

Of Biblical Proportions

New attraction designed for fun, but remains true to Book of Genesis



Ark Staff Picnic

Folks traveling in and around Williamstown, Kentucky, are in for an amazing few months as a replica of Noah's Ark—destined to be the largest timber-framed structure in America and possibly the world—is being built out in the rural countryside.

Located in northern Kentucky between Cincinnati, Ohio, and Lexington, this construction wonder, scheduled to open to the public July 7, 2016, will anchor the Ark Encounter, an entertainment and educational attraction.

Ark Encounters (Answers in Genesis)

CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF
ACTION OFFICER
Michael Zovath

LOCATION
Williamstown, Kentucky

"The whole purpose in this experience is to teach, but we want to do that in a fun way," says Michael Zovath, Co-Founder and Chief Action Officer of Answers in Genesis, the Ark Encounter's parent ministry. "There's a market out there for people who want to travel and spend some time together, but want to learn something. It's called the religious heritage and cultural travel market. It's probably a \$200 billion business each year, and we believe we'll tap into that with people who want to come and spend some time and learn something while they do it."



The ark is just one phase of the total \$92 million project and will be built at an estimated cost of \$35 million. No matter what else is in the park, however, the unchallenged focal point will be Noah's Ark, which measures 510 feet long, 51 feet high and 85 feet wide and sit next to three separate seven-story towers. The ark will eventually have more than 100 exhibits and hold about 10,000 people.

The ark sits on 15-foot tall concrete piers. Deck one is the bottom of the ship, and decks two and three house the displays and educational material. The rooftop deck will include a dining area that can host 700 people.

"It is all heavy-timber framed," says Todd Geer, Senior Vice President of Troyer Group, the architecture firm working on the project. "It is very

rustic, with exposed wood throughout. The inside is more of a museum attraction. It will explain how the ark was possible and how it could have held all of the animals as the Bible says."

The size of the timber being used is mind-bending. Floor joists, which according to Geer are "the smaller pieces" of the ark, are 16 by 18 inches and weigh 800 to 1,500 pounds apiece. There are 134 bays in the ark, and each bay has three joists.

Just in terms of numbers, Geer says there are 100 workers on the project (a number that will soon grow to 125), and about 1.5 million cubic yards of earth has been moved in cuts as much as 28 feet deep. There is about 3.3 million board feet of timber in the ark—enough to stretch 496 miles from the project site to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



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but we want to do that in a fun way,”
-Michael Zovath

CHALLENGE 1: WHAT IS A CUBIT?

The ark, possibly the world’s largest timber structure, is being built with materials and specifications described in Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

According to Genesis, Noah’s Ark measured 300 by 50 by 30 cubits. The challenge, Zovath explains, was to determine what a cubit measured during the time of Noah.

“We found there were at least 25 different lengths of cubits that were used to build different things back in the earlier parts of our history, so we had to settle on what we thought would be the dominant cubit that was used in earlier civilizations,” he says. “That’s the Royal Cubit or the Nippur Cubit. It was 20.4 inches long. We took the Biblical dimensions of the ark and just multiplied by the cubit factor to come up with our 510 feet long, 51 feet high and 85 feet wide.”

Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum, the sister attraction about 45 miles north in Petersburg, Kentucky, are designed to be entertaining and educational. Answers in Genesis has designed the parks to be Biblically authentic.

“We want people to understand more about the Bible and more about the flood of Noah’s day,” Zovath says. “We want people to learn

more about animal kind and to walk away with a look at the technology that was probably available to the people who built this ark, and see that it’s a plausible account from Scripture.”

Although the Ark Encounter will open in 2016, the ark itself is only the first phase. Once it opens, work on the other phases will be ongoing.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Because Answers in Genesis, through the Ark Encounter, wanted to be good stewards of the land and animals, the project was designed and constructed with sustainability in mind.

“It’s important to us because God called us all to be good stewards of the earth and the land,” Zovath says. “We’re supposed to have dominion over the earth, and that means to take care of it and make it as fruitful as possible.”

In addition to everything else that is spectacular about the Ark Encounter, Answers in Genesis and Troyer Group have set out to build not only a family-friendly and historically authentic facility but also one of the largest green construction projects in the country.

“We wanted to use as many different technologies and strategies as we could to be environmentally conservative,” Zovath says. “For



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instance, right off the bat, we're trying to use as much local labor as possible, including local contractors and local materials, which reduces the amount of driving time and the amount of fuel it takes to haul stuff."

The building itself is insulated in such a way that it reduces the heat load and reduces the air conditioning requirements, which then decreases the overall energy requirements. The building will also use LED lighting.

SPREADING THE WORD

Properties owned and being developed by Answers in Genesis—including the Creation Museum, which opened in 2007—are part of a larger ministry. The two projects are about a 45-minute drive away from each other.

"We originally thought we would want to go with a themed attraction next to the museum," Zovath says. "When we got our first study done, however, we realized we didn't have enough parking space on the land we owned to park everybody who wanted to come. We had to go back to the drawing board and start looking for more acres."

That search covered almost all of Kentucky and Indiana to no avail. Finally, the ministry's planners drew a circle of a one-hour drive around the Creation Museum in Petersburg.

"We decided we had to be a little farther away so that people didn't come to the museum thinking they could see it and the ark in one day because they thought the attractions were right next to each other," Zovath says. "Actually, the museum has turned into literally a two-day stay. The ark is probably a good day, at least in phase one, and as more phases come online, you can stay for longer." ■

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