Sierra Lodestar

Livin’ Large!

April 21 - 27, 2010
sierralodestar.com
Welcome to Sierra Lodestar

April 21 - 27, 2010 Vol. 2 No. 8

Mother’s Day Brunch

Sunday, May 9, 2010

Celebrate your mother with an elegant brunch in Ironstone Vineyards Music Room.

Seating Times:
9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. & 1:00 p.m.

The costs are $39.00 for adults $8.00 for ages 8-12 & $10.00 for 7 years & under

Please make your reservations, call 209-728-1251 ext.11

1849 Six Mile Road • Murphys, CA (209) 728-1251 • ironstonevineyards.com

On The Cover

On the Cover: Mara, an African elephant, strikes a dramatic pose at ARK 2000, a sprawling sanctuary operated by the Performing Animal Welfare Society in San Andreas.

Photo by Mike Taylor

Living the good life

Many people find the serenity of the Mother Lode’s foothills a great place to retire; they come here to revel in milder winters and warm summertime sun. Almost a decade ago, some super-sized creatures came to call these foothills home, too; the elephants in the care of the Performing Animal Welfare Society.

To their credit, PAWS’ co-executive directors, Pat Derby and Ed Stewart, shop locally. Tons of food for their elephants and tigers – currently the only two species relaxing on the hillsides – are purchased or contributed from area suppliers and local builders are hired for new construction.

The sanctuary also attracts visitors from around the world to San Andreas. Tours provide intimate glimpses into what it takes to safely and honorably keep these unusual critters in captivity, bringing hundreds to town. Many of those visitors stay in area bed and breakfasts and Ed and Pat are the first to recommend Gold Country wines to their visitors.

For me – a youngster who grew up on these hillsides – spying pachyderms perusing the pastures of their paddocks is a thrilling sight; who’d have thunk it? And if you get the chance to meet Ed and Pat, you’ll find their dedication to the animals amazing; would you spend the night on concrete with a newly arrived elephant that’s none too sure of what just happened? I can assure you that in no time, those new arrivals merrily make it onto Mother Lode soil and revel in its wonders.

May we all be able to enjoy our retirement in such loving care.

Mike Taylor
Editor
mtaylor@sierralodestar.com

Ralph Aldredge
Publisher
publisher@sierralodestar.com

Buzz Eggleston
General manager
gmt@sierralodestar.com

Contributors: Scott Thomas Anderson, Kim Mathie, Marla Allison, Bonnie Miller, Antoinette May Herndon, William Heinselman, Dean Fleming and Jan Hovey.

Design and production: Krissi Khokhobashvili, Carolyn Ramsay and David Christen.

Distribution: Monty Wright. Web Master: Patricia Jackson.
Caring for critters

Derby and Stewart founded PAWS in 1984 and its mission statement tells it all: “PAWS is dedicated to the protection of performing animals, to providing sanctuary to abused, abandoned and retired captive wildlife, to enforcing the best standards of care for all captive wildlife, to the preservation of wild species and their habitat and to promoting public education about captive wildlife issues.”

Some might read that statement and presume Derby and Stewart are anxious to declare animals more important than people or are determined to degrade any kind of human interference in animals’ lives, but that’s not quite the case. They are renowned for their knowledgeable handling of wild and exotic creatures that have been used and abused in circuses, at zoos and in private collections around the world. They also would rather see animals in the wild, not confined in cages or pens too small for their needs.

Derby saw the plight of performing animals firsthand early in her Hollywood career. She trained animals for movies and television shows. She worked on “Flipper,” “Lassie” and “Gentle Ben,” to name a few. She also trained the famed Lincoln Mercury cougars for commercials. She chronicled many of her experiences in the book, “The Lady and Her Tiger,” published in 1976 with writer Peter S. Beagle.

On a 30-acre patch outside Galt, PAWS began providing home to some of those battered and bruised animals. Elephants might have required the most space, but lions, tigers, several species of bear, monkeys and even a black leopard came to call PAWS home. As more and more animals required their hospitality, Derby and Stewart knew they needed to grow.

