

This Day in History... May 4, 1974

Opening of Expo '74

On May 4, 1974, Expo '74 opened in Spokane, Washington. "Celebrating Tomorrow's Fresh New Environment" was the slogan for the 1974 World's Fair held in Spokane, Washington. It was the first world's fair to focus on environmental themes instead of the space age and technological wonders.

At the time, Spokane was the smallest city ever to host a world's fair (In 1982 Knoxville would later become the smallest.) Many regular fair exhibitors were concerned about participating. However, lobbying efforts paid off and, one by one, businesses and entertainers signed on. Among the American businesses present were Kodak, General Motors, and Ford. Pacific Northwest Bell had a pavilion that opted not to use air conditioning, but instead used louvered panels on the roof.



Stamp designed by legendary artist Peter Max.



Nixon gave his opening remarks from a floating stage in the Spokane River.

Participants from 10 foreign countries built pavilions. Among these was the Australian Pavilion with a 36-screen revolving audio-visual display and a model of the recently completed Sydney Opera House. The fair opened on May 4, 1974, and President Nixon welcomed more than 85,000 visitors through the gates that first day. Over the next six months, more than five million people visited the fair. Ironically, attendance at the fair was limited by the nation's petroleum fuel shortage.

The theme of the fair, "Preserve the Environment" ran through many of the events during the fair. Among these events was a symposium on United Nations World Environment Day (June 5) and ECAFE Day for the United Nations Economic Council for Asia and the Far East, which covered regional environmental concerns.

Despite the focus on the environment, among the new technologies introduced at Expo '74 was the IMAX movie theater. The US Pavilion had a 90-foot by 65-foot screen, the largest indoor movie screen at the time. The IMAX Theater played "Man Belongs to Earth," a 23-minute film showing scenes of American natural beauty as well as environmental issues.

Despite its apparent success, the fair was not profitable and its backers actually lost money. This was most likely due to the four-fold increase in interest rates from the time planning began through the end of the fair. Still, the event brought about \$150 million in revenue into Spokane, revitalizing the previously dilapidated city. More importantly, the fair's message increased environmental awareness and set the stage for change.



Stamp issued in September 1974 for the World's Energy Conference.

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