

# FRONTIERLAND

## CONESTOGA WAGONS



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Climb aboard one of the Conestoga Wagon is this corner of Yester-Frontierland. The blue one has "Westward Ho!" emblazoned on its canvas cover, while the brown one has "Oregon or Bust" on it.

Your Conestoga Wagon is pulled by two strong horses, taking you on a genuine dirt path along the Rivers of America and through the Rainbow Desert.



Photo courtesy of Ron Yungul

Conestoga Wagons loading area, next to the Rainbow Ridge Pack Mules loading area



Photo by Charles R. Lympny, courtesy of Chris Taylor

### Wagon along the Rivers of America

Yester-Frontierland is on the move. As you peer from under the canvas cover, you might see Mike Fink Keel Boats and the Indian War Canoes navigating the Rivers of America. As you continue to the Rainbow Desert, you'll see park guests on the backs of Rainbow Ridge Pack Mules, riding the Rainbow Mountain Stagecoach Ride (on the same path as you wagon), or being transported in the ore cars of the Rainbow Caverns Mine Train.

Disneyland launched the Conestoga Wagons attraction in August 1955, the month after Disneyland opened to the public. Not everything was ready on opening day.

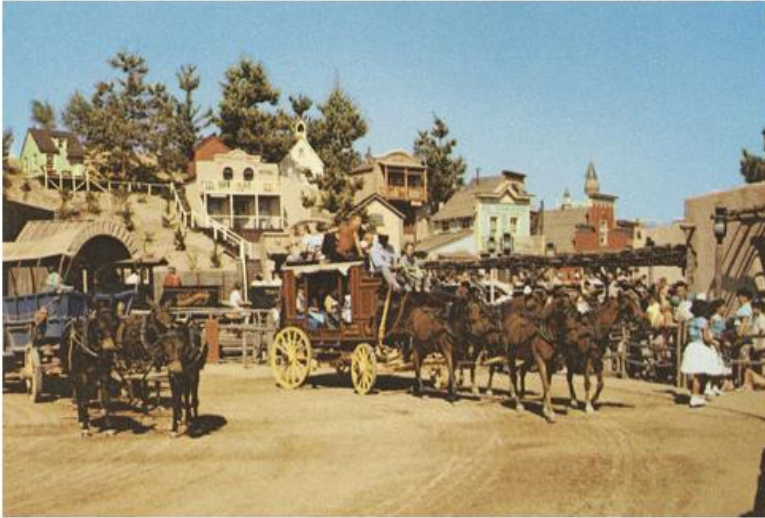
Here's how a newspaper advertisement featuring Frontierland at Disneyland (Pasadena Independent, December 18, 1955) described the attraction:

You will ride the Conestoga Wagon in Frontierland—one of the most picturesque and vital vehicles in history.

It was the Conestoga, not the Covered Wagon, that developed the West. The great wagons were first built in the Conestoga Valley of Pennsylvania, with water tight bottoms that permitted safe crossing of rivers.

You will also ride authentic stagecoaches, pack trains, and buckboards in this remarkable re-creation of the old West.

Early Disneyland was all about having experiences that you were unlikely to have in the real world. By the way, the buckboards never materialized at Disneyland. (A buckboard is also a wooden wagon, but with a simpler, boxier design than a Conestoga Wagon.)



*Hardy pioneers set out from Rainbow Ridge to explore the mysterious Rainbow Desert aboard Stage Coach and Conestoga Wagon.*

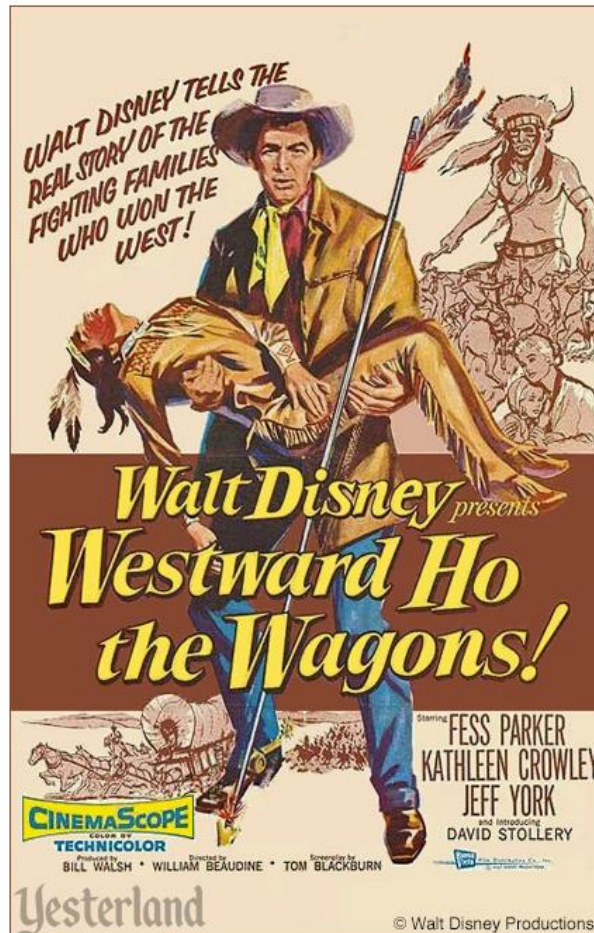
© Walt Disney Productions

scan from 1957 Disneyland souvenir book © Walt Disney Productions

Image and caption from *A Complete Guide to Disneyland, 1957*

The Conestoga Wagons attraction was supposed to provide the experience of riding in a Conestoga Wagon. It wasn't simply a ride vehicle from which to see something. Sure, there was great scenery, such as the clever anthropomorphic cacti of the Rainbow Desert. However, the real attraction was the wagon itself—an opportunity to travel like a “Westward Ho!” pioneer heading to Oregon.

Actual Conestoga Wagons of the 19th century were pulled by oxen, not horses. And actual pioneer families typically walked alongside their wagons, which were filled with the family's possessions, rather than riding in them. But that wouldn't have been as much fun for Disneyland guests.



© Walt Disney Productions

movie poster © Walt Disney Productions

Poster for a 1956 live-action movie from Walt Disney

Speaking of “Westward Ho!” there’s a largely forgotten 1956 Disney movie called Westward Ho the Wagons. The cast included Fess “Davy Crockett” Parker, Jeff “Mike Fink” York, Sebastian “Mr. French” Cabot, George “TV Superman” Reeves, and four Mouseketeers—Karen, Cubby, Doreen, and Tommy. Not surprisingly, the movie is about the experiences of settlers heading west by wagon train.

In September 1959, the Conestoga Wagons attraction ended its run of slightly more than four years. It was time to begin construction of Nature’s Wonderland for the 1960 opening of the Mine Train through Nature’s Wonderland and the Pack Mules through Nature’s Wonderland.

Almost 40 years later, you could again find a Conestoga Wagon at Disneyland... sort of...

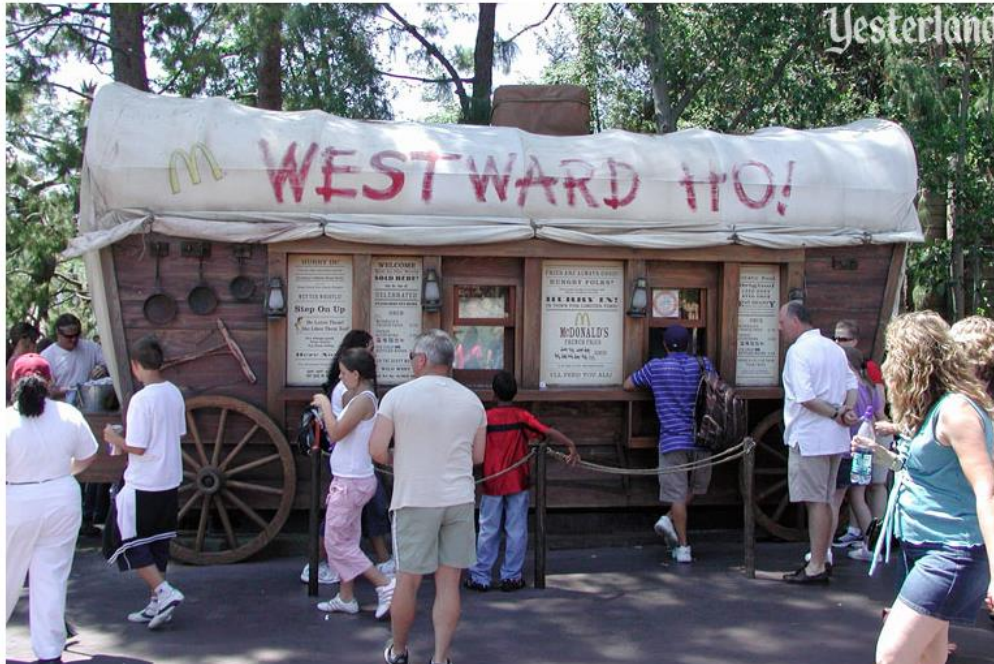


Photo by Werner Weiss, 2006

Conestoga Fries, a more recent Conestoga Wagon at Disneyland



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2006

“Treats manly enough for his hunger and delicate enough for her taste”

Conestoga Fries, hosted by McDonald’s, opened November 1998 at almost the exact spot at which guests originally boarded the Conestoga Wagons ride. It lasted almost ten years—considerably longer than the ride it referenced.

The McDonald's logo disappeared from Conestoga Fries September 2008. Most other McDonald's-branded eateries at Disney parks were renamed and given new menus, but this one was removed entirely.

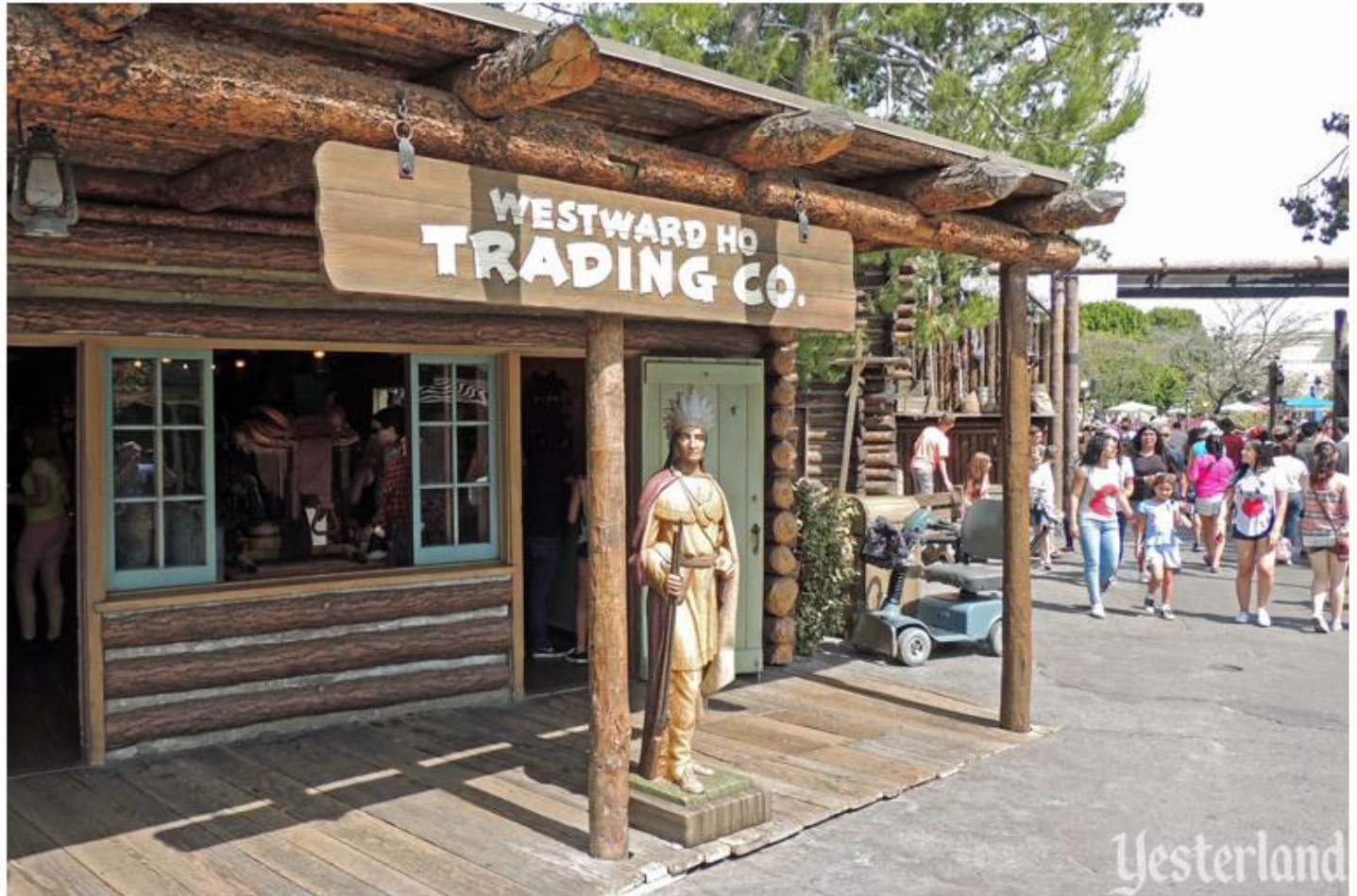
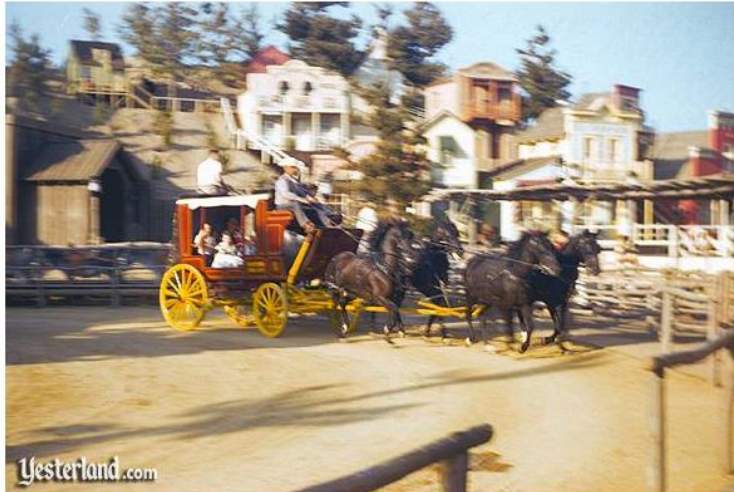


Photo by Werner Weiss, 2006

Westward Ho Trading Co.

