

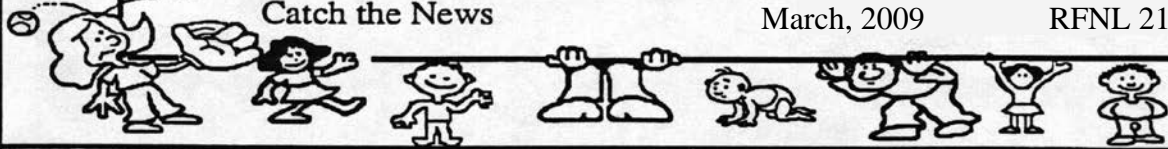


# The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch the News

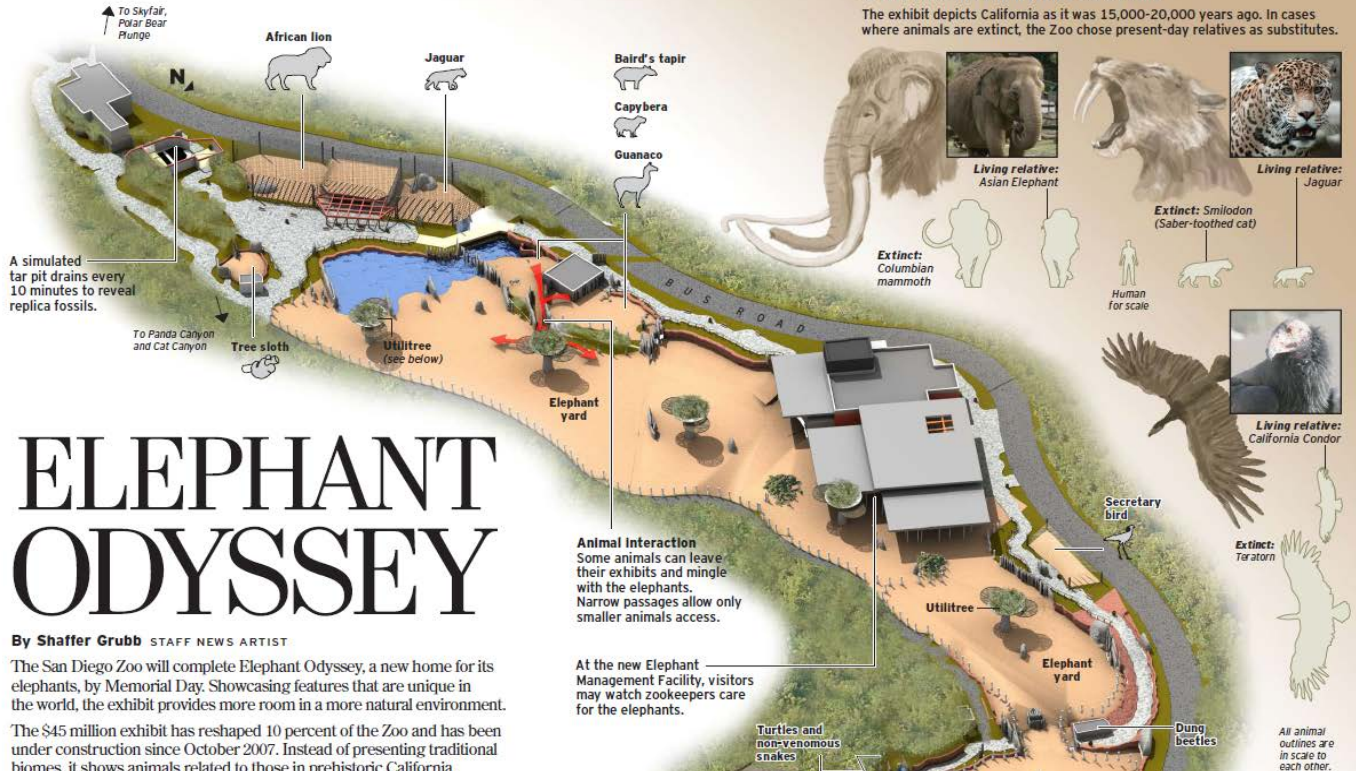
March, 2009

RFNL 217



## A TRIP THROUGH PREHISTORIC CALIFORNIA

The exhibit depicts California as it was 15,000-20,000 years ago. In cases where animals are extinct, the Zoo chose present-day relatives as substitutes.

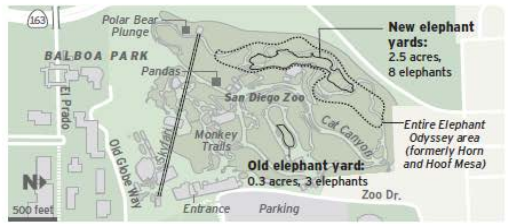


# ELEPHANT ODYSSEY

By Shaffer Grubb STAFF NEWS ARTIST

The San Diego Zoo will complete Elephant Odyssey, a new home for its elephants, by Memorial Day. Showcasing features that are unique in the world, the exhibit provides more room in a more natural environment.

