

Putting The Fun Into Labor...

Well, it was a last-minute attempt at a Labor Day outing with friends, and even though we strayed from our original idea of going to a Lake Erie-area haunted house and drive-thru zoo, we had LOTS of fun!

We went to the Toledo Zoo, always a great zoo, even if this Labor Day Saturday of 2009 equated to being one of the most crowded we've ever seen that zoo. It was just over 80°, so the animals weren't all that active, but we did get to see Louie, the "baby" elephant (who is now 6 years old and awaiting the completion of construction of his very own zoo exhibit area) lying down and taking a break, which was cool. We also saw one of their huge hippos swimming in the underwater hippo-quarium, which is always a treat because you can see a humongous hippo swim right past up close. After the zoo, we ate at one of our favorite places in the Toledo area – Nick's Cafe on Reynolds (not sure if it's actually Toledo or the suburb of Maumee). But the place is just north of Ohio's turnpike, I 80/90, and they have great food and almost *unimaginable* portion sizes – are they used to feeding GIANTS?!? Unfortunately for Nick's, the place was empty, but this is (just) one of the reasons we go to Nick's when we're in the area – they have GREAT food. Besides, **you** try withstanding the crowds to get a table at the Olive Garden on a Saturday evening, especially with 4 starving kids!

After dinner, we were going to head to another nearby Toledo suburb for a free exotic animal / magic show, something right up our alley. But the combination of the big weekend, crabby kids and crowds at the zoo caused our driver and his wife to veto that great idea, so luckily we hadn't told the kids since it sounded like fun and they would have been disappointed (no matter their exhaustive state) to miss it. But we've learned that over-doing it with little kids along is **always** regretful, and so we happily prepared for our journey home after we

gorged ourselves and piled leftovers into boxes at Nick's. But we grew distracted by a strip-mall across Reynolds from Nick's Cafe, and that's how we finally discovered what Nickel World of Toledo really is...

We had seen it in the strip-mall before, but we had always busily assumed that it was the 2009 incarnate of the early 20th century 5 and dime store. On Saturday night, we discovered that Nickel World is actually a family entertainment place, filled with **many** arcade, skill, and video games! They have a unique business model – they charge an entrance fee of \$2.50 per person, and then they sell \$5 bags of nickels for use on the games. Most of the games are just one nickel to play, some are two, and there's even a large selection of FREE games! The place is so cool; what a great concept! For about \$25, our party of 4 adults and 5 kids were easily entertained for at least an hour, PLUS the kids took home quite a bounty of prizes with the 5,000 tickets they were able to rack up in just that hour! Nickel World has just about every type of video game you can think of – two types of Skee-ball, multiple Crane Games, ball-roller games, basketball shooting games, racing games, Bozo Buckets, even air hockey as well as FREE! vintage arcade games like X-Men, Bust-A-Move, Dueling Dragons, and many more... We had a GREAT time, and Hubby and I are dying to return on a date night to fight, race and out-shoot each other without distraction from the kids! The only thing is that they are closed on Tuesday nights when we have our date nights... oh well, perhaps we can reschedule. If **you** are in the Toledo area, you **have** to check out Nickel World on Reynolds (US 20) – a rarity for an awesome value in family entertainment in this day and age of recession! And while I'm on the topic, Nickel World reminded me of another cool arcade-type place in South Bend, Indiana. [Megaplay](#) has two indoor mini-golf courses, as well as lots of video games (some of the classics are free) and even an inflatable jousting area where they hold tournaments. I've never had the pleasure of participating in something like

this, but it looks like lots of fun. If only I had discovered this sport before my sense of balance expired... I did see an indoor inflatable jousting space at another place in Toledo that we visited a few months ago. This place was pretty cool – they had adult-sized bouncy slides and ladders to climb, and my husband and I bounced down the slides and ran around like little kids until the unfortunate voices of reality (muscle strain and fatigue) made it loud and clear that we had better take it easy... But I can't remember the name of that place or where exactly it is, and I can't find it on the internet. Probably a bad sign that we were the only ones there at the time, I hope it hasn't closed down, but that's a lot of why it was so much fun – my kids weren't getting run over by eager older kids, and hubby and I weren't laughed out of the place by nasty teenagers...

So... back from my tangents. We had a really nice and safe Labor Day weekend free from any of the [speed traps we encountered in previous years](#). Hope yours was safe and fun also! God Bless!

Zoo Traveler

I really like to travel (NO FLYING THOUGH!), and we were fortunate enough to do lots of it – before we had so many little kids, of course. We still try to make a yearly trip to Florida, especially while we can still fit the entire family in one car – something that soon won't be easily accomplished as the kids grow older. At each travel destination, I have to admit that my favorite tourist attraction is always the local zoo. I made a list of all the zoos and/or wildlife parks I have visited, and I hope to add to it soon! Here is the list by state, country, or territory, followed by the city in which

it's located. An asterisk following the zoo means it no longer exists. I put notes about some of the places in *italics* as sort of a guide in case you're interested in visiting one of those particular attractions and want some info straight from a tourist's mouth.