"Westward Ho" lives on at Disneyland as part of the name of a Frontierland shop. Among other things, the shop sells pins. But can you buy a Conestoga Wagon pin there?

# STAGECOACH RIDE



Four horses pull a stagecoach into the town of Rainbow Ridge.

Take your seat inside or atop your stagecoach. Get ready for a ride through the wilderness of Frontierland.



The Rainbow Mountain Stagecoach Ride starts from this loading area.

Your stagecoach shares a well-worn dirt path with the Conestoga Wagons. Four horses pull your stagecoach on a journey that takes you along the shore of the Rivers of America and into the Living Desert.



This corner of the park looks like a natural wilderness.

In the Living Desert, keep your eyes open for balancing rocks, bubbling pots of colorful mud, and saguaro cacti that look strangely human.



A stagecoach travels along the Rivers of America.

This corner of the park is remarkably large, and it's easy to pretend that you really are traveling on a stagecoach through the wide open spaces of the Old West.

The Stagecoach Ride opened at Disneyland in 1955 as part of the original roster of Frontierland attractions. In 1956, with the addition of the Living Desert and other new scenery, the ride became the Rainbow Mountain Stagecoach Ride—although most Disneyland guidebooks and brochures from 1956 through 1959 continued to call it the Stagecoach Ride or just Stagecoaches.



The Rainbow Mountain Stagecoach in the Living Desert.

The ride closed forever in 1959 to make way for the construction of Nature's Wonderland—Beaver Valley, Bear River, and spectacular Cascade Peak. When Nature's Wonderland opened in 1960, there would be only two ways to travel through it—the Mine Train through Nature's Wonderland and the Pack Mules through Nature's Wonderland.

The Stagecoach Ride is one of Disneyland's iconic "gone but not forgotten" attractions, like the Monsanto House of the Future.



Disneyland Stage Lines Concord Coach on display in 2005.

For Disneyland's "Happiest Homecoming on Earth" 50th anniversary celebration, the park rolled one of the old stagecoaches into Big Thunder Ranch. It appears to be the same stagecoach that's in the fourth picture on this page—the one with the caption, "A stagecoach travels along the Rivers of America." For the celebration, it had a blue-and-gold 50th anniversary emblem above its door.



A poster in the 1950s?



Disneyland has a tradition of terrific attraction posters. The previous picture is not from the 1950s. Your first clue is the Pirates of the Caribbean didn't open until 1967. Actually, the picture above is from 2001, even though the attractions on the Frontierland poster were long-gone by then. It's good that Disneyland acknowledges and celebrates its past, and that many guests recognize the excellent graphics of the early attraction posters.



Holladay Overland Mail & Express Co. at Knott's Berry Farm

If you're in Southern California and you want to ride in an authentic stagecoach, head over to Knott's Berry Farm for the Butterfield Stagecoach ride. The Knott's website describes the ride like this: "Catch an original Butterfield Stage in Ghost Town for a rowdy ride back through time. And don't let the bullet holes in the door worry you, that happened long ago."

Even on slow days, it can be a long wait for this low-capacity attraction. The interior is quite cramped. But it's fun to experience travel inside an actual stagecoach. Unfortunately, the view from the stagecoach consists largely of a forest of supporting columns and twisting steel track of the various thrill rides that have invaded what was once Knott's Berry Farm's tranquil core.

# DIXIELAND BAND STAND



The Dixieland Band Stand is part of the shoreline.

The Dixieland Band Stand is on the Rivers of America waterfront. It's across from New Orleans Street, the Frontierland "neighborhood" with wrought iron balconies. There you'll also find Don DeFore's Silver Banjo Barbecue Restaurant.

New Orleans Street is not the same as New Orleans Square. New Orleans Street and the Dixieland Band Stand are older than New Orleans Square, which opened in 1966.



Listen to the Disneyland Strawhatters at 2:00, 3:00, 3:45, and 4:30 p.m.

The Dixieland Band Stand is the home of the Disneyland Strawhatters, a Dixieland jazz combo whose members—not surprisingly—wear straw hats.



Enjoy a snack at an outdoor table while you listen to the music.



The Strawhatters might change the rest of their wardrobe—but not their straw hats.

When it's not being used as a concert location, you can enjoy this structure as a pleasant, shaded gazebo, with great views of the Rivers of America and Tom Sawyer Island across the water.



Get a front row seat for the Disneyland Strawhatters.

The Dixieland Band Stand in Frontierland was one of the park's original features when Disneyland opened in 1955.

In the 1961 edition of Walt Disney's Guide to Disneyland, a caption next to a photo of the Strawhatters in front of the Dixieland Band Stand reads, "The 'Strawhatters' fill the air along Frontierland's Rivers of America with lilting Dixieland refrains."

However, the end was near for the waterfront Dixieland Band Stand by 1961. The waterfront area where Adventureland met Frontierland was reconfigured when construction began on New Orleans Square. The Dixieland Band Stand disappeared and did not return to Frontierland.



Here's the Frontierland waterfront in 2004. There's no bandstand.

The tradition of Dixieland Music didn't disappear with the original Dixieland Band Stand. Each fall from 1960 through 1970, Disneyland held a Dixieland at Disneyland event with many legendary performers, including Louis Armstrong. After New Orleans Square opened in 1966, the sounds of live Dixieland jazz and other jazz could often be heard in its streets and outdoor cafés. There's even a bandstand at the French Market Restaurant.



Here's the bandstand at the French Market Restaurant, New Orleans Square, in 2005.

# RAINBOW RIDGE PACK MULES

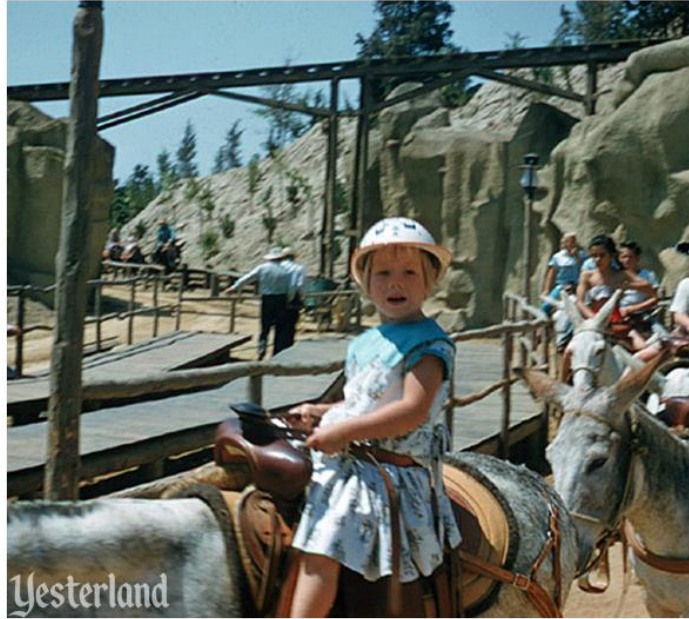


Photo by Florence Weir, 1956

Mule train for kids

There are plenty of high-tech attractions in Yesterland, including the Flying Saucers, America the Beautiful in Circarama, and the Yesterland-Alweg Monorail.

But there's a ride that's so low-tech that it keeps operating even if there's a power failure. However, that doesn't mean it's always reliable. It can stop for no apparent reason—or for reasons known only to the mules that provide the ride.

Let's compare high-tech and low-tech. The high-tech Indiana Jones Adventure opened at Disneyland in 1995 and proudly featured revolutionary, new ride conveyances capable of random variability. Revolutionary and new? Not really. The low-tech mules provided random variability forty years earlier.



Photo by Charles R. Lypany, circa 1955-1956, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Early load area

Mules are unpredictable. Sometimes they move right along; sometimes they barely move at all; sometimes they just stop; and sometimes they even back up. You never get the same ride twice. You might wonder if you'll ever make it back to the loading area.

Yes, just like the Indiana Jones Adventure.



Photo by Charles R. Lypany, circa 1955-1956, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Break area for mules

Climb onto a saddle on the back of a mule for a scenic ride across manmade hills, planted with shrubs and pine trees. Pretend you're in the Old West—the undeveloped West, as represented by a largely undeveloped corner of the park.



Photo by Charles R. Lypany, circa 1955-1956, courtesy of Chris Taylor

No town of Rainbow Ridge yet; no fancy scenery yet; no animated animals yet

The version of the ride in the three photos directly above is called the Mule Pack. Someday it will become the Rainbow Ridge Pack Mules. But that won't happen until they build the town of Rainbow Ridge.

When Disneyland opened in July 1955, the Mule Pack was one of the original attractions. The attraction operated in the same area as the original Stage Coach and the original Conestoga Wagons.

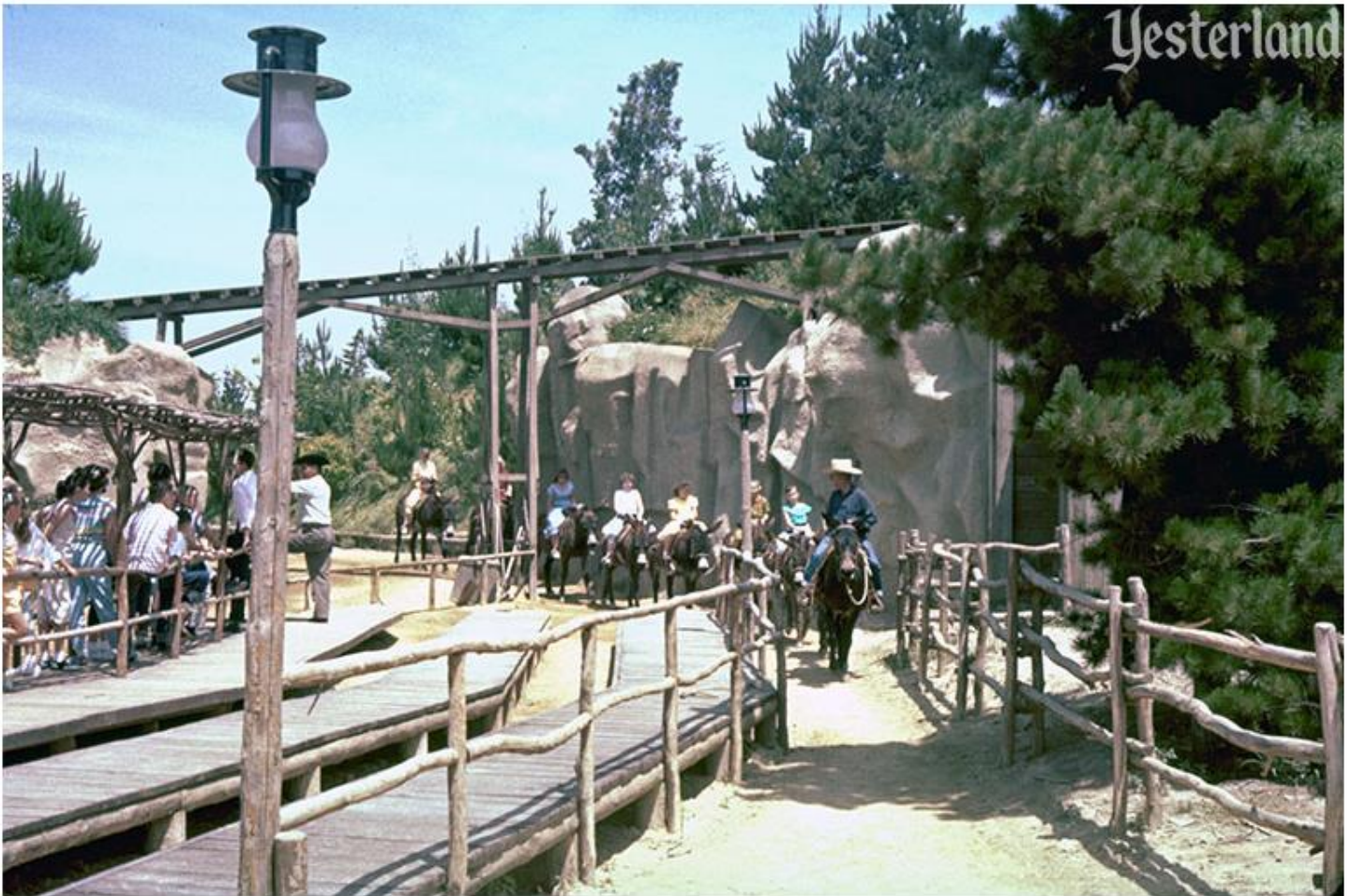


Photo by Merrill A. Garner, circa 1958

#### Enhanced Load area

The Mule Pack lasted less than a year with its original name and its modest setting.

A \$2 million Disneyland expansion for summer 1956 included the Disneyland Skyway, the Rainbow Caverns Mine Train, the Indian Village, the Indian War Canoes, Storybook Land, and Tom Sawyer Island.

The Rainbow Caverns Mine Train brought the town of Rainbow Ridge, the Living Desert, an enhanced load area for the mule ride, and more for riders to see along the trail.

The mule ride became the Rainbow Ridge Pack Mules in June 1956.

Disneyland guests needed to part with a top-tier ticket to ride on a mule. When Disneyland introduced the "E" ticket in June 1959, that's what the Rainbow Ridge Pack Mules required.





Photo by Christian Paul Jr., 1962, Courtesy of Chris Paul

#### Pack Mules Through Nature's Wonderland

The next expansion was in 1960. A \$1.8 million transformation turned the 7-acre mule ride and mine train grounds into Nature's Wonderland. The project included 204 animated animals, 75-foot Cascade Peak, and new environments inspired by Walt Disney's True-Life Adventures. The enhanced mule ride became Pack Mules Through Nature's Wonderland in June 1960.