Amanda Blake – who Derby met in 1967 on the set of the television series “Gunsmoke,” on which Blake played Miss Kitty – applauded Stewart’s and Derby’s efforts and provided financial and administrative assistance when PAWS was founded in the 1980s. At pawsweb.org, Derby notes administrative assistance when Stewart jokes that he was partly filled with dread because he knew a hereculen task lay ahead. Millions of dollars would need to be raised before any of their four-legged charges saw their new homes.

With the approval of local officials, the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Department of Agriculture – which oversees captive animals – and numerous other agencies, Derby and Stewart began construction at ARK 2000 shortly after they purchased the land. With rolling hillsides and innumerable oak and evergreen trees, the idyllic location was the perfect setting for an animal refuge.

At the onset, two 20,000-square-foot barns were erected, one for the African elephants and the other for their Asian cousins. Upon first stepping into the African barn, many people mentioned Steven Spielberg’s classic “Jurassic Park” film because the fencing inside is so large, complete with hydraulic gates and an elephantine Jucuzzi.

Stewart designed the barns and the oversized fencing that encloses the elephant habitats. The African barn has a heated floor, but that wasn’t so the elephants’ feet remain toasty in chilly winter months; it’s to help keep the expansive room dry.

“It makes the barn easier to keep clean,” Stewart said in 2002. “ARK 2000 is a dream that started a long time ago,” Derby said at the sanctuary’s dedication in 2002. “What you see here was not easy to achieve.”

At the celebration – held before any of the pachyderms had established housekeeping in San Andreas – Derby and Stewart dedicated the Kay Mannes Turner Asian Elephant Habitat and the Cynthia Moss African Elephant Habitat.

Moss, who is regarded as one of the leading authorities on wild African elephants, said PAWS has done more to advance the cause of African elephants than anyone.

“If you’re a captive elephant,” Moss said at the time, “you want to come live here.”

When PAWS took possession of the site on Pool Station Road, Derby and Stewart knew there were some Mi-Wuk Indian burial
sites on the property. Through the sanctuary's initial construction, experts were brought in and several sites were identified and fenced off to avoid animals troucing on sacred land. John James, a Mi-Wuk spiritual leader, blessed the property at the dedication, expressing gratitude for PAWS' willingness to preserve the sanctity of the sites. He said he would rather see the property used for an animal sanctuary “than a bunch of homes.”

Today, a memorial garden has been established at one of the largest sites, where trees are planted to remember animals that have passed while in PAWS' care.

Once African elephants Mara and 71 were moved to ARK 2000, a steady influx of extra-large retirees came calling. At the poster child for PAWS – died Sept. 21, 2008, of pancreatitis. Stewart said colic is fairly common in captive elephants because their diets aren't quite as complete as they would be in the wild. PAWS staff and veterinarians had kept vigil with 71, but she eventually weakened and died.

“It was like we lost our boss,” Stewart lamented at the time.

Today Annie, Rebecca, Wanda and Gypsy – all Asian females – share a barn and about 35 acres of hillside at ARK 2000. Across a gravel lot is the African barn, where Lulu, Mara, Maggie and Ruby are kept and roam 100 acres of fenced territory. The fencing is built of old oil well piping Stewart located in Texas. Each post is concreted into the ground several feet deep and extends to almost 10 feet above ground.

Maggie is one of the more famous residents at ARK 2000. She arrived via U.S. Air Force cargo jet in November 2007. Worldwide media converged on San Andreas as a specially constructed cargo carrier outfitted with the last chains the elephant will ever wear was used to fly Maggie from Anchorage, Alaska, where she was living at the Alaska Zoo. Keepers and the public there sought greener pastures for Maggie and it wasn’t until former host of “The Price is Right,” Bob Barker, stepped in that the move became possible. Barker made a contribution to PAWS and has since become one of the group’s largest supporters.

