to six cubs bringing her to a grand total of 45 cubs!! This was extraordinary news considering it was about this time that the Bengal tiger was considered an endangered species.

1972

- An outdoor aviary is built, which housed small birds and ducks
- The newest arrivals included a Lar Gibbon, spotted fallow deer and male Aoudad
- The marine mammal protection act is instated to protect and preserve marine mammals
- Recognition of endangered species including a variety of animals in the zoo at this time; The black rhinoceros, polar bears, Bengal tigers, mongoose, lemurs, bald eagle, cereopsis geese, and galapagos tortoises.

1973

- Endangered species act controlled the taking or capture of protected Flora and Fauna.
- Acquisitions include two black bear cubs and a pair of lion tailed macaque declared endangered in 1969.

1976

- The small mammal exhibit and prairie dog town are build.
- The Docent Association is formed. They are volunteer teachers who have donated thousands of hours and have raised thousands of dollars through fundraising efforts.

1979

- The Children's Zoo Plaza is built.

1980

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- The Nocturnal building is added to the Children's zoo.

1981

- AZA (American Zoological Association) was started with a host of SSP's (species survival programs). These plans relied on the goodwill and dedication of participating zoos and aquariums to provide support for breeding programs and also manage animals as part of a larger, cooperative inter-zoo and aquarium family. There are 175 accredited institutions that must undergo an evaluation every five years to maintain their status as an AZA Zoo.

Mid-1980's

- A new master plan is submitted to the state legislature for major renovation projects at the zoo.

Late 1980's

- Financial assistance is given and construction begins lasting until the mid-1990's.

Major Renovations Include:

- An outdoor lion exhibit built in place of the old barns.
- An Australian yard and exhibit were built at the far side of the zoo.
- The bear dens were renovated into an exhibit for puma and kodiak bears.
- The small carnivore dens were torn down and in its place the snow leopard exhibit is built.
- The old elephant house was transformed into a huge rocky polar exhibit.

1988

- The name of the Duluth Zoo is changed to the Lake Superior Zoological Gardens

1989

- Acquisition of Bubba & Berlin (zoo's popular polar bears).

1993

- A barnyard is added to the children's plaza.

1995

- Mike Janis is hired as the New Zoo Director.

1999

- Primate Conservation Center is completed. It features endangered primates from around the world.

2001

- The Willard Munger Animal Care Center opened, funded by a state grant with no matching funds.

2002

- ReBuild Minnesota alternative energy site.

2003

- Solar energy begins to be installed
- Master Plan revisited, revised and approved by City Council

2004 to 2006

- Zoo Director Mike Janis resigns; Ryan Gulker hired, resigns after six months
- September 2006: Zoo loses AZA Accreditation

2007

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- Interim Assistant Zoo Director Paul Anderson, a senior keeper, appointed
- Lake Superior Zoological Society and City of Duluth begin meetings to plan the future of the zoo and review the organization structure