The mule rides ended in 1973. Nature's Wonderland was replaced by Big Thunder Mountain Railroad (1979) and Big Thunder Ranch (1986). In 1996, the Big Thunder Ranch area temporarily became the Hunchback of Notre Dame Festival of Fools.

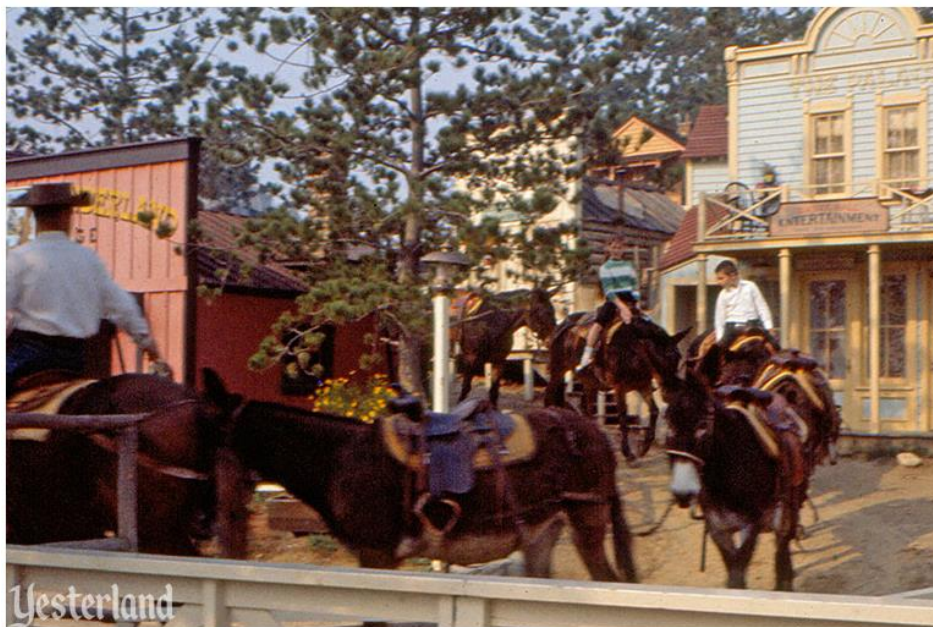


Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1961, courtesy of Robin Runck

#### Riding through the streets of Rainbow Ridge

Disneyland: the Nickel Tour, the wonderful 1995 book by Bruce Gordon and David Mumford, has this item about the cost of the “ride system”:

Those pack mules must have been the most economical ride system ever developed—in May of 1957, Disneyland bought 25 of the pesky little critters for just \$50 apiece! And the daily feed bill for their whole herd of 75? Just twenty cents a head.

Disneyland: Inside Story, the equally wonderful 1987 book by Randy Bright, has this about the reliability of this economical “ride system”:

Although blessed with extraordinarily short work hours, the mules would stop for no apparent reason along the trail and refuse to continue, regardless of the verbal lashings applied by the mule skinner. And almost anywhere, at any time, one of the creatures would break out into a loud and repetitious series of brayings that sounded astonishingly like “hee haw.”

Among Disney parks worldwide, the mule rides were unique to Disneyland. They never were duplicated.



Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1960, courtesy of Robin Runck

### Riding through the Living Desert

The next time somebody tries to tell you that “E” ticket means that a ride is particularly intense and thrilling, bring up the mule ride.

Disney Imagineering Legend Bob Gurr did not design Disneyland’s mules. If he had, they would have been more reliable. And more stylish.

# RAINBOW CAVERNS MINE TRAIN



Board the Mine Train for a trip into the Living Desert and through beautiful Rainbow Caverns. As your train enters the hot, arid desert, take a look at the cacti. Why, they almost look human! Watch out for those Balancing Rocks. Oh, oh. They're rolling around. Let's hope they stay up there.

There goes a Rainbow Mountain Stagecoach through the Living Desert .And behind it on the same path, there's a Conestoga Wagon. Now, a big train passes your little train; it's the Santa Fe & Disneyland Railroad. And what's that up by Natural Arch Bridge? It's the Rainbow Ridge Pack Mules. There sure are a lot of attractions that pass through the Living Desert.

But only the Rainbow Caverns Mine Train takes you into beautiful Rainbow Caverns. The caverns are dark inside except for pools and waterfalls of brightly colored, glowing water. Soft music adds to the mood of Rainbow Caverns. Illuminated only by the glowing water, you can make out the stalagmites and stalactites of the cave.

After you exit from the Mine Train, visit Mineral Hall right next door. Look at those ordinary looking rocks in Mineral Hall. But when the room darkens, the rocks glow in mysterious colors through the magic of black light.



The Rainbow Caverns Mine Train began operating in Disneyland's new Living Desert in 1956. The Living Desert also served as the enhanced home of the Stagecoaches, the Conestoga Wagons, and the Pack Mules which all had premiered in Disneyland's inaugural year, 1955.

In 1960, the Mine Train attraction was upgraded to become the Mine Train through Nature's Wonderland. The Conestoga Wagons and the Stagecoaches disappeared during this expansion, but the Pack Mules were allowed to stay.

The Santa Fe & Disneyland Railroad (renamed the Disneyland Railroad in 1974) served as the northern border of the Living Desert. Railroad passengers enjoyed excellent views of the desert until the track was rerouted in preparation for the 1966 opening of "it's a small world."

# MIKE FINK KEEL BOATS



The Keel Boat experience

Whether you saw the original broadcasts of "The Legends of Davy Crockett" on the Disneyland television series (ABC) in 1954 and 1955, or later re-broadcasts on Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color (NBC), you'll remember that Davy Crockett and Mike Fink raced their keel boats down the river to New Orleans.



Photo by Charles R. Lypany, circa 1956, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Steering the Gullywhumper with a large rudder

Davy Crockett may have won the race, but Mike Fink has the honor of having his name on this attraction.



Photo by Charles R. Lypany, circa 1956, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Mike Fink's boat, the Gullywhumper

Take a seat on the Gullywhumper, the legendary keel boat of Mike Fink, King of the River. You can recognize the Gullywhumper by its simple, barn-door-like shutters.



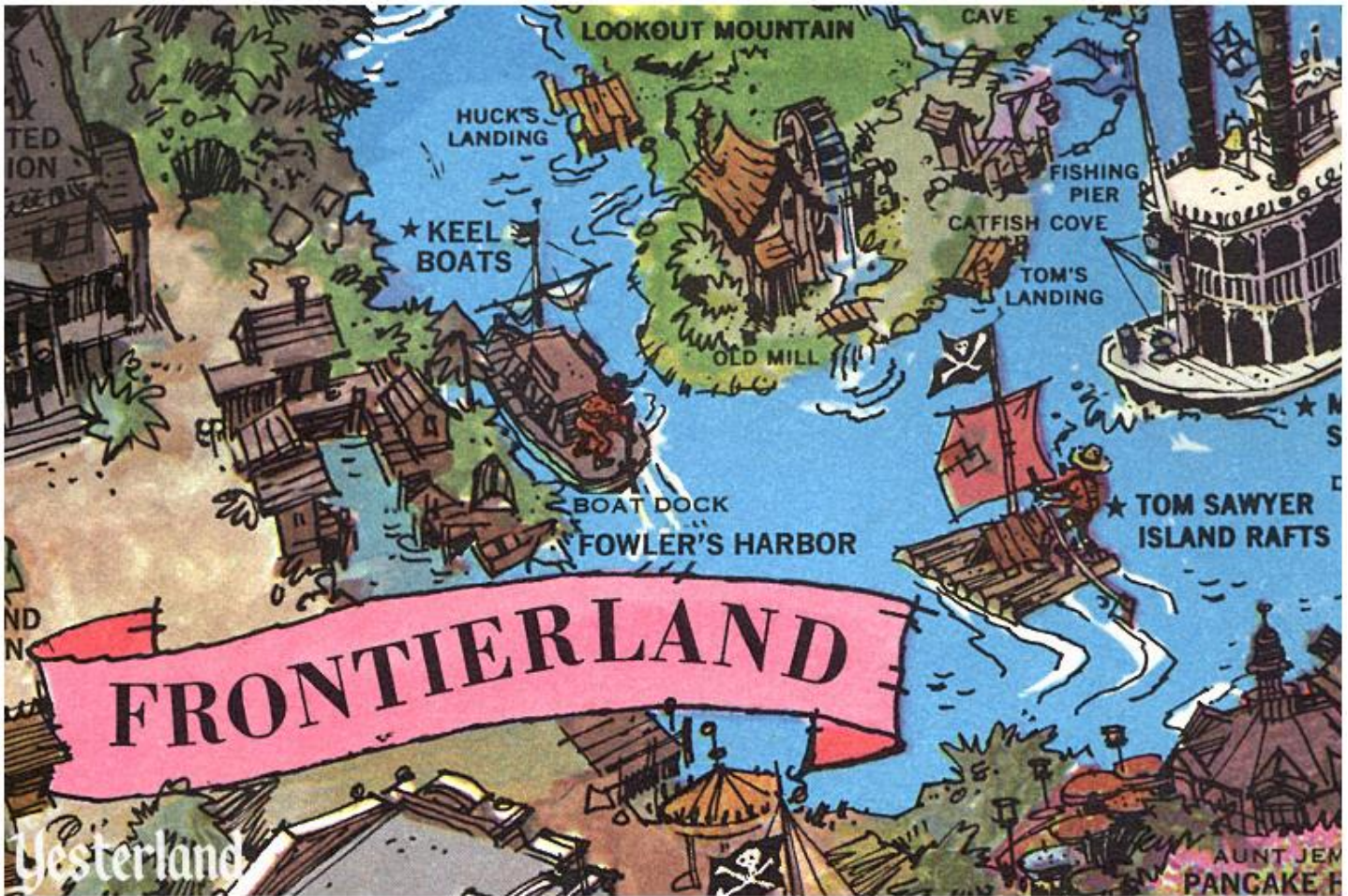
Photo by Charles R. Lypany, circa 1959, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Davy Crockett's boat, the Bertha Mae

If you're partial to Davy Crockett, you might prefer a seat on the Bertha Mae, the legendary keel boat of the King of the Wild Frontier. With louvered and decorated shutters, the Bertha Mae is fancier than the Gullywhumper.

The Mike Fink Keel Boats premiered in Disneyland on December 25, 1955—the park's first Christmas. Over the years, the Keel Boats usually operated on a seasonal basis, primarily during the summer, but sometimes also on busy weekends.

The original boats were the actual boats used in the filming of the Davy Crockett programs, quickly converted to have seats and two windows on each side. These boats were replaced by higher-capacity boats with three windows on each side.



Keel Boats on the 1964 Disneyland Souvenir Map by Sam McKim

When it came to tickets, the Mike Fink Keel Boats ride was usually a bargain compared to the other vessels of the Rivers of America. For example, in 1972, Disneyland guests had the opportunity to circle Tom Sawyer Island for a mere "C" ticket on the Mike Fink Keel Boats. In comparison, the Columbia Sailing Ship, the Mark Twain Steamboat, and Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes all required a "D" ticket.

In 1994, at the end of the summer, the Mike Fink Keel Boats closed for the season. All through 1995, the Keel Boats never reopened. Had they closed forever? No! The Keel Boats reappeared on the Rivers of America at the end of March 1996.

Then came... The Accident. At around 5:30 p.m. on May 17, 1997, the Gullywhumper began rocking from side to side while on a routine trip around the island. The Gullywhumper tipped over, dunking a boatload of guests into the Rivers of America. Several guests were treated for minor injuries at St. Joseph Hospital in Orange. Following the accident, the Gullywhumper was removed from the water for inspection.

Neither the Gullywhumper nor Bertha Mae operated for the rest of the 1997 season—or ever again.



Photo by Werner Weiss, 1983

The Gullywhumper at the Magic Kingdom Park in Florida

The Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World had its own Mike Fink Keel Boats. Circling the Rivers of America from a dock at Liberty Square (and later from a dock in Frontierland), the two boats had the same names as their Disneyland counterparts. Originally launched when the park opened on October 1, 1971, the seasonal attraction closed April 29, 2001.



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2005

The Coyote docked at Disneyland Paris

When Disneyland Paris (originally Euro Disneyland) opened in 1992, the park had its own keel boat ride, River Rogue Keelboats, with two boats, the Racoon and the Coyote. The Paris version closed in 2000. In 2007, after a seven year absence, River Rogue Keelboats returned to service and continues to operate as a seasonal attraction.

So if you want to experience a Disney keel boat ride, you'll have to go to Disneyland Paris.



Photo by Karen Weiss, 2004

Disneyland's Gullywhumper serving as a prop

Back at Disneyland in Spring 2003, the Gullywhumper returned to Rivers of America—not to transport guests, but just as a prop. The Gullywhumper was moored at Tom Sawyer Island, providing another thing to see from the Mark Twain, Columbia and Canoes. Despite efforts to make the boat look like a historic artifact, it was obvious that it was a defunct ride boat. It looked sad.



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2007

Disneyland's Gullywhumper suffering from neglect

As the years passed, the condition of the Gullywhumper deteriorated. It was supposed to add life to the Rivers of America, but the boat looked rather dead.





Photo by anonymous, 2010

### The new Gullywhumper, looking like an actual keel boat

As part of the 2010 refurbishment of Disneyland's Rivers of America, the cabin that was once the Burning Settler's Cabin became Mike Fink's Cabin. His boat, the Gullywhumper, is nearby. And this Gullywhumper looks authentic, not like a former ride.

While the Gullywhumper stayed at Disneyland, the Bertha Mae had an entirely different fate.

The Bertha Mae showed up on eBay's Disney Auctions site in December 2001. Disneyland pocketed \$15 thousand, and some mysterious collector now owned half of the two-boat fleet of the Mike Fink Keel Boats. Who could it be? And what happened to the boat?