“I agreed to make a $750,000 contribution to PAWS' sanctuary in California for the specific purpose of making life as good as possible for Maggie,” Barker was quoted.

Maggie was born in Zimbabwe, Africa, and brought to Alaska in 1983, according to pawsweb.org. Her mother was killed in a government-sponsored cull – hunts that are carried out to control elephant populations that are encroaching on human settlements. Maggie had a companion in Anchorage named Annabelle, an Asian elephant, until 1997, when Annabelle died. “This was the thing to do,” said Patrick Lampi, executive director of the Alaska Zoo, as he sat under an oak tree outside the African elephant compound in 2007, watching Maggie explore the California foothills.

“This is so impressive,” Barker said when asked what he first thought when he arrived at ARK 2000. “I knew it was wonderful from photographs, but this is truly spectacular.”

Up the hill from the Asian barn – which has a half dirt and half concrete floor so the elephants can sleep comfortably on special loam brought in for that purpose – are the bull barns. In 2008, PAWS received Nicholas, an Asian bull elephant, and frantically tried to raise money to construct a separate barn for him because bulls and females cannot be housed together. The matriarchs in elephant society send teenage males away from their herds in the wild as the boys enter their first musth – initially akin to human puberty but a hormonal force of nature that knows few bounds in wild elephants.

Support arrived when Barker heard Nicholas’ plight and another sizeable contribution came in. Nick’s barn is dedicated to Barker, where fences over 10 feet tall assist Brian Busta – Stewart’s nephew, who is Nick’s primary caregiver – with managing the sanctuary’s largest resident. PAWS is now in negotiations to possibly provide retirement for three other bulls, but Derby said that’s on a first-come, first-served basis because they only have room for one more.

PAWS uses protected contact as its method of training its elephants. Targets – bamboo sticks with balls on the ends – are used to indicate where keepers want the elephants to stand. They also help the humans tell the elephants what parts of their bodies to push through special gaps in the fences so they can be cared for. Captive elephants require a lot of foot care, primarily because they aren’t traipsing through rough outdoor settings and grinding their toenails naturally. While PAWS’ pachyderms do have free reign over some outside spaces, it’s not enough to adequately trim their tootsies, so the people perform jumbo pedicures about once a week.

The protected contact is safer for the humans and the animals, as handlers are not close enough to the elephants to allow their trunks to grab them. This is in sharp contrast to the training methods used by circuses, Stewart said, which rely on bullhooks.

“That’s a weapon,” Stewart said, noting that when he has gone to speak with members of the California Legislature, an armed guard has accompanied him from the entrance of the capitol to the meeting room. At circuses, he said, the hooks are used to smack elephants or to hook into their mouths and are then twisted to grip their lips.

Here kitty, kitty

In April 2003, Department of Fish and Game officials served a search warrant at a purported animal rescue facility in Colton and were shocked to find 90 dead tigers in freezers, 13 living infant and juvenile tigers and leopard cubs and 54 living adult tigers, leopards and lions. In what became one of the largest animal rescue efforts on the planet, 39 of the tigers ultimately came to San Andreas. Today, 29 are enjoying seven sections of grassy hillside and living their days in the Gold Country sun, lounging like oversized housecats.

John Weinhardt’s so-called rescue facility in Colton was disgusting, Stewart said. He made several trips there as the tigers’ moves were coordinated. Wein-
hart was found guilty on 56 counts of animal abuse, including 14 felonies. The infants and juveniles were taken to the Fund for Animals’ Wildlife Rehabilitation Center near San Diego. Chuck Traisi, who ran the facility at the time, said the place was a great example of why keeping exotic animals in captivity is a bad idea. “Seeing the conditions at this man’s residence – of his so called rescue – simply serves to reinforce my belief the exotic animal industry is the most loathsome, disgusting, exploitive animal matter that I can imagine,” he said.

“Throughout the country there are a few highly respectable sanctuaries that provide the quality of life for animals such as these tigers, who have been subject to neglect,” he said. “There are too few of these sanctuaries and PAWS is one.