The \$45 million exhibit has reshaped 10 percent of the Zoo and has been under construction since October 2007. Instead of presenting traditional biomes, it shows animals related to those in prehistoric California.

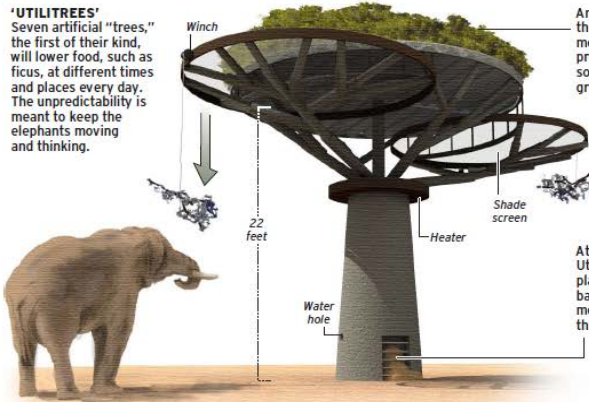


**Animal Interaction**  
Some animals can leave their exhibits and mingle with the elephants. Narrow passages allow only smaller animals access.

At the new Elephant Management Facility, visitors may watch zookeepers care for the elephants.

The Madagascar Gardens are the only remnant of the former Horn and Hoof Mesa. The plants were deemed too sensitive to move.

**'UTILITREES'**  
Seven artificial "trees," the first of their kind, will lower food, such as ficus, at different times and places every day. The unpredictability is meant to keep the elephants moving and thinking.



An acacia shrub helps the Utilitree look more realistic and provides another source of food once it grows to hang down.

At the base of the Utilitree, hay is placed behind iron bars as an additional mental challenge for the elephants.

### CHILDREN'S AREA

- A series of oversized tracking collars beep when kids walk through.
- Bone puzzles have different heads and tails for children to match.
- A fossil dig substitutes small rubber chunks for dirt, which kids may sift through.

SOURCE: San Diego Zoo  
PHOTOS: Getty Images; EDUARDO CONTRERAS AND JOHN GASTALDO / Union-Tribune

# The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch the News

March, 2172

## Robert's company helps build unique zoo exhibit

The World Famous San Diego zoo will soon open one of the most ambitious and unusual animal exhibits in the world, and Robert's company is playing an important role in its construction, as shown in the page one picture. We have the following comments from him.

Dad

As an update I thought I would let you know about a unique project that my company is involved with. A few months ago we were awarded the electrical contract for the new San Diego Zoo Elephant Odyssey (see the information sheet on page one) that will be completed this April. While I am not personally involved with the electrical work I was asked to help design a control system for the feeding of the elephants.

Now one would think this is a simple process of just throwing some hay out and yelling "Come and get it!" (although it did work for you and Mom). And in fact, that's about the way it used to be in the old elephant enclosure. The problem, as it was explained to me, is that the elephants don't have to forage for their food as they do in the wild. This causes major health issues with captive elephants because of this sedentary life style (kind of like a really big couch potato). Wild elephants can roam as much as several miles a day looking for food, whereas in captivity very little foraging is required.

So a major part of the design for this new exhibit is the "Utitree", pictured at the bottom left-hand side of the information sheet. Each "Tree" will have a winch that, when activated, will lower food down to where the elephants can just reach it, then wait for a pre-determined time and raise it out of reach again. The idea here is to have several of these trees located throughout the exhibit and to have food presented at random times and locations. This method provides several benefits to the elephants; 1) It makes them reach up for food, thus working the neck and upper body muscles, 2) The random presentation makes the elephants move from tree to tree to get fed, 3) The short time of presentation makes them hurry to get the food (our family motto "the quick and the fed" certainly applies here) which increases their heart rate and provides for better exercise, 4) by having multiple trees present food at the same time, a dominant elephant can't keep other elephants from getting their share, and 5) It challenges the elephants to think and respond to these trees.

My job was to take this design and provide a control system that would accomplish the above stated goals. The basic operation calls for a wireless manual control system (the user can select a tree then push a button on the remote control to lower or raise the food). There also are automatic controls which lower the food and provide an audible signal to call the

elephant. They also raise the food after a timed period and do so in a random pattern and for multiple trees.

Now this is not a difficult program and it is ready for installation. However the most challenging part of the system was the audible call for the elephants. It turns out that elephant's hearing is in the low frequency range; in fact 80% of their communication is well below the normal ability for a human to hear. Additionally, elephants can feel vibrations in their feet from very far away. Based on this information we decided that the sound of the winches motion and the vibration it will provide to the tree should be enough that the elephant's will hear and feel where their next meal is coming from.