More than five years later, I was watching a "screener" DVD of Finding Kraftland, a father-son bonding documentary originally made for a single birthday party showing that went on to become a surprise hit on the film festival circuit. It turned out the buyer of the Bertha Mae was Richard Kraft, the father in the film.

I asked Kraft about his purchase for an interview that was originally published by MiceAge in August 2007. Here's an excerpt from that interview:

WEISS: The Bertha Mae, one of the actual keelboats from Disneyland's Mike Fink Keel Boats ride, appeared on eBay's Disney Auctions site in December 2001. The description said that the boat "is not actually a seaworthy craft. It is suitable for display and/or storage on solid ground only..." Someone paid \$15 thousand. Now that I've seen Finding Kraftland, I finally know who bought the Bertha Mae!

KRAFT: I never went on the Keel Boats when they were in Disneyland. They looked like such a snooze. I was certainly not going to waste a ticket going on one. Then the Bertha Mae came up for auction. I felt possessed. I had always loved your website, Yesterland. I loved the idea of a cyber-space where all of the attractions of the past lived on. Owning a keel boat would be like really visiting Yesterland. So for quite a bit more than the cost of a "C" ticket, I can now visit Disneyland of the Past whenever I want.



Four stills from *Finding Kraftland*, courtesy of Richard Kraft

Richard Kraft showing off the Bertha Mae in the film *Finding Kraftland*

WEISS: Currently, you have the Bertha Mae in storage, but your plans are to build a lagoon for the Bertha Mae on your property. How is that project proceeding? How will you make sure the Bertha Mae is seaworthy? How do you plan to use the Bertha Mae? As a floating work of art? Or perhaps as a floating outdoor dining room?

KRAFT: The original plan was to crane it over our house and build a lagoon in our backyard. I envisioned a picnic area with the keelboat as the centerpiece, sort of like the Chicken of the Sea Ship in Fantasyland. After a few meetings with various engineers and my business manager, reality kicked in. So it has lived in storage ever since.

For more, see my interview with Richard Kraft about his movie, *Finding Kraftland*.

When I previously updated this article in 2010, the Bertha Mae was still languishing in the same storage facility where it had been since Kraft took possession after his successful bid. Kraft had seen his purchase exactly twice—first backstage at Disneyland right after he won the auction, and then when he filmed the sequence for *Finding Kraftland*. He has no idea if it still floated, but there was no indication that it didn't. Wrapped in plastic and stored indoors, the boat was still in the same condition as when Kraft bought it.

That was the problem.

"The boat has gone unvisited since *Finding Kraftland*," explained Kraft in 2010. "It is sad and lonely in the storage facility. It is not getting the love it deserves. It should find flight in some fantastic way."

As of June 2014, the Bertha Mae is still in deep storage at Dunkel Bros. off the "5 Freeway" in La Mirada, California. When asked what the future looks like for the Bertha Mae, Kraft replied, "I have absolutely no idea!"

# BURNING SETTLER'S CABIN

You boarded the Freight Train of the Santa Fe & Disneyland Railroad at the Frontierland Station. As your train follows the water's edge, you gaze between the slats of the cattle car in which you're seated. Across the water of the Rivers of America, there's a rustic log cabin.



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, 1956, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Cattle car



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Fire!

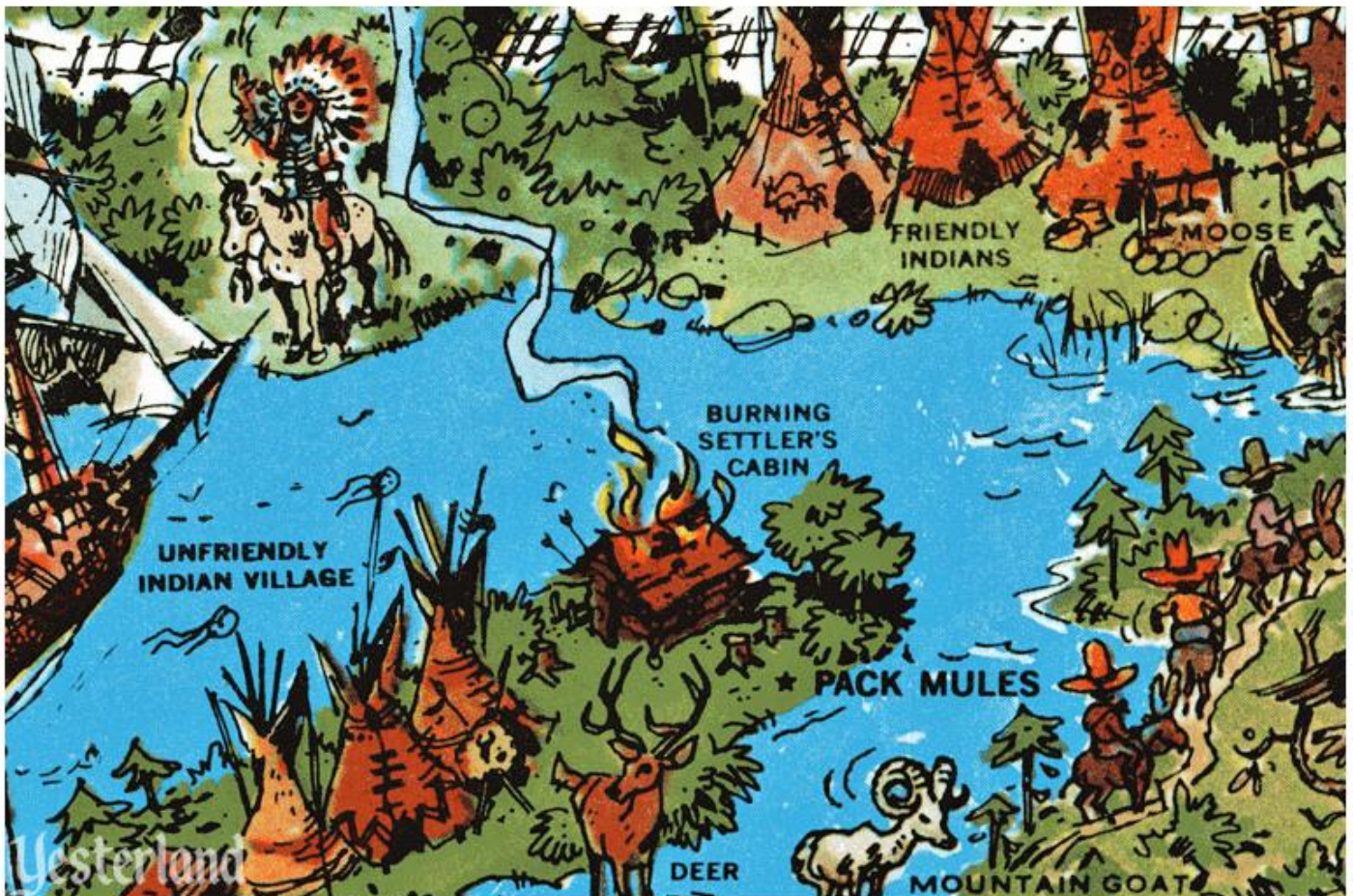
That cabin is on fire! Oh no! There's a man sprawled on the ground, with an arrow in his body, sticking straight up. He's not moving. He must be dead.

The train's narrator explains: "Now, we're heading into the true backwoods. Watch for Indians and wild animals near the water's edge. This is the American West as it was a century ago. Our forefathers who tamed this great wilderness faced constant danger. And there, across the river, is proof—a settler's cabin afire! The old pioneer lies nearby—the victim of an Indian arrow."

So that's what happened. The settler was killed by an unfriendly Indian, who then torched the cabin. Your souvenir map shows that the Burning Settler's Cabin is located right by the Unfriendly Indian Village.

Do you want a closer look?

You can't get to the cabin by foot. According to the Tom Sawyer Island map, the cabin is in "Indian Territory," where "terms of treaty prohibit entry." You wouldn't want to walk there anyway, because you could wind up like the unfortunate settler.



© 1962 Walt Disney Productions

Detail from 1962 Disneyland souvenir wall map



Charles R. Lympany, courtesy of Chris Taylor

### Friendly Indians, just as the map shows

Taking another look at your park map, you might conclude that the settler would have been better off if he'd built his cabin across the river. That's where the friendly Indians live.

Another way to see the flaming cabin is to go on the Indian War Canoes, which leave from the Indian Village. Don't worry. The Indians who guide the canoes are friendly Indians.

The Burning Settler's Cabin wasn't an attraction in the traditional sense. It was a dramatic show scene visible from the watercraft of the Rivers of America and from the railroad. Added to the north end of Disneyland's Tom Sawyer Island in 1956, it burned for more than four decades. The story of who lived in the cabin and why it was ablaze changed several times.

The original story, as described earlier in this article, involved an Indian attack. In Walt Disney's Davy Crockett programs, some Indians were friends and some were foes. This theme carried over to early Disneyland.

In the 1970s, the entertainment industry became increasingly aware that their often simplistic portrayal of American Indians could be offensive. At Disneyland, the settler lost the arrow and became the victim of evil river pirates.

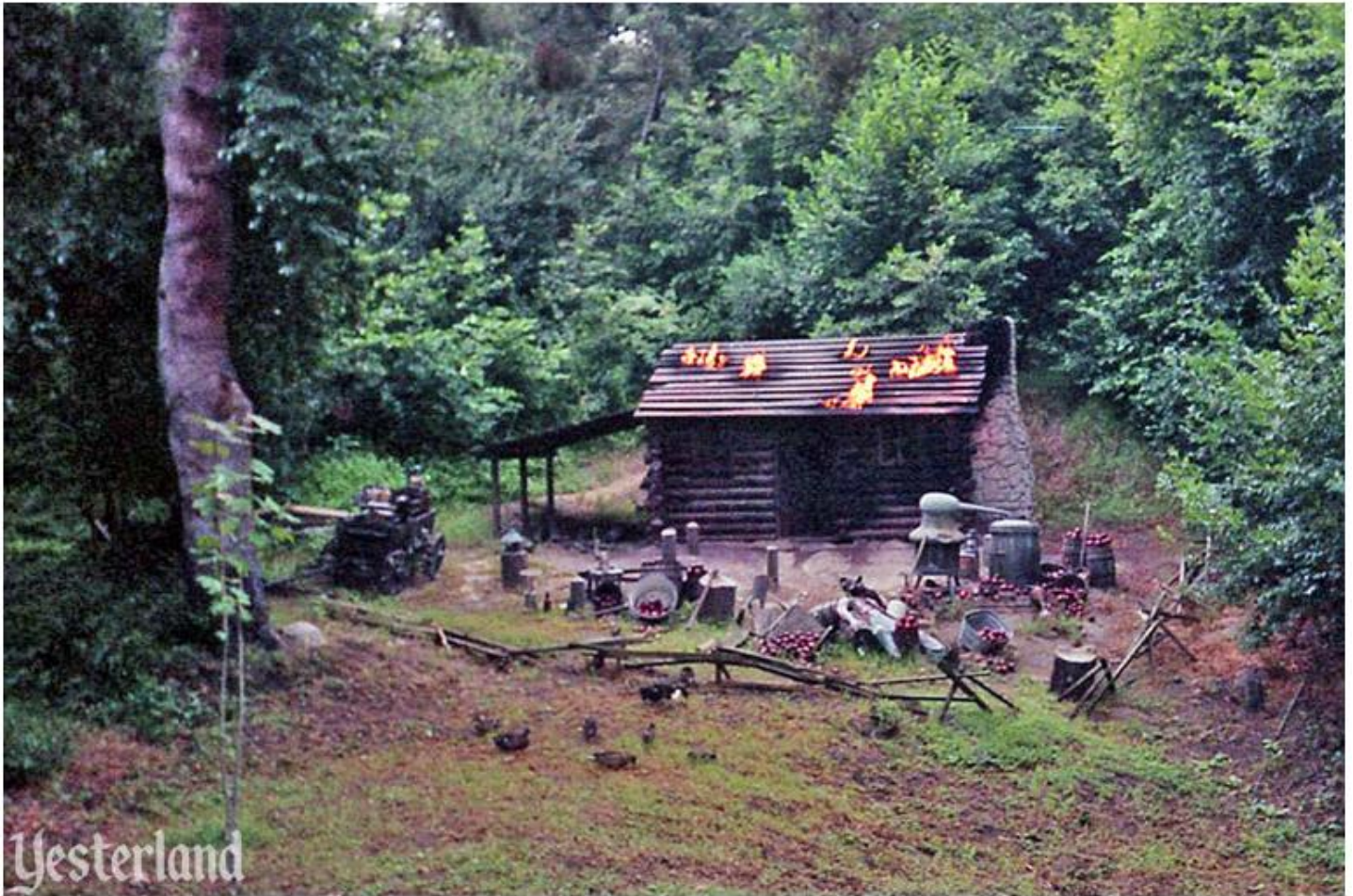


Photo by Chris Bales, 1989

### Cabin set ablaze by a moonshiner

In the mid-1980s, the settler became a moonshiner whose still had exploded, igniting the cabin. The moonshiner was sprawled out in front of the cabin, but we were assured he wasn't dead; he had just consumed too much of his product.

In the early 1990s, an eagle nest appeared atop a dead tree trunk right next to the cabin. The new story was that the careless settler had accidentally set his own cabin on fire, endangering the nearby nest. The settler wasn't very smart if he burned down his own home. The eagles were even less smart if they built their nest so close to a settler's cabin.

