

Construction and Maintenance

by Robert Boutwood

As usual, plenty of new construction work and maintenance work was carried out throughout both zoos during this financial year. The most interesting construction must be converting our new purchase Combe Farm with its stables for the inhabitation of our most coveted Sumatran rhino. The stables at Combe were built by Sir Phillip Halden in 1931 for his prized hunter chasers. They are now converted to two sleeping bedrooms and two day/night rooms (the Sumatran rhino being nocturnal), both including swimming pools for our prized hunter chaser! We also modified the outside yard, covering it with wood mulch which is watered at regular times to simulate the forest floor of Sumatra, and has a mud wallow which Torgamba frequently visits. He seems to enjoy his surroundings, leaping and bounding, scratching and sniffing in the outside enclosure, although inside he is still a little wary of our jacuzzi; time will tell.

Progress with the perimeter fence at Combe has begun again with the advent of reasonable weather. As soon as this is completed we will be able to move some of our herds of Przewalski horses on to our new luscious pasture. We have at present completed both the west and east sides.

At Port Lympe work is now completed on the new black rhino enclosure, a four room palace for Kingo and Arusha. They will also mix with the Cape buffalo herd as we intend to mix the two species together on completion of the new box section fence in the six acre paddock. The Cape buffalo now have a much larger yard and house to cope with their increased numbers.

Along the drive at Port Lympe we have demolished the Siberian lynx enclosure and rebuilt a new one for Diana monkeys. The wolves too have had their home rebuilt and have resettled there, rewarding us well with cubs.

A small concession has been made to the public in the gate house where we now have a new lavatory block.

Other developments include new top gates at Otterpool Lane junction, the preparation of the base for the Sumatran rhino house in the 'Virgin Wood' and the restoration of the Moroccan patio.

Also in the house, the artist, Arthur Spencer Roberts, continues his mural of south east Asian animals. He has now been working on this project for over a year and reckons that another year should see it finished.

At the other end of the house, opposite the wildlife photographic room, there is a new welded sculpture exhibition containing eight animal pieces by Keijo Salohovi, the Finnish artist.

At both zoo parks the meat gutting areas have been renovated and at Howletts, where there are more carnivores, in an attempt to maintain meat supplies, a deep freeze unit has been constructed to help us over the lean time in July and August.

The African elephant pool has been enlarged as swimming is one of Swana's most popular pursuits, and the fence has been strengthened and heightened. The old shade and the mud wallow have also been renovated.

New enclosures that have been built by our own hard working team include a set of three enclosures next to the gardening department shed, all fitted with well insulated sheds, providing accommodation for Javan langurs, snow leopards and Goeldi monkeys, and a black-footed cat enclosure on the west lawn fitted with a special dehumidifier unit to reduce the water content in the air, thereby simulating the climate conditions of these tiny cats, who up until now have had slight respiratory problems.

Because of the worry of an electrical failure on the estate, we have installed a generating unit which will also play a part in reducing our electrical consumption by coming on at peak times. This procedure will be implemented immediately following the departure of a nest of great tits in the exhaust pipe.



Visitors may now enjoy the gorillas in the rain as a small shade provides a shelter from the elements. Important work has recently begun on renovating the original gorilla house, providing a wider service corridor and decorating and strengthening the existing bedrooms.

Lady Sally's two hand-reared tigers Bhima and Jumna, brother and sister, also found themselves in luxury accommodation at Rufflans next to the ramp. They have recently been separated for mating purposes.

Other work at Howletts includes the construction of a new keepers' cottage at Lackenden House, a staff car park at the cattle grid entrance, an office extension to house the expanding management team and a first aid/mothers' room in the cafe area. Road works around the zoo park have also been carried out by Moons of Selling.

Two fires destroyed the saki monkey enclosure and the front of the hay barn respectively. Sadly in the former case one baby was lost as she darted back into the enclosure despite heroic attempts by staff to save the animals and the building.

At last the scaffolding has been removed from around the focal point of Howletts, the mansion, revealing a splendidly painted and restored building. Due to the formation of the charitable foundation, mansion expenses are paid for by Mr. Aspinall himself.

Expenditure during the period of April 1985 to April 1986 came to £282,172.87 plus £135,705.53 of which the former figure represented new development work, and the latter was attributed to maintenance. Rome was not built in a day.

The black rhinoceros breeding cow 'Rukwa'. She has been mated this year and should calve again at the end of 1987.

(Photograph by Robert Boutwood)