

D-Day Commemorated at the Isle of Wight Zoo

Visitors invited to celebrate war-time role of the fort.

This Sunday the focus of the Isle of Wight Zoo won't be the animals, but the fort itself. The fort helped secure an allied victory in the D-Day landings, but due to the secrecy of the project very few people know how crucial it was.

The Pipeline Under The Ocean project (PLUTO) was set up in order to supply the allies with fuel for d-day and beyond. It was inevitable the withdrawing Nazis would destroy all the fuel they could in an attempt to slow the allied forces down, but PLUTO combated this. Pipes were laid between England and France, with the Isle of Wight being a key part of a project described by General Eisenhower as being "second in daring only to the artificial 'Mulberry' Harbours". The zoo housed eleven of the sixteen Sandown pumps, with the five remaining ones at Browns and the Grand Hotel.

Although most of the pumps were broken up and dismantled at the end of the war, a few survived. One went to the forerunner of the National Grid, and for many years was used to wash their insulators. However with the closure of the station a new home was sought, which is when experts on the Isle of Wight were contacted, who helped trace the original positions of the pumps under the fort's gun arches. The return of the pump to the zoo was the culmination of years of work from many sides.

Over the last few years staff at the zoo have been restoring the interior of the fort to create a World War II themed lounge in sympathy with the fort's history. It seemed only fitting that the official opening of the area should be on the anniversary of d-day, Sunday 6th June. PLUTO project veteran Laura Barlee will cut the ribbon. Ms Barlee worked at PLUTO command Norfolk House during World War II, and is the niece of Clement Atlee.

The day will have a celebratory atmosphere, with face painting and craft activities, as well as the chance to view some original war time artefacts on loan for the day. The zoo is particularly keen for local people to sample this unknown piece of their history, and would like to remind them that they can get a special discount if they bring proof of their residential status. Staff would also be very interested to hear from anyone with memories of D-Day on the Island, and invite those people to contact the zoo with their stories.

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Notes to editors:

Isle of Wight Zoo aims to promote the survival of endangered species through first class educational and recreational experiences, exemplary animal management, conservation and research. The Zoo is best known for its work with exotic cats. As a centre for surplus or rescued big cats, all have come to the Zoo at different stages of their lives and from a variety of backgrounds. The Zoo strives to encourage the social development and natural behaviour of each cat in their care. Every species of big cat residing at the Zoo is currently under considerable threat in its natural habitat. Isle of Wight Zoo is currently home to 11 tigers, 4 lions and 2 jaguars

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