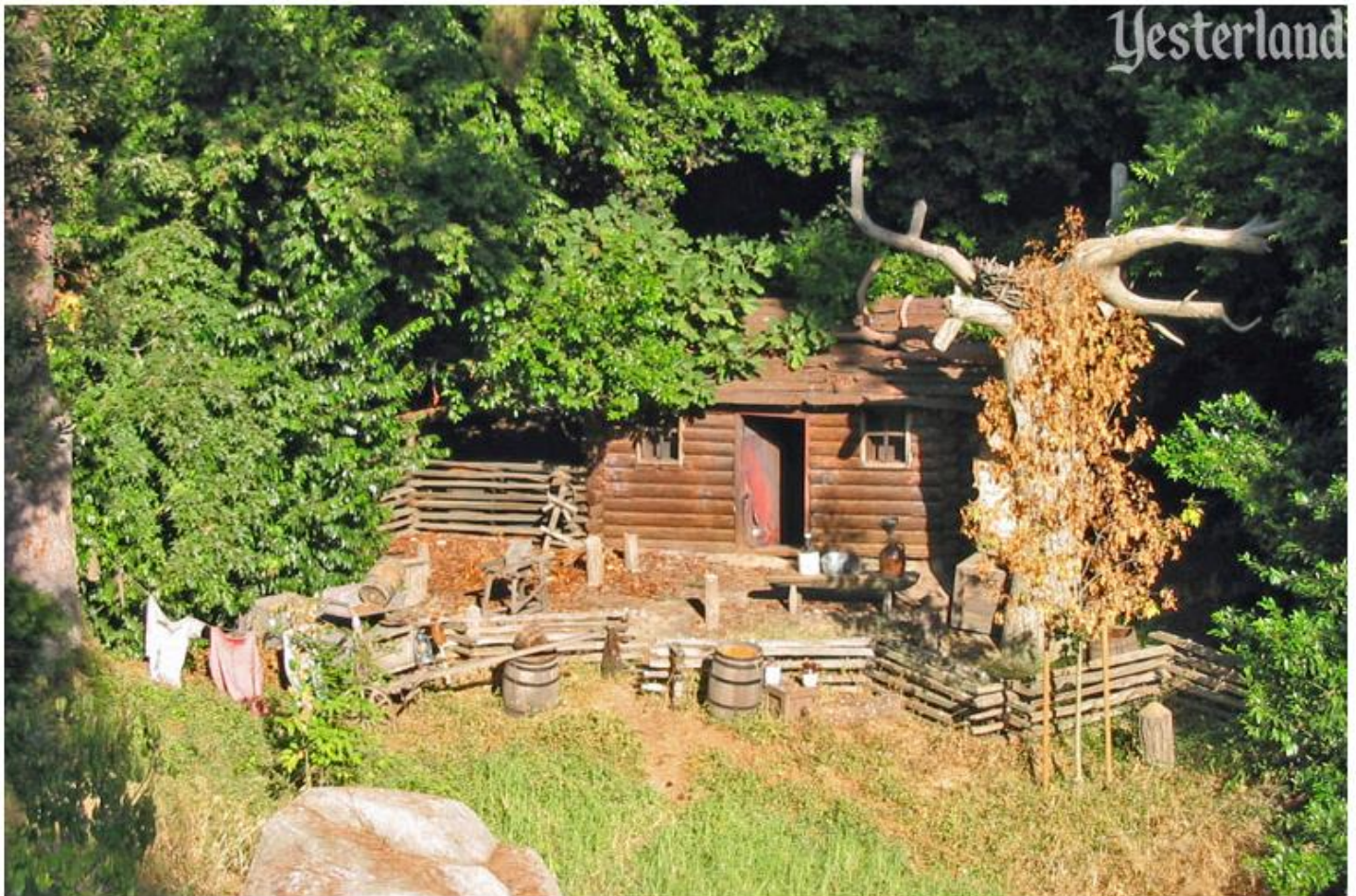


Photo by Werner Weiss, 2004

### Abandoned cabin, no longer burning

A half century after the opening of Disneyland, the sturdy, fireproof Settler's Cabin was still there, but it was no longer engulfed in flames. It was engulfed in trees.

The Settler's Cabin looked sad—a neglected remnant of the past. Instead of being the most memorable sight along the edge of the Rivers of America, it was easily overlooked.

There was no official explanation for why the flames were extinguished. One story was that the gas line needed replacement, but it would be too costly. Another story was that the flames are a victim of California's strict emissions standards.

This wasn't the first time that the flames went out. During the period when the settler was a victim of river pirates, the flames were a victim of the energy crisis. The cabin burned with the same artificial fire effect as used in Pirates of the Caribbean. It's a great effect in the indoor Pirates ride, but was not convincing outdoors. The real fire returned in the mid-1980s.



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2007

Fixed-Up Settler's Cabin at Disneyland, as it looked in 2007

As part of the Pirate's Lair makeover of Tom Sawyer Island in 2007, the former Burning Settler's Cabin became a well-tended Settler's Cabin. The settler even gained a motionless horse. There were no longer holes in the roof or empty windows for flames. The Settler's Cabin would never burn again.

So what happens when a house gets flipped? Someone moves in, of course.



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2013

Mike Fink moves in



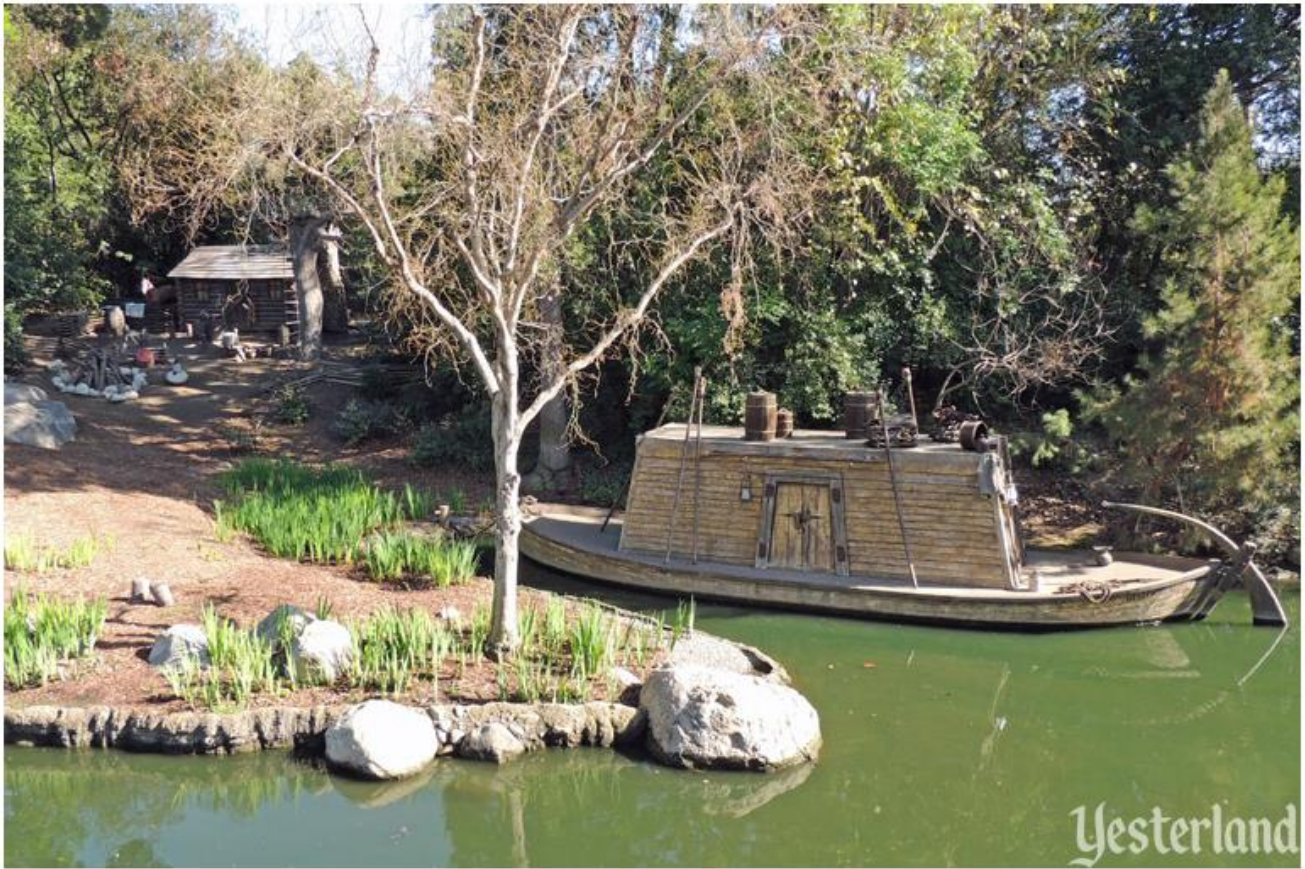


Photo by Werner Weiss, 2015

Convenient dock for Mike Fink's keelboat



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2015

Mike Fink's cabin

During the 2010 refurbishment of Disneyland's Rivers of America, the fixed-up cabin became Mike Fink's Cabin, with his keelboat, the Gullywhumper, docked in front.

Apparently, it was also Fink's place of business. A sign in front read, "Mike Fink, King of the River" and "Traps - Tradin'."

The refurbished cabin was a nice place, but Mike Fink had to move because of Star Wars. Rivers of America closed January 2016 for the north end of Tom Sawyer to be chopped off and the river loop shortened. Good-bye cabin.

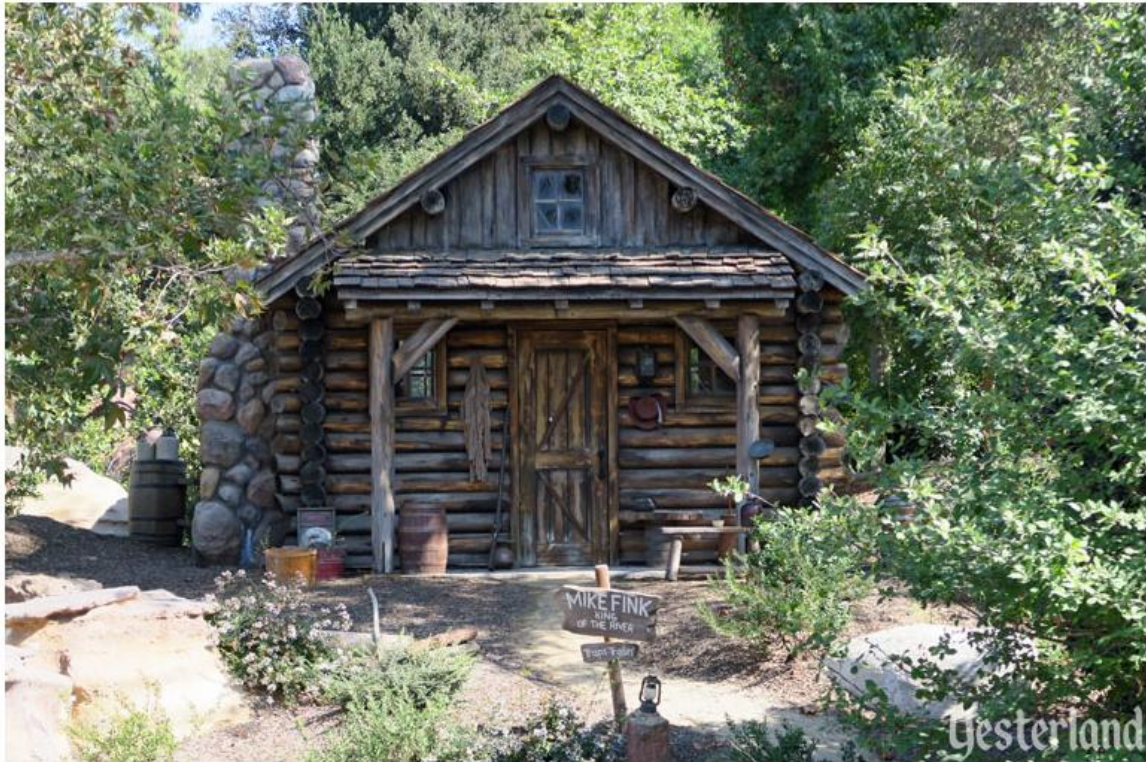


Photo by Allen Huffman, 2017

Mike Fink's new cabin



Photo by Allen Huffman, yyyy

On a cliff

When the work was done and the Rivers of America were refilled in July 2017, Disneyland guests discovered that Mike Fink had an even better cabin.

There was also a Burning Settler's Cabin at Walt Disney World. Like its California cousin, the cabin in Florida stopped burning long ago. Unlike its California cousin, the cabin in Florida still looks sad and neglected.