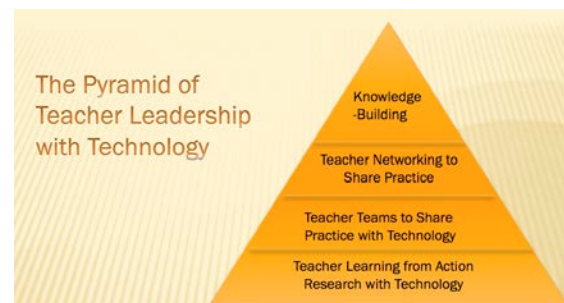
So, on your next visit to this exciting new exhibit, be sure to take note of the feeding habits of its occupants. Chances are that it will remind you of our family dinners way back when.

Love you both! Robert

Thanks, Robert, for this interesting report on this amazing new project. I am sure it will be the number one attraction when it opens.

### *Margaret Presents on Teacher Leadership with Technology at SITE Conference in Charleston*

Margaret attended the Society for Information Technology in Education Conference and presented a chapter that she and Hank Becker wrote called *Characteristics of teacher leaders for information and communication technology*. One of her slides from her talk is presented below. The chapter can be downloaded from the [RFNL google site](#).



Then instead of returning home, she flew to Las Vegas where Bud joined her to celebrate her 59<sup>th</sup> birthday. They went to see the Beatles LOVE show. Like all performances by Cirque du Soleil, the show features incredible acrobatics, stunts, dance and wonderful staging themed with the familiar sound-track of the Beatles moving from the Sixties to the present time.



# The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch the News

March, 2009

Using the lyrics from the songs, they created a massive swirl of lights, colors, shadows, and even a Volkswagen Beetle that drives across the stage and later comes apart at the seams. It was quite a production.



The second show they attended was Ice at the Riviera which was a surprisingly good given the half-price inexpensive tickets. The Olympic quality performers moved across the ice with such comfort and grace it was hard to believe it was ice. The best was the women on stilts with skates—ten feet of silk scarfs in all colors gracefully dancing around the stage was spectacularly beautiful!



Back home, Margaret has been hard at work on a new website on [Learning Circles](#) that pulls together all of her experiences with learning circles over the years. She would love comments or critiques if you are up to reading. It is a wiki so join before you read, then you can fix any errors you catch as you read.



## Some brief family news items

Here are a few words on some happenings in the family

**Brett** spent a few days visiting San Diego for a root canal

procedure. Believe it or not, it cost less to fly from New York (with help from Jessica) to San Diego and return than to have the procedure done in New York! **Brian** will be moving to Tucson, Arizona in June, to be with some friends of his. He will continue his college studies there. **Correction** – In the January RFNL we incorrectly reported that the winner of the Jeopardy game was the Listy team, whereas the actual winner was the Margaret team. We did get the picture right. Sorry for this mistake. As you know, **Carol** is having a difficult recovery from her blood clot problem. However, things are looking better now and hopefully she is now making good progress. After his back surgery last year **Robert** was making good progress. However, a couple months ago he reported that in picking up a piece of paper he hurt his back again but in a different place. Fortunately, he quickly healed up and now reports that he feels fine. **Scott** recently joined older brother David at Francis Parker Lower School, in the after school program.

## Scooter News

It was last November that we reported on the maiden scooter voyage aboard the finally finished, scooter trailer to the San Diego Zoo. Since that auspicious day, the wildness of the Saturday afternoon lunch has never been the same. The trailer, now painted a brassy blue and circled with a red & white racing stripe, trimmed with two American flags is such a display of senior swagger it can't help but provide an uptick to the traditional day at the park.

We have had a couple of trips to Balboa Park dining at both the Prado and the San Diego Sports HOF deli. We have visited the Automobile museum. It's a neat collection. The restored model "T", the old Bentleys, the Cadillac, specially customized to travel across the country never stopping (yes you can even change a flat tire as it moves), the old Dixieline lumber truck, the hot rods and the racers, a 55 Chevy, an original Jack in the box drive through menu (cheese burger 26 cents (the good ol days)), motorcycles, yes, your Harleys and your Indians, amongst others.

We have also scooted the parks main drag lined with musicians, actors and mystic tort card readers. I sometimes fear that grandma may get a speeding ticket from the horse riding peace officers but, to date, they have looked the other way. And, OK, we stopped in the parks distinguished room 105, the "senior room" for tea and cookies (free). Even us independent folks must, from time to time, be with our own people.

A Sea World trip was yet another weekend adventure. Thank you, Chris, for the passes and the good time at the LAST beer garden days at the park. Perhaps you RFNL readers know that Sea World has been owned by Anheuser Busch, and that a foreign beer company named INBEV has recently purchased A.B.. INBEV is now actively trying to sell Sea World. Consequently the Busch Beer Garden, a marketing tool of AB Beer, is now a thing of the past. Fortunately, we scooted in for the last day of a tremendous beer tasting

# The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch the News

March, 2009

experience. Several (free) beers from the menu were served paired with the appropriate fruit, cheese, crackers or chocolate snack. Now that's a lunch. And O yea, Shamu Rocks.

Anyway here are a few pictures of our past shenanigans. Anyone wishing to join us can just come, or check with granddad for excursion details; bring your running shoes.



Francie...

What did you do to Bobs hair?!?

Ha Ha