“That, perhaps, is a high point, knowing that these tigers are now going to spend the remainder of their days not being used or exploited.”

Stewart and Derby had always planned on having tigers at the San Andreas sanctuary, but the confiscation of the animals in Southern California sent them to the drawing board. They devised a system of remotely operated doors and gates that allow their keepers to care for and maneuver the tigers within the small groups that arrived in the Mother Lode. Stewart said the cats came here in those little groups and the animals within those groups get along. However, if those groups were put together, fights to the death could ensue.

“They’ll fence fight,” he said of the tigers today if they see each other through the chain-link fencing.

The 10-acre habitat for the tigers features individual dens for each animal and larger enclosures for the little groups that open individually onto the hillside compound, which is divided into seven spaces so the cats can venture into the bush within their groups. The tigers won’t climb the trees on the hill, but Stewart assures visitors to the sanctuary that the trees were trimmed so that there was no chance the giant felines could hop the fences.

“There are more tigers in Texas backyards than in India,” Derby said of the worldwide state of captive tigers.
More large felines will be in San Andreas before too long, as five African lions – three males and two females – sit today in quarantine in Bolivia waiting for clearance to retire from a circus there. Officials with Animal Defenders International waged a years-long battle to have circuses that used animals banned in the South American country and prevailed last year. The group has housed the lions and will pay to transport them to California. The group is also funding the construction of the lions’ new home at ARK 2000 and has promised to pay their expenses for life.

“The night quarters and feeding pens alone will provide the animals with more space than they have ever enjoyed,” says ad-international.org. “However the real treat is the massive natural enclosure attached to them.”

Last year, ADI presented Derby and Stewart with its Lord Houghton Award, one of the United Kingdom’s most prestigious animal protection honors that is only presented once every four years for outstanding worldwide contributions made to animal welfare.

Going to see the elephants

The Gold Rush expression “going to see the elephant” takes on a new meaning today and guests have the chance to visit ARK 2000 several times a year. The Seeing the Elephant program allows small groups of visitors access to the sanctuary, where Derby and Stewart serve as guides on a tour of the facility. A two-day package – including a stay at a bed and breakfast inn – includes a visit to the Galt facility, too, and goes for $750 per person. A one-day visit to ARK 2000 is available for a $200 donation.

Other contributions come to PAWS via Costco, which sends thousands of pounds of produce to the sanctuary each week and San Andreas schoolchildren collect acorns during the fall for the elephants. Residents with certain tree species on their properties also truck their trimmings to the facility and Safeway in Jackson donates old bread and produce.

“Elephants don’t mind an overripe banana,” Derby joked.

The sanctuary employs about 33 people and is staffed around the clock. Volunteers come out of the Mother Lode woodwork to help whenever a special event brings visitors from all over the world, too. “We’ve had people from Africa, India, Denmark, Japan and Norway,” she said, when asked where guests come from.

The care and feeding of individual animals can be supported via the Adopt an Animal program (no, you can’t have an elephant!) and a donation wish list is also posted at pawsweb.org, where Web cameras and complete information on all of PAWS’ activities can be found.

Derby said the amount of support that has sprouted in the Mother Lode as ARK 2000 has grown has been incredible. Even area wineries have gotten into the act, as each year’s October “Afternoon in TUSKany” fundraiser finds pachyderms snacking on Calaveras wine grapes.

“You can’t live here and not appreciate it,” Derby said of her Calaveras County home. She added that ARK 200 has gone “beyond our wildest dreams. It has been an incredibly positive experience for us.”

As a kind of joke on the sanctuary grounds, elephant dung – which is used by an area apple orchard – is referred to as “Calaveras Gold” for its fertilizing benefits for crops. Derby said life here “truly lives up to the name Gold Country.”

Video of Maggie’s arrival at ARK 2000 can be viewed at calaverasenterprise.com. Contact Mike Taylor at mtaylor@calaverasenterprise.com.