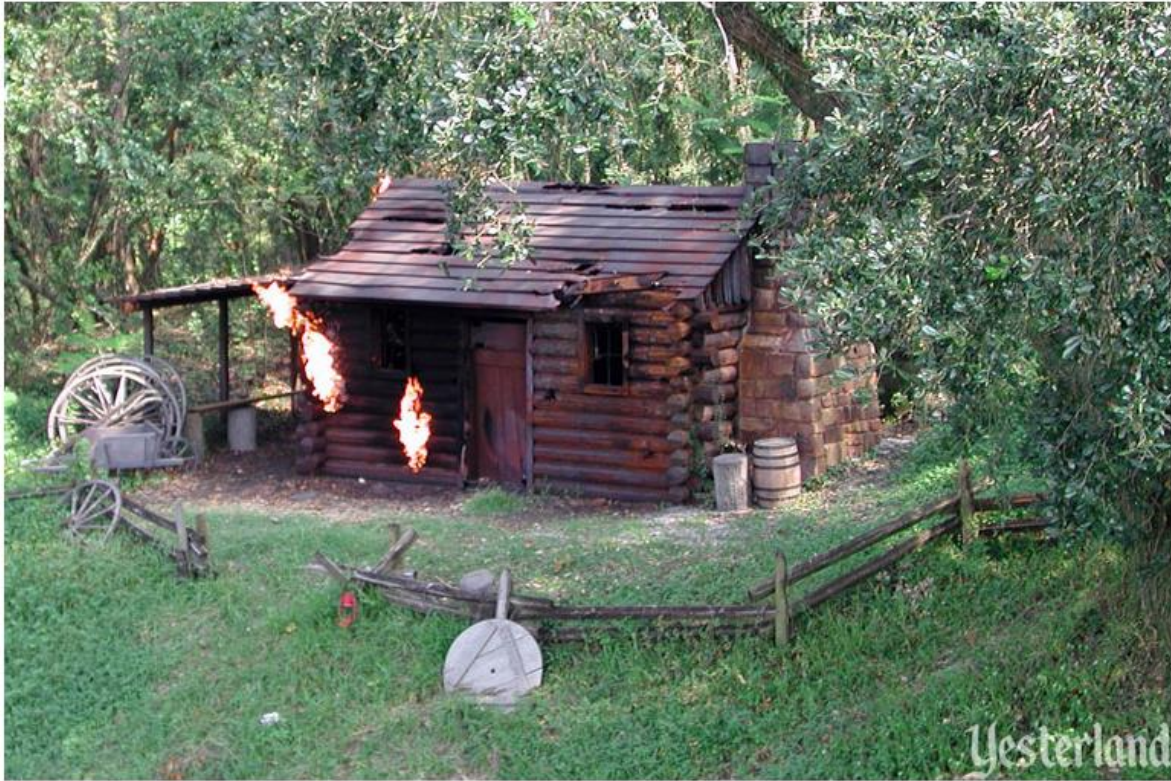


Photo by Werner Weiss, 2004

Burning Settler's Cabin at Magic Kingdom Park, Walt Disney World, 2004



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2006

Extinguished Cabin at Magic Kingdom Park, Walt Disney World, 2006

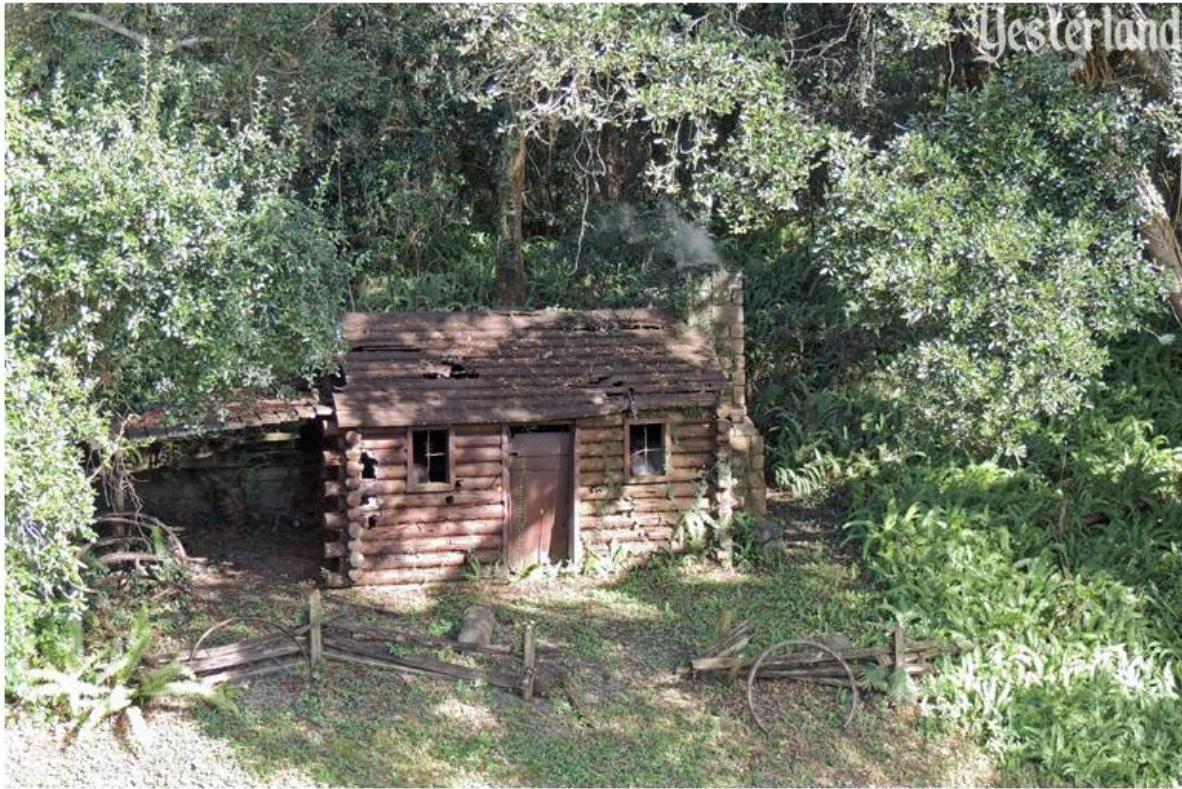


Photo by Werner Weiss, 2015

Cabin with smoke from the chimney at Magic Kingdom Park, Walt Disney World, 2015

The Liberty Belle Riverboat went down for “rehab” in September 2005 for nearly a year. Because guests would not see the Burning Settler’s Cabin, Magic Kingdom management turned off the flames. The riverboat came back, but the flames didn’t. Although there was not an official explanation, the story at the time was that the pipes that supplied propane for the fire—the original pipes from 1971—had deteriorated due to age and a year of not being used.

Unlike its Disneyland counterpart, the cabin at Magic Kingdom Park has never been fixed up. The openings for flames are still there. Does that mean the fire will return some day?

Probably not.

# FORT WILDERNESS



Tom Sawyer Island

Photo by Charles Lympny, circa 1956

Take a look at your Tom Sawyer Island brochure from 1956:

## FORT WILDERNESS

At the far end of Wilderness Road stands Fort Wilderness—the outpost of civilization. The time is the War of 1812...the United States flag has only 15 stars.

Within the gates there is a Canteen and Trading Post—stocked with pelts, guns, knives, and Indian craft.

In the Regimental Hdqrs., Davy Crockett and George Russell, U.S. Army Scouts, can be seen reporting to Maj. General Andrew Jackson during the Cherokee Indian Campaign.

From the parapets and block houses can be seen the vast untamed American wilderness...the deer, moose, bear and wildlife of the primitive forest.

Beyond the stockade are tepees...hostile Indians on the warpath. A settler's cabin burns in the distance...mute evidence of a treacherous attack.



Sign to Fort Wilderness

Photo by Allen Huffman, 2002



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2002

Turret

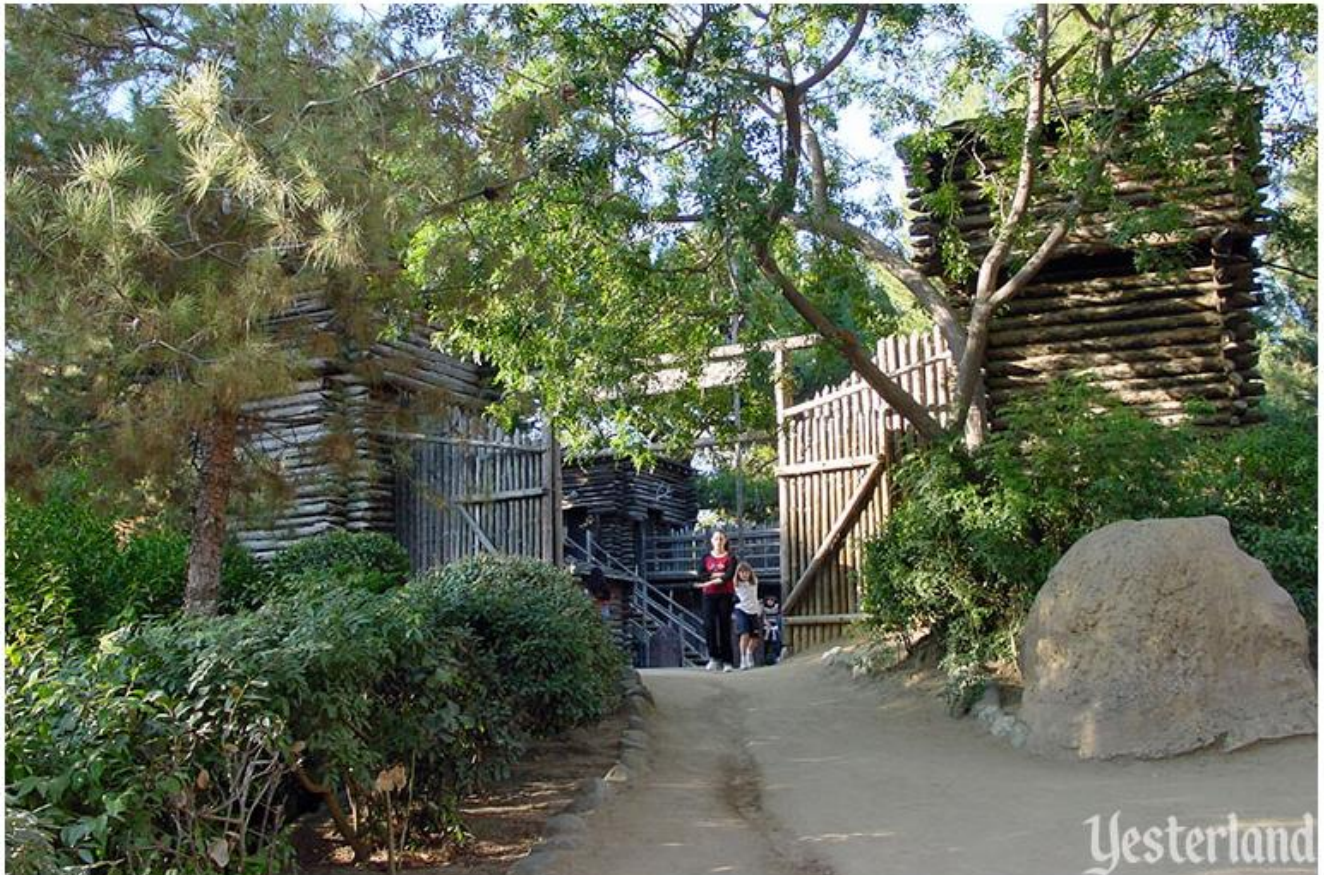


Photo by Allen Huffman, 2002

Gates to the rustic fort

Fort Wilderness is built from actual logs. The materials give the fort an authentic look. Wood requires care to protect it from the elements and from termites. It's a good thing this park is known for impeccable maintenance.

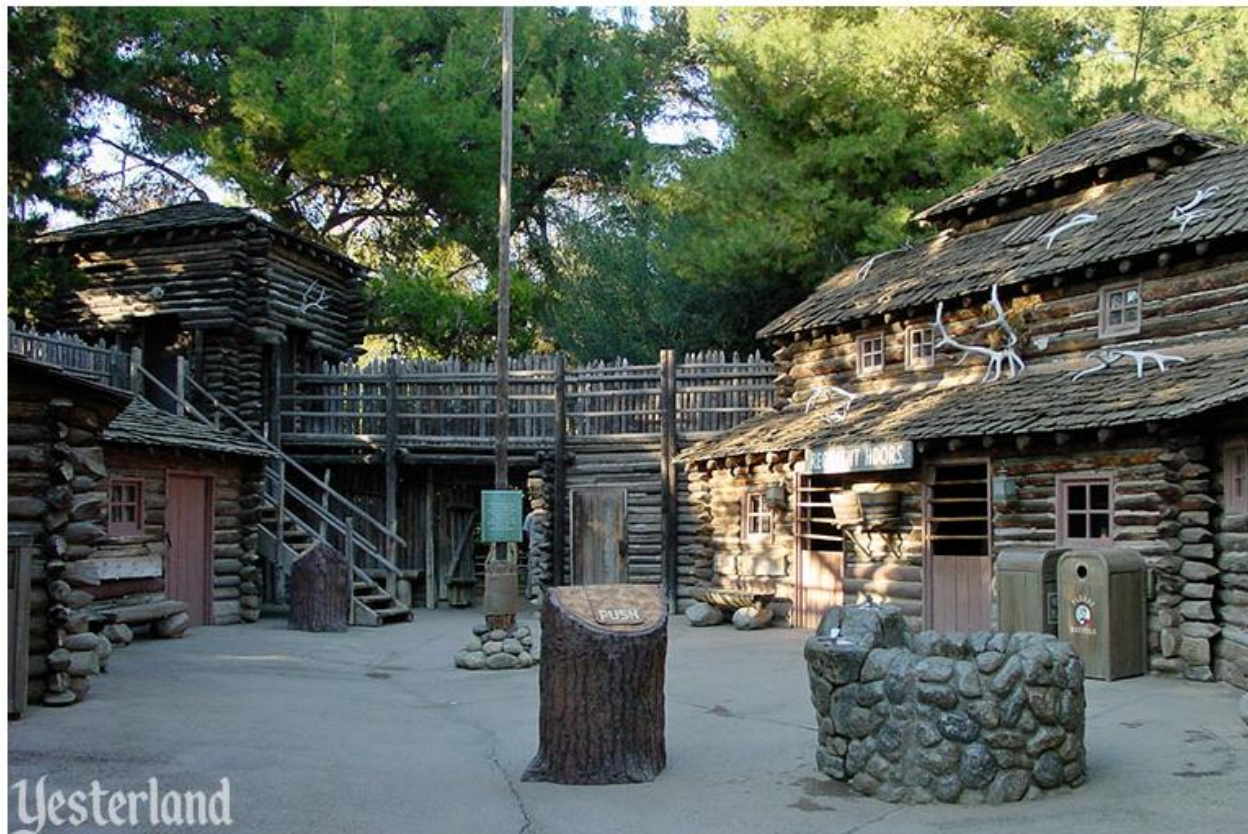


Photo by Allen Huffman, 2002

Fort Wilderness yard



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2002

Regimental Headquarters

When you're inside the fort, you can pretend to be back in the early 19th century. There was danger on the frontier—hostile Indians, wild animals, and an occasional war. Military outposts such as this one provided some security from those dangers.

