

Niabi Zoo Elephants Arrive at their New Home

Written by Marc Heinzman

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Coal Valley, IL – 21 October 2013 - Niabi Zoo officials announced today that the Zoo's two Asian elephants, Babe and Sophie, have arrived safely at their new home at the Little Rock Zoo in Little Rock, Arkansas. The elephants, which arrived in Arkansas this afternoon, are currently settling into their new habitat after the drive from Niabi Zoo.

After an extensive and thorough nationwide search, elephant care expert Alan Roocroft selected Little Rock Zoo as the best fit for Babe and Sophie based on a number of criteria that were mutually agreed upon between Mr. Roocroft and Niabi Zoo staff. "Our number one criteria when selecting a facility for Babe and Sophie was that it be located in a warmer climate," said Niabi Zoo Director Marc Heinzman, "and Little Rock Zoo only has a combined week or two each year when their elephants have to be kept inside. That's a major improvement from the four to six months that we have at Niabi Zoo."

In addition to the warmer climate, Mr. Roocroft and Niabi Zoo staff also focused on the management program and staff experience at any potential facilities. "It was important to us that Babe and Sophie continue to be managed in such a way that would encourage them to stay active and healthy," said Heinzman. "Babe is overweight and Sophie has arthritis. In order to keep these conditions from worsening as they age, they need to be in a management program that has them exercise and stay mobile. Mr. Roocroft was impressed by the condition of Little Rock Zoo's elephant and the knowledge of the Zoo's elephant team."

Alan Roocroft visited Little Rock Zoo in September and prepared a report on his assessment of their management program and facilities, which was recently submitted to Niabi Zoo staff. Babe

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and Sophie will be joining Little Rock Zoo's one adult female Asian elephant, Zina. Babe and Sophie will be kept together while also adding to a third member to their herd, which were two other important factors to Mr. Roocroft and Niabi Zoo.

Niabi Zoo was assisted in the transport of the elephants by Feld Entertainment Inc., which operates Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Feld Entertainment Inc., the original owners of Babe and Sophie before they were donated to Niabi Zoo, donated their services and transportation expertise to Niabi Zoo. "We're extremely grateful to Feld Entertainment for helping us with what otherwise could have been a very costly procedure," said Heinzman. "Their vast experience with transporting elephants and their equipment was invaluable. Moving elephants is normally extremely costly and dangerous, and we couldn't have done it without Feld Entertainment."

Babe and Sophie, who have been at Niabi Zoo since 2000 and 2003 respectively, will be on loan to Little Rock Zoo. By loaning them, Niabi Zoo retains ownership and oversight of the elephants' future. "It was, and will continue to be, extremely important to us that Babe and Sophie stay together and leave Niabi Zoo for the best possible situation," said Heinzman, "and we're in agreement with Mr. Roocroft that Little Rock Zoo offers that."

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