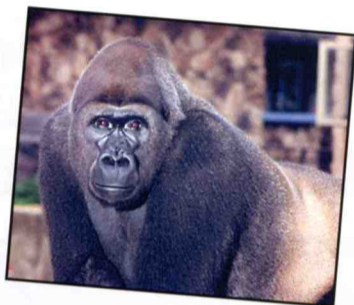


Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo Fun For All Ages

By Diana Lambdin Meyer • Photos Provided By Henry Doorly Zoo

Imagine playing tug of war with a 400-pound gorilla or patty-cake with his 200-pound mate. Maybe you would like to pitch a tent and spend the night with the whole gorilla family.



It might seem like a scenario for a reality-based television program, such as *Fear Factor* or *Survivor*, but it's not. It's a reality weekend getaway at the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Neb.

Long renowned as one of the world's best, the Henry Doorly Zoo reached a new level of notoriety this spring with the addition of the Hubbard Gorilla Valley, where humans, not apes, are on display.

Research has taught us that gorillas, the largest of the ape species, are shy, friendly animals that need companionship, attention and stimulation. Some of the first gorillas kept in zoos didn't live long. Many believe they died from loneliness and boredom.

Such will not be the case at the Henry Doorly Zoo. They'll have hundreds of visitors a day to watch and play with. The three-acre exhibit is designed so that gorillas have a full view of human spectators through floor-to-ceiling Plexiglas windows.

The gorillas can crawl on top of tunnels that visitors

must pass through and peer down at them from above. Another tunnel allows children to crawl in the midst of the gorillas and pop up in one of two 5-foot-tall Plexiglas bubbles.

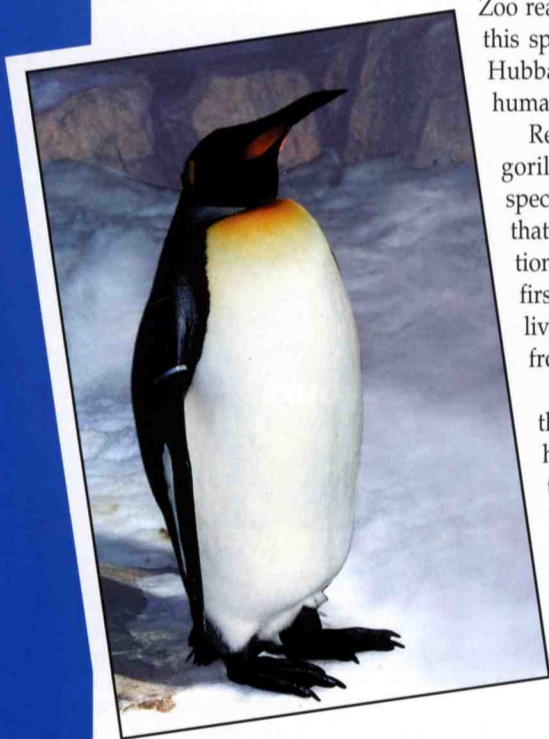
But the most popular activity for gorillas and humans is tug of war. A 6-foot length of rope passes through a secure window where a gorilla or two is always anxious to give you and a couple of friends a test of strength and stamina.

If you fail at that, try a simple game of patty-cake. Line your paws up with the massive hands of the gorilla and see who has the quickest and most adept reactions. Another interactive area places a steering wheel on both sides of the glass window, and you and your favorite gorilla can see who is the better driver.

In all cases, it's best to let the gorilla win.

The problem with gorillas, besides the fact that they can be sore losers, is that they smell – really bad. However, Omaha's gorillas don't stink. The exhibit has been designed with negative vacuum-pressure airflow and other features that significantly reduce the telltale body odor found in most zoological gorilla exhibits.

When you get bored with the gorillas, or they indicate they are bored with you, there's much more entertainment throughout the 110 acres of the Henry Doorly Zoo. If it's a hot day – or even if it's not – plan on spending much of it in the penguin exhibit. The official name is the Kingdoms of the Seas Aquarium, where



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