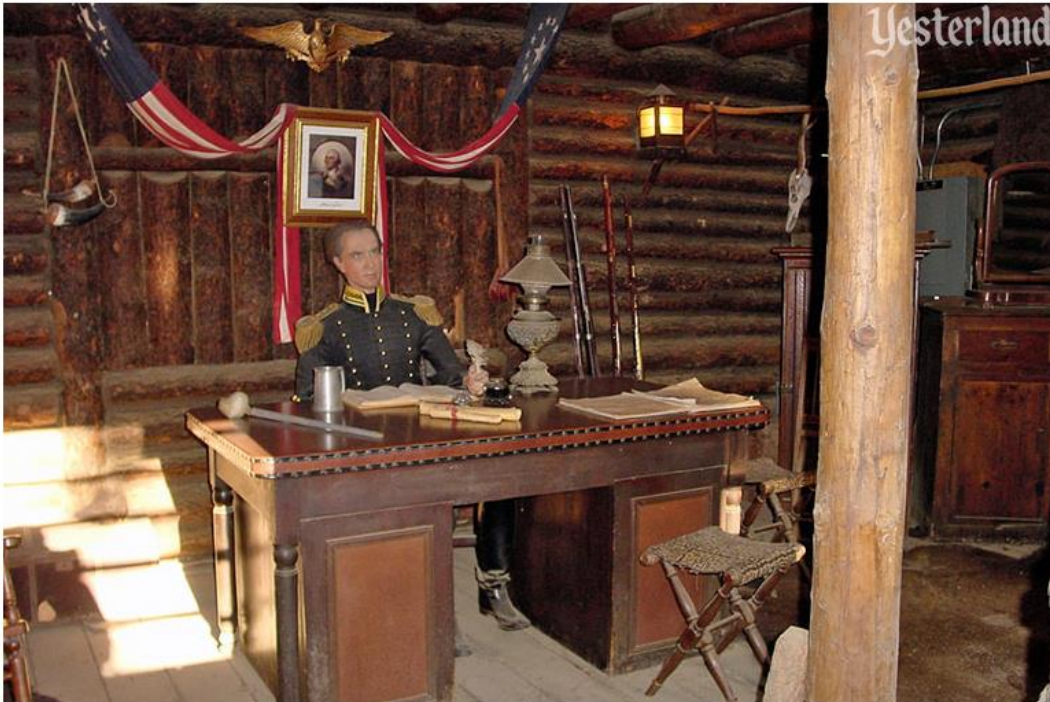


Photo by Allen Huffman, 2002

Inside Regimental Headquarters

Look into the dusty interior of Regimental Headquarters. Hmmmm... Davy Crockett and George Russell must be out scouting. But they used to be in there. Is that really Major General Andrew Jackson?



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2002

Steps to the rifle roost

Climb up to the rifle roost. Point the rifles and pretend to shoot. Gaze over the parapets at all there is to see. Go down to the Canteen and buy a Pepsi-Cola. And you might want to use a restroom too.



When you're ready to leave Fort Wilderness, don't go out the same way you entered. Take the secret escape tunnel instead.

Disneyland opened in July 1955 with an island in the middle of the Rivers of America. The Mark Twain Riverboat traveled around it. But there was no way for guests to get to the island—unless they considered swimming to be an option.

That changed in May 1956 with the opening of Tom Sawyer Island. A small fleet of rafts provided transportation from a dock near the Chicken Plantation restaurant (a site near what is now New Orleans Square) to the old "Tom's Landing" location between the island's grist mill and fishing pier. Castle Rock and the Pontoon Bridge would not be added until 1957, but Fort Wilderness was one of the original features of Tom Sawyer Island when the first guests were welcomed.

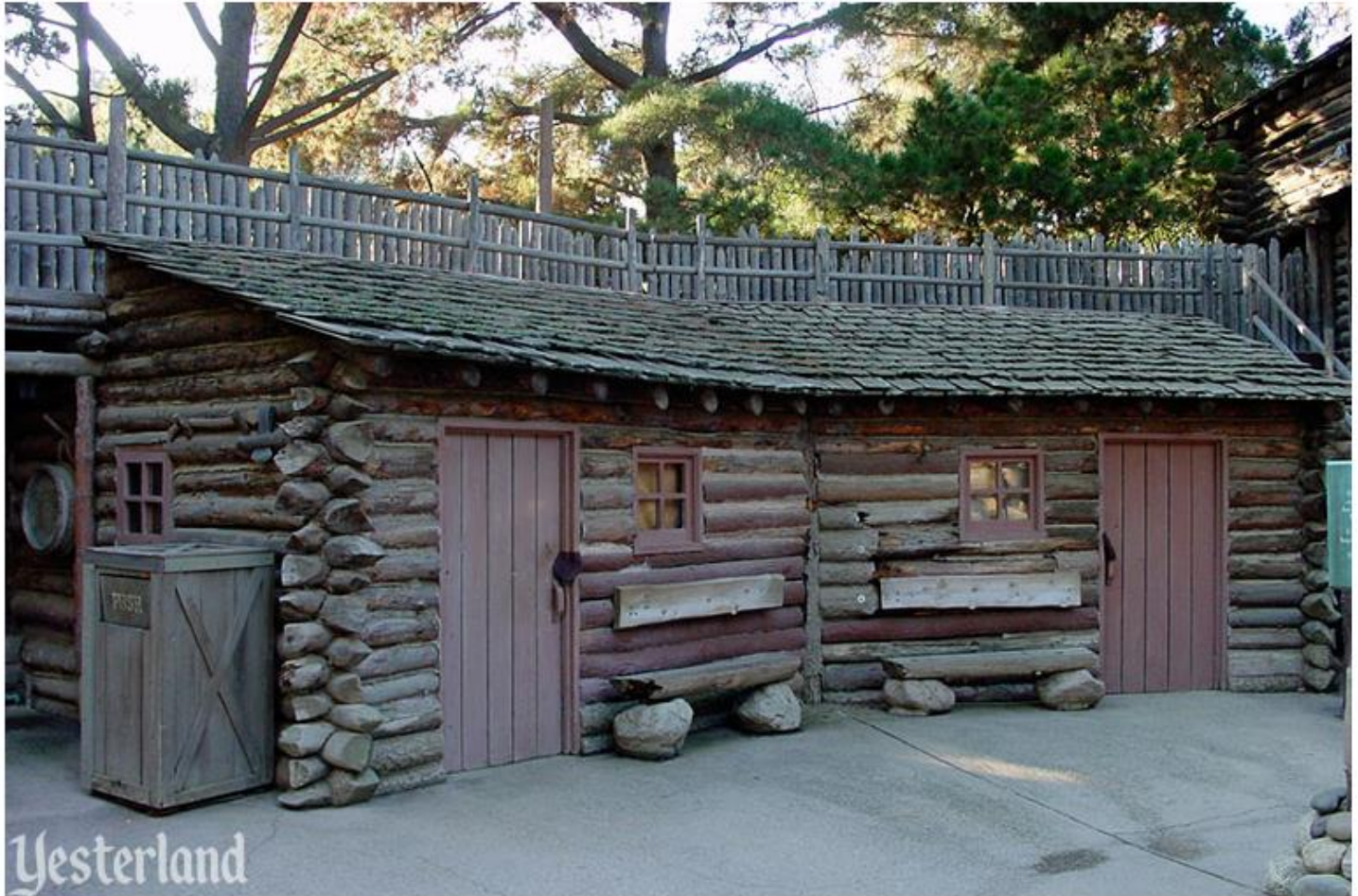


Photo by Allen Huffman, 2002

### Defunct Fort Wilderness Canteen and Trading Post in 2002

In the mid-1990s, Disneyland management began to cut back on maintenance throughout the park to increase short-term profits—at a time when much of Disneyland was reaching an age when it needed more maintenance, not less. The Burning Settler's Cabin stopped burning. Perhaps the deterioration of Fort Wilderness was inevitable due to age, but perhaps it would have been avoidable with proper maintenance.

In January 2001, a 6-year-old girl lost most of an index finger when she slipped while playing with one of the toy rifles in the rifle roost. The rifle roost was boarded up. (If you look at the 2002 photo of the rifle roost earlier in this Yesterland article, you'll see that the rifle roost is inaccessible.) Fort Wilderness stayed open, but Disneyland management (and undoubtedly Disneyland's legal staff) became acutely aware that Tom Sawyer Island needed attention.

Disneyland drew up plans to improve the condition and safety of Tom Sawyer Island. A massive improvement project in 2003 coincided with draining the Rivers of America.

When Tom Sawyer Island reopened to guests in summer 2003, the results were well received. Although the reason for the improvements may have been concern over liability, guests found a Tom Sawyer Island that was in far better shape than the previous year. Guests could once again enjoy the swaying suspension bridge, which had been closed for several

years. It and the barrel bridge had both been skillfully rebuilt. The island had plenty of safety improvements, but it still offered plenty of fun.

However, when the guests reached Fort Wilderness, they found that the mighty stockade gates were closed. The elements and the termites had won.

The gates never reopened for guests.



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2003

Locked gates

Guests could only peek between the timbers to see the interior of the fort. For four years, Fort Wilderness stood with its gates closed. The wooden structure had deteriorated too much. It could not be rehabilitated.

Although Fort Wilderness was no longer open to guests, performers of the nighttime show Fantasmic! used it as a costuming area. The walls were reinforced with wooden framing beams within the fort—functional, but not pretty.



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2005

Good show from the outside only

It was not a question of whether Fort Wilderness would be torn down—it was just a question of when. On May 16, 2007, MiceAge editor Al Lutz posted the following “Editor’s Daily Note” item:

5/16 BREAKING NEWS: R.I.P. Fort Wilderness 1956-2007 Team Disney Anaheim has just decided to demolish Fort Wilderness after years of trying to ignore the looming problems with the aging wood structure. With Pirate’s Lair debuting next week the demolition will be handled overnight for the next 30 days. A cement log stockade for Cast Member use only will replace the Fort in the same area that the original stood. Stay tuned for all the details in the next update. - Al Lutz

The timing seemed odd, given the attention that would be focused on the island with the May 25, 2007, reopening of Tom Sawyer Island as Pirate’s Lair on Tom Sawyer Island.

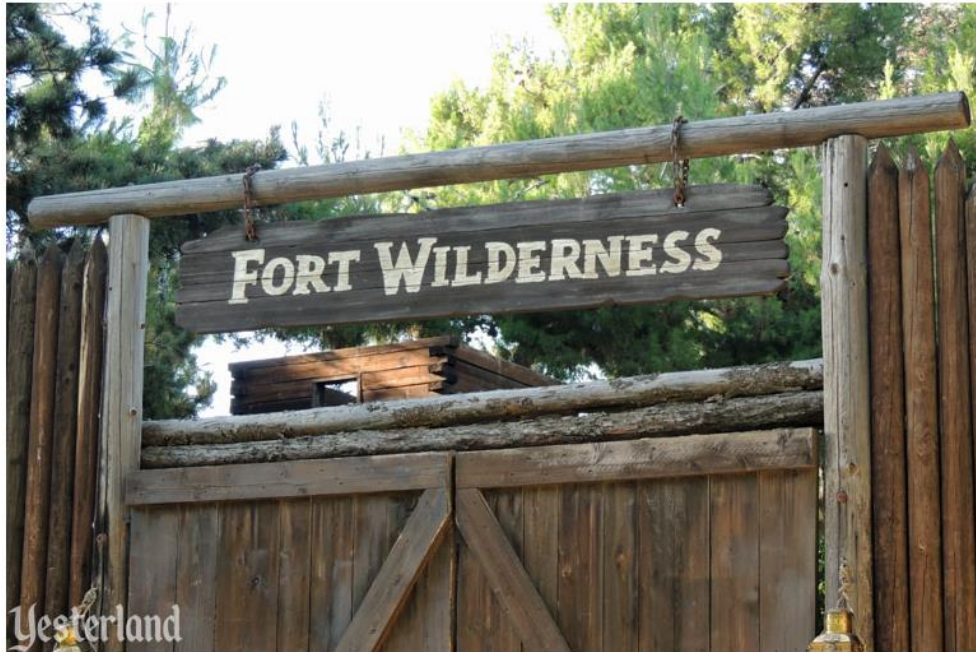


Photo by Werner Weiss, 2015

Same name



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2015

But not the same fort

Fort Wilderness returned as a sad shadow of what it had once been. Not only is the newer fort not open to guests, it’s not even a convincing frontier fort from the outside. It’s there to serve the needs of Fantasmic!



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2015

### How not to design an authentic stockade wall

The newer Fort Wilderness has guest restrooms on its exterior. That can be good news for guests who find themselves in need of indoor plumbing while on the rustic island. But doors in the stockade wall?



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2006

Fort Langhorn gates

2,200 miles away, the story is different. Magic Kingdom Park guests at Walt Disney World can still explore a fort on Tom Sawyer Island.



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2006

Fort Langhorn yard

The Florida fort opened as Fort Sam Clemens in 1973. It became Fort Langhorn in 1996. If those names sound familiar, it's because your English teacher told you the Mark Twain's real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens. Oddly, Langhorne ends with the letter E, but the fort omits that letter.

The timbers of Fort Langhorn are in great shape because they're fiberglass, not wood. This version never looked quite as authentic as the California original, but at least it's still around.

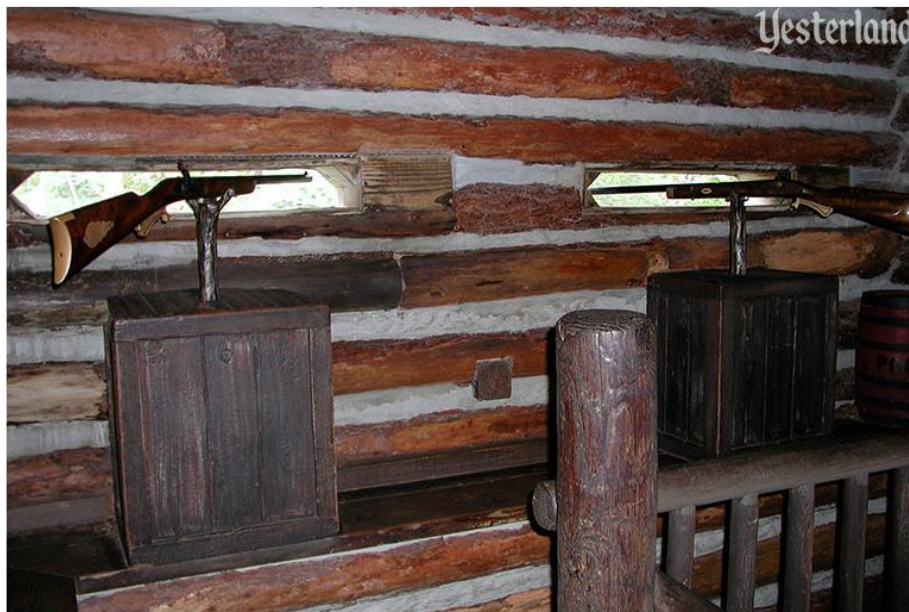


Photo by Werner Weiss, 2006

Fort Langhorn Rifle Roost

At Fort Langhorn, children can still pretend to shoot anything at which they can point the fort's toy rifles.

