

A ZOO Unlike Any Other

by Ron Stern



RON STERN

"The L.A. Superbug," one of Bill Swets' unique creations.

I have lived in Fort Collins for eight years and have driven by this unique location many times. But for some reason, on

this occasion I decided to stop and see what the Swetsville Zoo was all about. Named after its founder, Bill Swets, this unusual sculpture park features an eclectic mix of 150 figures made from scrap steel, car parts and even old farm equipment.

As I wandered around this unlikely outdoor museum, I saw an endless variety of humorous and whimsical creations. There was a 20-foot-high, 2,000-pound Allosaurus standing among the trees, a "barbershop" duet featuring singing alligators, and an "L.A. Super Bug" that consists of a VW Beetle elevated above the ground by long, steel, spiderlike legs that could get out of any traffic jam.

What started as a way to pass sleepless nights has turned into an all-consuming hobby that has taken up several acres of the Swet property. One night in 1985, Swet got the idea of working with

metal and started welding his various works of art. He placed them all over his property for no other reason than the fun of it.

That kept Swet busy through 10 years, and now his house and yard are a major tourist draw, attracting more than 20,000 visitors each year. Swet, like his art, has a wonderful sense of humor. He laughed loudly when I asked him about some common reactions to his work. "Is this guy crazy?" was about all he could manage to utter.

The Swetsville Zoo is free to the public and located at 4801 E. Harmony Rd. in Fort Collins, Colo., just east of I-25. ♦

Ron Stern is a freelance writer residing in Ft. Collins, Colo. He is the author of six books and currently writes about interesting people and places.

Questions or comments about this essay may be e-mailed to: mellis@colorado.aaa.com.

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