

Prairie Dog Exhibit at Yukon Bay Theme World | Hanover Adventure Zoo



In May 2010, Hanover Adventure Zoo opened its seventh theme world with Yukon Bay. At Yukon Bay, wolves, caribou, bison and prairie dogs are presented in the rugged wilderness of Canada. Here, visitors come eye to eye with polar bears, fur seals, sea lions and grey seals in an enormous saltwater harbour basin equipped with a wave generator. All enclosures can be viewed from a variety of angles. The Caribou Exhibit makes up part of the Yukon Bay theme world encompassing an overall surface area of approximately 26,500 sq. metres.

The Prairie Dog Exhibit is designed to look like an archaeological excavation site that visitors repeatedly encounter on their way through Yukon Bay. Tools, measuring devices and artificial animal bones are evidence of the researchers activities. The border walls of the enclosure are therefore designed to resemble ground fissures. The middle of these surroundings is home to two prairie dog colonies. Here they dig their tunnels or perch themselves on top of the artificially constructed mounds of earth at the centre of the enclosure and keep lookout.





The planting design around the enclosure forms a green backdrop of evergreen coniferous trees and North American deciduous trees with intense autumn colouration. Inside the enclosure, individual trees provide shade; wire protects their roots and trunks from the animals. Where it was necessary to remove certain existing trees for Yukon Bay, this was offset within the surface area of the project by plantings of native deciduous trees.

The enclosure is divided into two sections that can be linked via two tubular tunnels when needed. Both sections feature specially installed, ca. 1 sq. metre concrete structures designed as earth mounds with artificial tunnel entries. These tubular spaces function as structures for the animals and can be heated, for example, to regulate the winter hibernation of the animals when needed. Caretakers can open the tunnel shafts from above. The steel covers are designed to resemble excavation equipment and therefore remain inconspicuous to viewers. An air pressure valve allows the cover to be opened easily.



Caretakers can enter the enclosure with a pushcart through a small door in the visitor barrier. This is constructed out of solid wood framing with a heavy gauge wire core. A smooth steel overhang mounted on the inside prevents the animals from climbing over. A digging barrier set 50 cm below surface level also covers the entire enclosure. A mix of sand and larger grain sizes gives the animals plenty of opportunity to fulfil their digging needs.

A wooden footbridge divides the exhibit into two parts so visitors feel like they're standing in the middle of the exhibit. Elaborate, hand painted signage communicates to children and adults highly descriptive information on the North American prairie dog's life in the wild.