



Cheyenne Mountain Zoological Society

4250 Cheyenne Mountain Zoo Road | Colorado Springs, CO | 80906
(719) 633-9925 | info@cmzoo.org

Will Rogers Shrine of the Sun

4250 Cheyenne Mountain Zoo Road
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Reach the shrine by way of a trip up the Russell Tutt Scenic Highway, originally named the "Wonder Road" after its miraculous construction. As you travel up the mountainside, each turn reveals breathtaking views of the Rocky Mountain Range and glorious vistas of the city of Colorado Springs below. A trip to the shrine is included in your Zoo admission for that day and is a 1.4 mile drive up from the Zoo's entrance. The highway was constructed by Spencer Penrose in 1924 and initially terminated 7.5 miles up at the summit of Cheyenne Mountain.

Spencer Penrose, founder of the Broadmoor and Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, along with a group of his associates from Colorado Springs, formed the End of the Trail Association. The End of the Trail Association acquired property for the shrine and began construction in December of 1934, and finished in 1937. The edifice's design was commissioned by Colorado Springs architect Charles E. Thomas, and at the time construction began the tower had yet to be named. The shrine has an entry gate with stone piers, an eighty foot high observation tower, looks like a fortress with a stone turret, and is built of 5,000 cubic yards of native Cheyenne Mountain gray-pink granite quarried from a single boulder. Anchored 28 feet into a solid rock buttress, the entire structure, void of nails or wood, is bound by 200,000 pounds of steel and some 30 wagon loads of cement. The elevation of the shrine is 8,136 feet on the top deck, and it provides spectacular views of Colorado Springs and the Pikes Peak Region.

During the shrine's construction, Will Rogers, an American humorist, was killed in an airplane crash in



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Alaska. This tragedy inspired Mr. Penrose to honor his close friend by naming the tower after him. Jo Davidson, an artist in Paris, was commissioned to sculpt a bronze bust of Will Rogers, which stands in the ten-acre courtyard in front of the shrine. The shrine was dedicated on September 6, 1937, in a ceremony broadcast nationally on the NBC radio network.

Inside the square sided, five-story shrine, the Historical Room on the ground level displays murals by New Mexico artist Randall Davey depicting early development of the Pikes Peak Region. Included are Native American scenes, Zebulon Pike's travels, gold discoveries in Cripple Creek, and activities of General William Palmer, founder and developer of Colorado Springs. These murals were carefully restored in 1993 by noted American artist and mural painter Eric Bransby, an associate of Randall Davey's.

In the three rooms above, a photographic history of Will Rogers' life captivates visitors at the shrine. The display begins with his early childhood in Oklahoma and passes through the years when he gained fame on stage, screen and radio as "America's unofficial Ambassador of Good Will." The final photograph is of Will Rogers and pilot Wiley Post taken just before the fatal flight, which claimed their lives at Point Barrow, Alaska, in 1935.

On the lower level of the shrine, accessible by a separate entrance is a tranquil chapel where the ashes of Spencer and Julie Penrose are interred along with two colleagues of the Penroses from the Cripple Creek gold rush days, Larry Leonard and Horace Devereaux. The chapel is adorned with 15th and 16th century European art objects indicative of the Penroses' efforts to cultivate a refined character for the Pikes Peak Region.

The crowning feature of the shrine is the set of Westminster Chimes, which can be heard throughout the Broadmoor valley as they strike the quarter hours each day. Today, the Will Rogers Shrine of the Sun stands as an everlasting monument to the cowboy who had a



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special gift for making the world laugh at its own troubles.

Spencer and Julie Penrose were married in 1906 and were highly instrumental in the development of the City of Colorado Springs. The Penroses are responsible for the construction of the Pikes Peak Highway, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and the Broadmoor Hotel. They were also a moving force in regional cultural and educational activities. They donated property for the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and established the El Pomar Foundation in 1937 to contribute to charitable and educational nonprofit organizations in Colorado.

For further information about visiting the shrine, hours of operation and area road conditions please call Cheyenne Mountain Zoo at 719.633.9925 or e-mail info@cmzoo.org.