

## THE BONSAI PAVILION AT THE WILD ANIMAL PARK, SAN DIEGO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

The Bonsai Pavilion is located at the San Diego Wild Animal Park ([www.sandiegozoo.org/wap/visitor\\_info.html](http://www.sandiegozoo.org/wap/visitor_info.html)) in the beautiful San Pasqual Valley near the town of Escondido, 32 miles northeast of the city of San Diego within San Diego County. The 1800 acre wild animal preserve allows visitors to view exotic animals as they might see them in their native habitats of Asia and Africa. Today the Park has over 3,500 animals representing 260 species. The botanical gardens cover the acreage with several specialized collections including Nativescapes Plant Garden, Old World Succulent Garden, Protea Garden, Conifer Garden, Herb Garden, Epiphyllum House, Baja Garden, Australian Rain forest, Water Wise Garden, and our renown Bonsai Pavilion.

Cary Sharp is the Horticulturist for the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park which is an accredited botanical garden. He is responsible for all the botanical areas within the Park. The volunteer gardens within the park are maintained by the various respective organizations and clubs. The Bonsai Pavilion is located in the Kupanda Falls Botanical Garden and provides a unique display with a meeting and educational facility for Bonsai enthusiasts and the public.

The Bonsai Pavilion was initially constructed through the joint efforts of the Wild Animal Park and members of the San Diego Bonsai Club (SDBC) ([www.SanDiegoBonsaiClub.com](http://www.SanDiegoBonsaiClub.com)) and San Pu Kai Club (SPKC), the north county bonsai club. The landscaping of the pavilion area was provided by SDBC founding member Mas Takanashi. The total construction was performed over a period of two years by volunteers from the two bonsai clubs.

The pavilion was opened on May 9, 1987 coinciding with the Wild Animal Park's 15th anniversary celebration. Bonsai Master John Y. Naka cut the ribbon and the first and largest permanent display facility for bonsai in the western United States was opened to a crowd of more than 200 bonsai lovers. It was the culmination of dreams, dedication and much hard work by all the parties involved. Major monetary contributions were given by the Golden State Bonsai Federation, San Diego Bonsai Club, San Pu Kai, and Joan Dayton along with many bonsaiists throughout California. The basic design concept for the Pavilion, a 3000 square foot rectangular lattice structure with several viewing bays and an interior garden was provided by architect Frank Nauwelaert. SDBC Past President John Jackson directed the construction.

Initially, the bonsai were donated for the collection. John Naka was one of the first to recognize the value of having a Bonsai collection in Southern California. He donated his "Wild Dragon" California Juniper at the beginning of the Pavilion development. He later made suggestions and recommendations about the Pavilion even when it was on the drawing boards. Alice and John Naka visited the Pavilion in 1997 at the tenth anniversary to rededicate his tree. On that day the Park honored him with a special "John Naka Day" celebration, presenting him with a certificate and a medal. The San Diego

Bonsai Club also presented him with a plaque commemorating his many contributions to bonsai.

There have been many generous contributions which have enhanced the bonsai display over the years. Trees have been donated by Bruce and Yaeko Hisayasu, Mas Takanashi, Ko Tsushima, John Jackson, Stan Childs, Dr. Frank Dixon, Cap Puliafico, Brian Jackson, Kaz Yoneda, Walter Anderson Jr., and many others. Donations to the collection have been made from the estates of Seymour Dayton by his wife Joan and Melba Tucker. Mr. and Mrs. Jim Moody donated a tree in memory of their son. Special viewing stones (suiseki) have been donated by Harry Hirao.

Currently, there are approximately sixty trees in the collection. Fifty of these are on display in this beautiful, tranquil setting while the rest are in a growing area and rotated around with the seasons to provide variety and interest in the garden. Some ninety volunteer members from the two clubs work and care for the trees under the direction of volunteer curator Steve Valentine. There are formal tours of the Bonsai Pavilion by appointment and volunteer club members are available to answer question on the third Saturday of each month from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The Pavilion has been a great addition to the Wild Animal Park's botanical offerings and has been a showcase for many tours of school groups, park visitors, and convention groups.

Originally, the Wild Animal Park contacted Cap Puliafico to consider the feasibility of building a Bonsai House. The land was donated to the Clubs and the project undertaken. That was over 18 years ago. The Park has once again offered space to the Club for expansion into another area. This area, across from the Kapanda Pavilion, is considerably larger than the current Bonsai Pavilion and contains a water fall and stream feature along with much more area for educational programs, growing stock, and work areas along with expanded show areas for bonsai amid very tranquil walkways. There is a steering committee from the San Diego Bonsai Club and a member architect who are currently drawing up plans for this new facility.

Visitors can view the Bonsai Pavilion's collection 365 days of the year during Park hours. There are admission and parking fees to the Park but there is no additional charge for visiting the Pavilion. Memberships to the San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park are available.

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