



Ndoki Forest

Ndoki is an African word that means “sorcerer” and the transformation of this previously underutilized section of the Zoo is nothing short of magic. As part of the \$19 million Zoo 2002 expansion project, the Ndoki Forest was born and included three and a half acres of new animal exhibits, lush plantings and unique visitor services.

The Ndoki Forest takes its name from a remote river in central Africa. The river flows through a tropical forest that supports an abundance of wildlife, including gorillas, elephants and chimpanzees, many of which have never seen a human. It is one of the world’s last undisturbed natural sanctuaries, yet it is still threatened by loggers and poachers. Riverbanks set out to recreate this part of Africa as a sanctuary for gorillas and elephants, giving visitors the opportunity to see these wonderful animals and learn more about them and their natural habitat.

The area between the sea lion exhibit and Conservation Outpost was chosen as the site of Ndoki Base Camp, and the transformation began in 1999. From the ground arose two massive hills of clay that would shape the gorilla exhibit. Clearing for the elephant exhibit, an African Village began as the expansion pushed the Zoo’s boundaries further into the wooded area along the Lower Saluda River.

Riverbanks’ habitat horticulture staff planted thousands of trees, shrubs, plants and grasses after painstakingly researching the environment of the Congo, the area Ndoki Forest is to mimic. They recreated the look with available plants suited for our area. Bamboo, palms and banana trees take the visitor’s imagination on safari when viewing the Ndoki complex. Grassy areas, known as bays, complete the realistic look and offer spots for the gorillas to relax and browse on their daily treats.

Visitors can watch the gorillas from Base Camp as well as from observation points within Ndoki Forest. The gorillas have many places for exploration and their keepers and the horticultural staff make frequent changes to the habitat for enrichment purposes.

The landscaping for the elephant exhibit encircles the more than 1/2-acre habitat, with very little planting within the exhibit except for grasses. The focal point in the elephant exhibit is the 12-foot deep, 250,000-gallon watering hole, where visitors can stand on a dock to observe the elephants. Elephants enjoy bathing daily when they can, so the chance of finding a pachyderm in the pool are quite good. Daily interpretive sessions show visitors the training each elephant receives maintain health and well being. Interpretive sessions are held daily at 11:30 a.m.

Meerkats enjoy a spacious area created to resemble the arid plains of their home, complete with hollow logs and many places for these curious little animals to explore and dig. These entertaining creatures spend their days cavorting about in search of food and fun. They groom each other, wrestle, play and are very curious about their surroundings. They never forget to be on alert, however, with at least one meerkat always on guard duty, standing tall and on the lookout.

Educational graphics enlighten the visitor about the animals and the habitats as they walk through Ndoki Base Camp and Forest. Each area contains interactive graphics and children can compare their hands to a gorilla's hand, discover an elephant graveyard or test their knowledge of gorilla diets.

Tucked along the fringe of Ndoki Forest is a recreated African village. The centerpiece of the village is the rustic Ndoki Lodge, which is available for meetings, parties and festivals. The Lodge overlooks the elephant exhibit and pool and features indoor and outdoor seating. A pizza restaurant and marketplace of authentic African selections complete the village. Ndoki Forest is truly a place to excite all the senses.