

Taronga Zoo celebrates its first 100 years

By Sophia 5K



The floral clock is one of Taronga Zoo's heritage listed sites with its original internal mechanisms still operating. Photo courtesy: The NSW State Library archives.

Taronga Zoo's celebrating 100 years of history with a number of original sites still visible.

Back in 1916 when Taronga Zoo first opened its doors at Mosman, the animal enclosures were very different. Although much has changed, visitors can still spot remnants from the past due to their historical importance.

Although Taronga Zoo was opened in 1916, its history dates back to 1884 where the first public zoo opened in New South Wales called Billy Goat Swamp in Moore Park. 228 mammals, 552 birds and 64 reptiles were moved from Moore Park to Taronga Zoo. Altogether there were 844 animals that were moved.

These historical sites are dotted throughout Taronga Zoo including the floral clock, monkey cages, elephant temple and the front and back entrances. Whilst these heritage listed sites can still be seen to this day, many of these are no longer used in their original format.

Some elements of past enclosures have been embedded into newer modern enclosures where animal welfare and conservation are critical. In the early days many of the animal enclosures were made out of cement and wire to ensure the visiting tourists could get unobstructed views of the animals. Back then the enclosures

Heritage facts:

- Opened in 1916
- Centenary celebrations throughout 2016
- Heritage listed sites include
 - Old monkey pits
 - Elephant temple
 - Floral clock
 - Old bridge

weren't designed to match their inhabitant's natural environment; the key focus was easy cleaning. Cement made cleaning the cages fast and easy for zoo keepers.

Back when it first opened, the focus was on entertainment with little camouflage provided for the animals. Patrons could sit back and enjoy themselves on elephant rides or watch in amusement as primates rode on motorbikes or sipped on tea at a tea party. The wire cages allowed easy access for inquisitive and cheeky children to poke their fingers and sticks at the animals as they tried to get their attention.

100 years on and Taronga Zoo is forging a path as one of the world's best animal conservation groups.

"The zoo has changed a lot over the years and the exhibits are so much better. They are more to do with where the animal comes from. We've got people who actually work to make the exhibits very comfortable for the animals," says Joe who used to live in the zoo.

"We also have probably three times as many staff as we had back then. It's better for the animals because they [keepers] can spend more time with the animals," Joe said.

The old lion pit was built into the new tiger exhibit which is a massive change. The tigers have places to camouflage and can hide from patrons when they feel like being alone.

The old monkey cages were transformed with indoor spaces for the animals to escape the public eye, foliage for camouflage and plenty of climbing frames to keep them entertained.



The old elephant house. Photo courtesy of The NSW State Library Archives.