

3 years after damage from earthquake, Washington Monument reopens

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WASHINGTON — Today is the day that visitors set foot inside the Washington Monument, nearly three years after a 5.8-magnitude earthquake closed it for repairs.

About 1,800 members of public, including veterans wounded in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and their families, were allowed inside starting at 1 p.m. ET. Beforehand, the National Park Service had an hourlong reopening ceremony with schoolchildren, bands, singers and speeches.

“Going up in there and looking out reminded me of what I was fighting for,” said Marine Cpl. Tim Donley, who now uses a wheelchair because of the injuries he sustained. From the top, visitors can see the White House, the Capitol, the museums and monuments on the National Mall and beyond to Arlington Cemetery.

Visitors can examine new exhibits on the top floor of the 555-foot structure, including one that tells the story of Gen. George Washington, who later became the United States’ first president.

“They just finished getting them installed at 3 in the afternoon on Friday,” said Jenny Anzelmo-Sarles with the National Park Service. “You can still smell the glue drying.”

The epicenter of the Aug. 23, 2011, earthquake that damaged the iconic obelisk on the National Mall was about 90 miles southwest of Washington but caused more than 150 cracks in the monument’s marble, including one that split a stone from top to bottom near the peak of the monument.

Crews assessed the damage in September 2011 and created a report on what needed fixing. For the past two years, construction workers have been mending the marble and reinforcing weak spots.

Some damaged marble was replaced with salvaged material or stone from the same Maryland quarry as the monument’s original marble. The replacement stone had been saved from the steps of old Baltimore row houses.

“Repairing the Washington Monument included the painstaking process of inspecting more than 20,000 stones, repairing cracks, securing loose stones, installing steel supports and repairing extensive damage to the elevator, in addition to completing a thorough seismic study,” said Jonathan B. Jarvis, National Park Service director.

The project was completed on time and within budget, thanks to a \$7.5 million donation from financier David Rubenstein of The Carlyle Group that was matched with money from Congress.

Original construction on the Washington Monument was begun in 1848 but stopped in 1854 when donations ran out. It resumed in 1879, after the Civil War. And the monument was dedicated on Feb. 21, 1885, the day before the former president’s actual birthday.

The political divisions that stopped construction 160 years ago aren’t too different from Washington today, said the president of the nonprofit Trust for the National Mall, Caroline Cunningham.

Tickets for entry Monday were snapped up, but others can get their tickets online starting Tuesday. Tickets also are available on a first-come, first-served basis starting at 8:30 each morning at the Washington Monument Lodge on 15th Street between Madison and Jefferson drives.

The Washington Monument normally draws about 700,000 visitors a year. The National Park Service offering extended hours to visit the monument beginning Tuesday through the summer from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

“Folks can walk up. They can touch the stone, feel that marble and get in the elevator and get up to the top,” Anzelmo-Sarles said. “See the incredible view of the city. It’s unmatched.”

Contributing: The Associated Press



Washington Monument repairs: 3 years in 80 seconds: The Washington Monument has finally reopened after it was closed because of damage from an earthquake. [This time-lapse video courtesy of EarthCam](#) shows the three years of repairs in about 80 seconds. Check out www.earthcam.net for more cool videos.