

HATTIESBURG ZOO

For Immediate Release

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NEW ZEALAND COUPLE TRAVELS MORE THAN 7,000 MILES FOR HATTIESBURG ZOO SLOTH EXPERIENCE

HATTIESBURG (April 18, 2017) — Last Saturday, native New Zealanders Gareth Borthwick and Melissa Prince stepped inside the Hattiesburg Zoo to eagerly begin a highlight of their U.S. vacation, an up-close and personal encounter with one of the Zoo's two-toed sloths. The couple planned their international trek from the southern hemisphere around the Sloth Experience, giving them the chance to see and hold the animal species they had previously admired from afar.

The couple's interest in sloths started when they caught glimpses of the furry animals in zoos in both Japan and Australia. Hattiesburg Zoo's Sloth Experience was the first time the couple was able to personally interact with a sloth.

When asked what rounded out the perfect U.S. vacation, the New Zealand couple was in agreement.

"Our goal was to eat a lot of fried chicken and barbecue and visit the sloths," said Prince.

The couple's experience featured the Zoo's five-year-old male sloth, Chewy. During their session, they assisted a zookeeper with sloth meal preparation and then enjoyed feeding Chewy, followed by the chance to hold him. Their experience was completed with a behind-the-scenes tour of the Zoo's animal kitchen.

"It was truly exhilarating to share the Sloth Experience with this couple who traveled so far to have this first-hand encounter. Their sheer excitement feeding and holding Chewy was awesome to see. We had a great time, and I was able to introduce them to some native animals from our area as well," Corissa Boaman, zookeeper, said.

During their trip, the couple is also visiting Dallas, Shreveport, and Los Angeles.

“It’s not every day people travel the globe to see Chewy and Mo. It was exciting to learn that they planned their U.S. tour around the Hattiesburg Zoo. I believe it is a trip they remember for years to come,” Rick Taylor, executive director for the Hattiesburg Convention and Tourism Commissions, said.

Sloth Experiences are \$40 per person and are typically booked three to four months in advance. Experiences are only available on Thursdays and Saturdays with limited spots available for each session. To reserve an Experience, call the Zoo at 601.545.4576.

For additional information, call the Hattiesburg Zoo at 601.545.4576 or visit the Zoo online at HattiesburgZoo.com or on Facebook. The Hattiesburg Zoo is a Hattiesburg Convention Commission Facility, in partnership with the City of Hattiesburg and the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission. Since 1991, the Hattiesburg Convention Commission has been developing and operating tourism-related facilities for the Hattiesburg area.

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