California:

Sea World San Diego

San Diego Zoo

Canada:

Bird Kingdom Niagara Falls Aviary, Niagara Falls, Ontario

Marineland, Niagara Falls, Ontario – *this place is very cool. You can hand-feed deer, Beluga Whales or even Orcas (Killer Whales). You can throw food down to bears who beg and do tricks. There are also a variety of amusement park rides for the whole family. Look at me petting the Orca!*



Washington, DC

National Zoo

Florida:

Wooten's Wildlife Park, Florida Everglades – *a cool, family owned place where you can see animals on display; including alligators, crocodiles, and Florida panthers. You can also hold and feed baby alligators! I wonder if they still exist; their website hasn't been updated since '06!*

Sea World, Orlando

Gatorland, Orlando

Animal Kingdom, Orlando

Idaho:

Zoo Boise, Boise

Illinois:

Brookfield Zoo, Brookfield – *this is the zoo I grew up going to. In the 80's when I was a frequent visitor, they had many 'celebrity' animals, with interesting stories to match.*

Shedd Aquarium, Chicago

Peoria Wildlife Park, Peoria

Cosley Zoo, Wheaton

Glen Oak Zoo, Peoria

Henson Robinson Zoo, Springfield

Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington – *yuck, not one of my favorite places. Their tiger exhibits consisted of teeny tiny cages, and they had a really scrawny, terrible looking tiger, at least in the late '90's when we lived in the area. Hopefully they've cleaned the place up.*

Scovill Zoo, Decatur

Indiana:

Ft Wayne Children's Zoo – *a perfectly sized zoo to visit with kids. They have a wide variety of animals and some nice exhibits. They just recently built a chair-lift type ride that will take you over the lion exhibit once it's finished –*

cool and scary at the same time!

Potawatomi Zoo, South Bend

Fun Spot, Angola

Michigan:

Binder Park, Battle Creek

Minnesota:

Minneapolis Zoo, Minneapolis

Missouri:

St Louis Zoo, St. Louis

Nebraska:

Henry Doorly Zoo, Omaha – *I know they've since rebuilt it, but when I visited back in 2001-2002, they had a teeny-tiny exhibit for the gorillas, which made them none too happy. I actually witnessed a huge male gorilla charge a kid and beat on the glass from his small exhibit – scary!*

Henry Doorly safari park, Omaha

Folsom Children's Zoo, Lincoln – *a very nice little zoo located in the heart of Lincoln. It's so well-laid out that you can forget you're in the middle of a capital city, and they have lots of animals in a variety of nice exhibits.*

Ohio:

African Safari Wildlife Park, Port Clinton – *I love this place! You can feed deer, elands, huge buffalo and a variety of hoofed mammals from the comfort of your own vehicle. In season, they have pig races, animals shows, and camel and pony rides for the little ones.*

Akron Zoo, Akron – *I was really impressed with the layout, exhibits, and the happiness of the animals – a very impressive little zoo!*

Cincinnati Zoo, Cincinnati

Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Cleveland

Columbus Zoo, Columbus – *a zoo no one had heard about until my favorite celebrity, Jack Hanna got ahold of it and made it a*

world-reknown facility. Huge zoo, and the only place to see my favorite animals, manatees in my home state of Ohio!

**Sea World Ohio, Aurora – we actually lived in Illinois at the time we visited here, but I'm glad we got to see it before they sold it to Six Flags, who sold it to Cedar Fair. Any of the other Sea Worlds are quite a hike from IL or OH for that matter, especially for a non-flyer such as myself.*

Toledo Zoo, Toledo

Pennsylvania:

Pittsburgh Zoo – very impressive zoo! Lots of kid-friendly playgrounds and interactive areas. The polar bear habitat looked really cool – people go through a tunnel that the bears can swim over – but we didn't see it since the bears weren't in the pool. I NEED a second look at this zoo and will definitely allow more time when I get back there!

ZOOAMERICA North American Wildlife Park, Hershey – We did not care for this zoo at all. We visited in the late '90's, so maybe they've added more to it by now. But at that time, they only had animals indigenous to North America, and let's face it, those are easy to spot in most areas of the U.S. And let's face it, the real star tourist destination in Hershey is the chocolate factory!

South Dakota:

Great Plains Zoo and Museum, Sioux Falls – I visited here with my family when I was 15. This place was amusing to us because attached to the zoo is the museum, which has many taxidermied specimens. We joked that this zoo had more dead animals than live ones!

