

It seems as if everyone

in Roanoke, Virginia visits

children's zoo

By **ROBERT P. HUNTER**

Director of Parks and Recreation

City of Roanoke, Virginia

BEING unique is in itself normally enough. Roanoke's Mill Mountain is just that, in the way it rises 1,400 feet straight up out of the city but to find a zoo perched atop it doubles the uniqueness.

Although the zoo represents an investment of some \$190,000 or more, the cash outlay was small because the police and firemen of Roanoke did most of the work as an offtime labor of love.

The zoo is a child's delight, complete with fabled characters from the nursery rhymes and animals from the fairy tales. There are three billy goats in Gruff's Castle; there is a cow which has a moon to jump over; and Noah's Ark full of little beasties and birds. In short, it's a fairyland delight for children (of any age) right down to the "zooperintendent's castle."

The zoo covers five acres in 100-acre Mill Mountain Park and it's

open from 9:00 to 9:00 daily from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The train, circling its 1,000-foot track (and diving under its 50-foot tunnel beneath the entrance gate) is open from 1:00 to 9:00 on weekdays and 9:00 to 9:00 on weekends. The admission to the zoo is only a dime, which goes to maintain it; train rides are nine cents for children and 15 cents for adults, so that for a quarter anybody can have a good time. When the train is paid for the Jaycees, who sponsored it, will give it to the city.

Some of the animals like the prairie dogs from Texas spend the winter there. The dogs just burrow in the ground. The bear cub, growing up to be a big boy, hibernates. Some of the animals are on loan and go home for the winter. It may be that the latter, like the children of Roanoke, look forward to Memorial Day when once again the Mill Mountain Zoo becomes Roanoke's prime attraction.

HOW IT BEGAN

The Children's Zoo had its beginning in August, 1951, when the idea was conceived by the Civitan Club of Roanoke and launched by that organization as a community-wide project. The city manager and other city

Just as crazy as its tenants is Goat Gruff Castle which delights kids as much as antics of the goats.



officials enthusiastically endorsed the plan and gave their wholehearted support to the endeavor. In January, 1952, city council gave its approval and blessing to the undertaking which included approval of Mill Mountain as the site for the zoo. A five-man steering committee was appointed by the city council to see the project through to completion.

Work started immediately. Thousands of public-spirited citizens, business firms, civic organizations, and school children gave money, material and labor to make the zoo a reality. Our city firemen, the prisoner force, and many city departments had a major share in its accomplishment. The project virtually snowballed. Nothing has ever so completely captured the imagination and interest of the people of Roanoke as did the Children's Zoo. The Children's Zoo first opened on July 4, 1952, and proved an instantaneous success. During the first season, from July 4 to September 14, 84,260 paid admissions were collected and since 1952 over a quarter of a million persons have visited the zoo.

BASIC IDEA OF CHILDREN'S ZOO

The primary idea behind the Children's Zoo is to provide a place espe-

cially for youngsters—a place where they can get acquainted with tame, harmless animals at close quarters and sometimes even pet and feed them. For many, this is the first such experience with fur and feathers, and it is important that the child's first meeting with animals be a pleasant one. We believe that the Children's Zoo serves a necessary function in developing a child's interest and sympathy for animals and natural history in general.

The zoo is in a setting of colorful Mother Goose and other familiar stories with quaint picturesque buildings which delight the children and adults alike.

GENERAL LAYOUT AND CONSTRUCTION

The grounds of the Children's Zoo are approximately 400 feet long by 200 feet wide and contain about one and three-fourths acres. The zoo area is surrounded by a miniature railroad track, and beyond the railroad track is a seven-foot high board fence which encloses the entire area. The gayly colored little exhibits are unique in design and scaled down to miniature size. The buildings as far as possible are constructed of permanent materials and are equipped with lights, water and drains. There is an under-



Happy to pose for the cameraman are these inhabitants of popular Prairie Dog Town in Children's Zoo. All photos courtesy Roanoke Department of Parks and Recreation.

ground lighting system, and the area is adequately floodlighted for night operations. A large portion of the area is covered by wide black top walks. Grassy areas and shrubbery add to the attractiveness of the grounds.

A project such as this is within reach of your park system. Scaled to your means, and with the help of community organizations, a children's zoo could become your most popular attraction.

A fitting place for Noah's Ark is this setting high atop Mill Mountain in the Roanoke Children's Zoo.