**Marineland, Rapid City – note the asterisk, this place doesn't exist anymore, thank goodness. When we visited in the summer of '93, they had dolphins and sea lions held in such tiny cages and pools, it was sickening. I haven't been able to find much info on this place, but I'm sure they were shut down because of poor treatment of their animals. I can only hope the animals found a better home.*

Bear Country USA, Rapid City – *a cool drive-thru bear habitat experience – keep those windows rolled up!!! And check out the baby bear nursery – so adorable!*

Wisconsin:

Henry Vilas Zoo, Madison

*Serpent Safari, Wisconsin Dells

GRAND TOTAL AS OF 2009:

41 animal-themed places in 2 countries, 13 states, 1 district... and counting!

Saturday Slobber

Well, school starts on Tuesday, so for one last summery hurrah, we ventured over to the coastal cities in Ohio on Lake Erie for some fun. First stop was the African Safari Park in Port Clinton, which is really more of a drive-thru zoo than anything having to do with Africa. They do have zebras, giraffes, and camels, but most of their animals hail from North America. It's always an extremely fun experience, and we try to go every year. Since this summer was very busy with the new baby and all, it didn't occur to me that we hadn't gone yet until I struck up a conversation with a really nice elderly couple at a restaurant the other day. When I asked where they were from, they replied, "west of Cleveland", so that got me thinking about the Safari Park in Port Clinton. On the way home from the restaurant that night, I said to my husband, you know, we haven't been to the safari park this year... An idea was hatched, and there we were on Saturday with 6 of our closest friends.

Saturday morning was almost like a one-act play with all of us

standing there on our front porch, trying to figure out who was going to ride with whom; we were trying to find the best way to do things to be as economically (and environmentally) friendly as possible... We ended up taking just 2 cars for the 12 of us, and then once we got to Port Clinton, it was like musical chairs (cars) once again while we tried to figure out how to position everyone to get the most bang for our buck, so to speak, since the safari place charges by carload *and* by individual...

So anyway, after a stop at Cheese Haven In Port Clinton – and now I have to go off on yet another tangent because Cheese Haven is SOOO good and totally worth a stop if you're in the area. And what I mean by "in the area" is anywhere up to 100 or even 1000 miles, depending on how much you like cheese. They have so many varieties, along with fresh jerkies and beef sticks and other yummy treats. We stopped there to get our lunch of corned beef sandwiches – and they have the **best** corned beef sandwiches, yum. Unfortunately, I was not willing to take 4 kids into the cheese store to run around, so I was stuck in the car with the kids, but my oh-so-thoughtful hubby talked the worker into making me a sample bag (which they're not supposed to do, you only get the free samples if you go into the store, but hey, I was stuck in the car), AND he made my sandwich for me – how sweet ☺

Ok, tangent aside... now we've arrived at the Safari Park, and it is SO crowded... Makes me think twice about going there again next summer unless it's near their last weekend of operation like it was when we went last year... I mean, I just can't stand waiting in line to go to the bathroom, of all things... Waiting in line is not much fun at all, but when you're waiting in line to do something as necessary and as unrewarding as going to the bathroom, it's really annoying. So, because it was so crowded, it took us forever to get through the drive-through zoo part; although not as long as it took the other vehicle in our caravan because they were stuck

behind an obscenely slow white van the whole time... So while we got out of the drive-through section, they had barely just begun... But the whole park is a really cool place; even more so if you don't care about the vanity nor cleanliness of your car since there are some rather huge creatures (including deer, elk, elands, buffalo, zebras, giraffe and longhorns) who drool, head-butt, lick, slobber, and basically invade your car as your drive through *their* habitat. I think you must truly be an animal lover to appreciate the place since you come out filthy... This was the first time we had been there in our new car, but I'm happy to report no major damage, that I know about, at least; but what's this about driving our car through a pond, jamiahsh?!?

We'll get to the bottom of that later... when you come out of the drive-through part, it's time for the walk-through zoo section, and there they have monkeys, macaws (military, not green-winged as the sign said), ocelots, warthogs, alpacas, and tortoises; not to mention rides for the kiddees: ponies and camels. I noticed that they had 2 camels for riding; one was resting while the other gave the rides. But interestingly, one was a Dromedary and the other a Bactrian camel, the difference between the two species being mainly in how many humps they had... My daughters rode the Dromedary (1 hump), and they really seemed to enjoy themselves – I wonder if riding the Bactrian (2 humps) would have been any different? I was envious because I'm no where near the 125 lb. weight limit, so I'll probably never get to ride a camel... After that, we got to check out an animal show, ironically titled "Laugh With the Animals". It was ironic because our host for the show was so dry – she had the audience doing everything *but* laughing... It was a fun show, though, and something that we hadn't yet done at the park in our previous visits. Overall, an interesting day... as it is anytime you have 12 people on an outing together!

If you liked reading my synopsis of the day, check out my

fellow tangents.org blogger and get Jamiahsh's take on the whole thing. I'm going to take a lesson from him and blog this in 2 installments... got to leave the readers craving more, so they say! Check out my next post for a full summary of our visit to a year-round haunted house – Ghostly Manor in Sandusky, Ohio! Until then...