# CASTLE ROCK RIDGE



Photo by Charles R. Lypany, circa 1959, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Castle Rock, the most prominent landmark of the Castle Rock Ridge

It's 1957. You've just set foot on Tom Sawyer Island after a ride on a Tom Sawyer Island Raft across the Rivers of America. You spent a "D" ticket for this attraction. That's the highest denomination. (The "E" ticket won't be around until 1959—at which time the Tom Sawyer Island Rafts will be promoted to an "E" ticket.)



Photo by Frank Taylor, circa 1959, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Castle Rock and Injun Joe's Cave from the *Mike Fink Keel Boats* dock.

To make sure you don't miss a thing on the island, consult your Tom Sawyer Island Explorer's Map. There's a map on one side and vividly written descriptions on the other.

Visit Tom and Huck's Tree House, The Old Mill, the Fishing Pier (where you can borrow one of Huckleberry Finn's favorite poles and a can of worms to fish for real catfish and river perch), Injun Joe's Cave, the Pontoon & Suspension Bridges, Fort Wilderness, and Castle Rock Ridge.



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, circa 1959, courtesy of Chris Taylor

*Mark Twain Riverboat* passing between Castle Rock and a Conestoga Wagon



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, 1966, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Castle Rock, with the Sailing Ship Columbia and Cascade Peak behind it

Here's what the map says about the rocky ridge.

#### CASTLE ROCK RIDGE

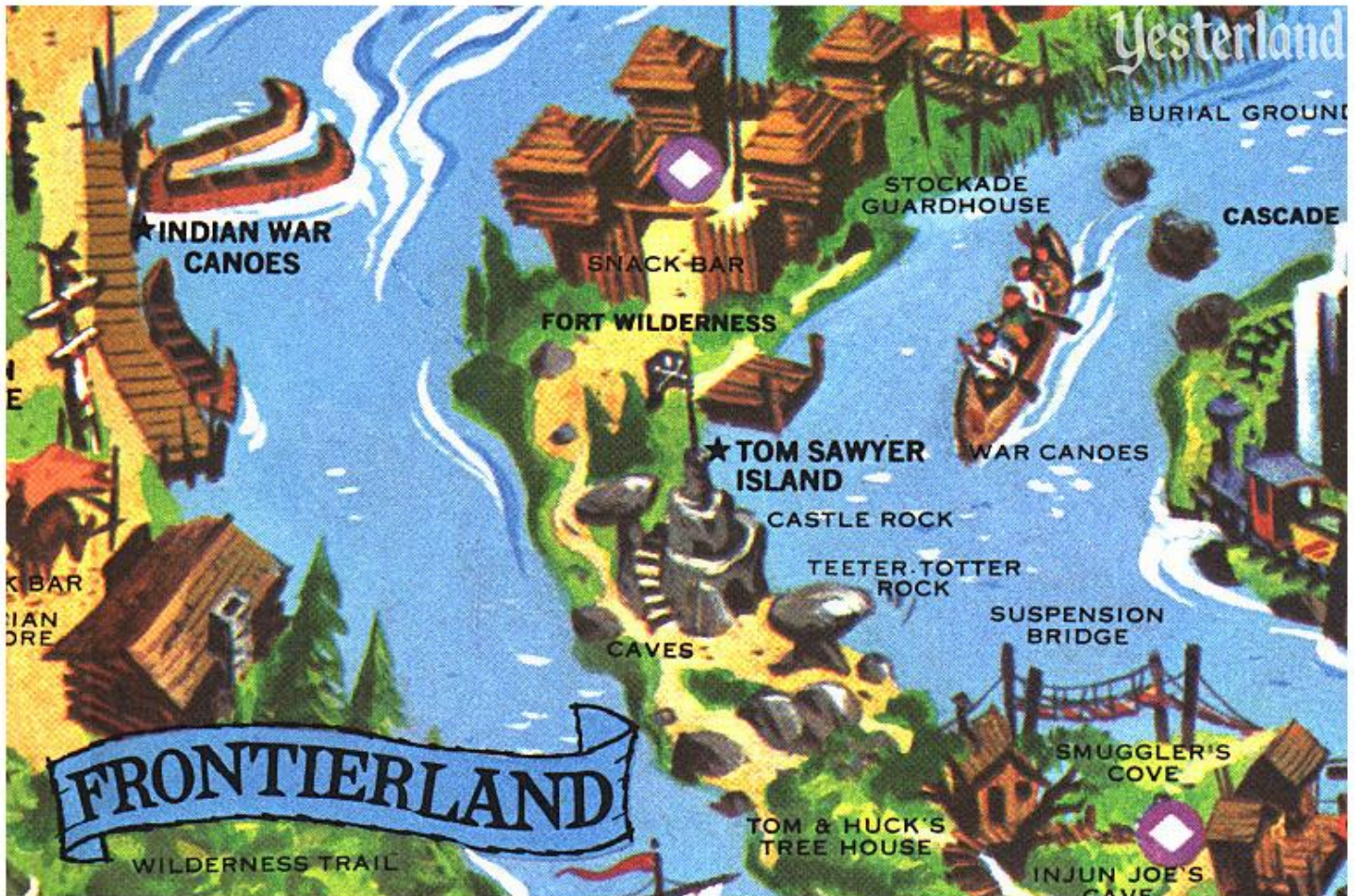
A fantastic group of rocks stretches along the ridge of the island... and in this primeval playground you can ride the Merry-go-round Rock... or seesaw on Teeter-Totter Rock. Climb the stone steps to the ramparts of romantic Castle Rock high above the river... descend the spiral steps to the depths of the castle.

High adventure awaits you beneath Ambush Rock... Relive the days of the river pirates in the Pirate's Den... follow the underground maze to The Dungeon of No Escape.

The Dungeon of No Escape? Perhaps that's why so many rafts are returning to Frontierland with very few passengers.

When Disneyland opened in July 1955, it already had the Rivers of America with the Mark Twain Riverboat plying a route around an island—but there was no way for guests to visit that island, which had nothing on it but trees, shrubs, and dirt. That changed on June 16, 1956, with the opening of Tom Sawyer Island Rafts and Tom Sawyer Island.





Copyright 1968 Walt Disney Productions

*Castle Rock on the 1968 Disneyland Souvenir Map by Sam McKim*

Tom Sawyer Island, described before it opened as “a playland out of a youngster’s dream,” cost \$250,000. It was part of Disneyland’s \$2 million expansion for 1956, which also included the Skyway, Rainbow Caverns Mine Train Ride, the Indian Village, Indian War Canoes, and the transformation of Canal Boats of the World into Storybook Land Canal Boats.

Children and adults could explore the many features of the island as long as they wanted—or until dusk, when the island closed.

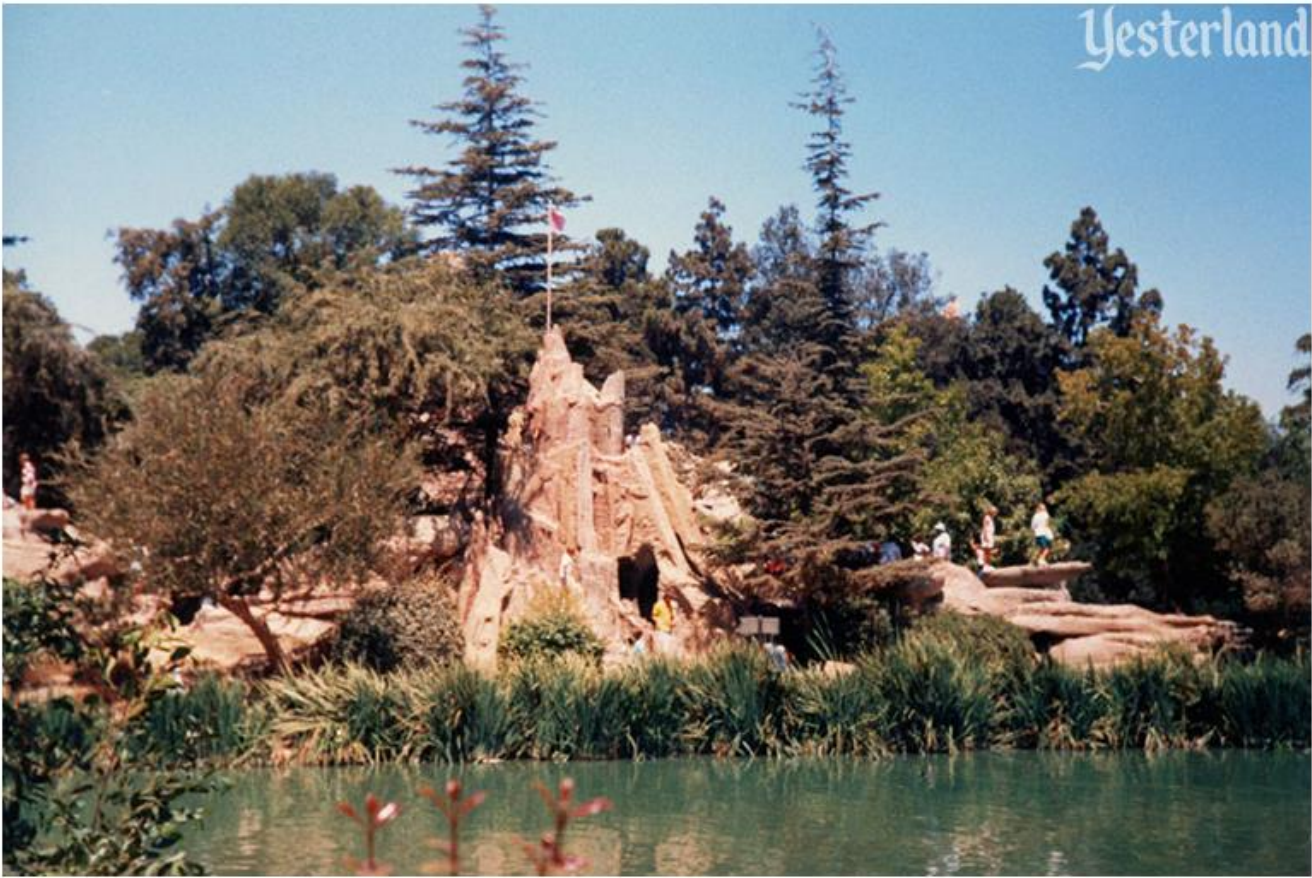


Photo by Chris Bales, 1987

Castle Rock in 1987

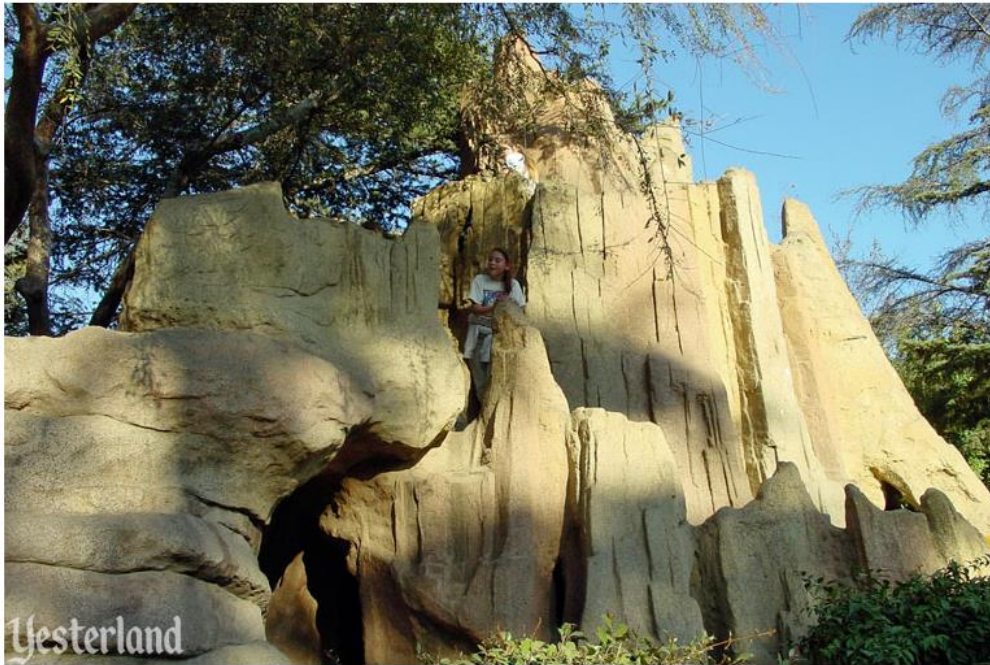


Photo by Allen Huffman, 2000

Castle Rock in 2000

The trees on Tom Sawyer Island kept growing. What had originally been a rather barren island with young landscaping plants became a mighty forest surrounded by water.

Despite remaining the same size, Castle Rock went from being a towering landmark reaching into the sky to being a rocky structure at the base of towering trees.



Castle Rock in 2002

Photo by Allen Huffman, 2002

Over the years, Merry-go-round Rock and Teeter-Totter Rock were quietly removed. Safety standards had changed.

However, as late as 2002, Castle Rock still provided the same experience as in 1956. Guests could climb up in various ways and emerge at various levels.



2003 Makeover

Photo by Allen Huffman, 2003

In 2003, Castle Rock gained an odd assortment of building parts, masts, and barrels around its summit. Apparently Tom and Huck enhanced the rocky castle so they could pretend it was a ship.



Photo by Karen Weiss, 2004

Hidden Castle Rock

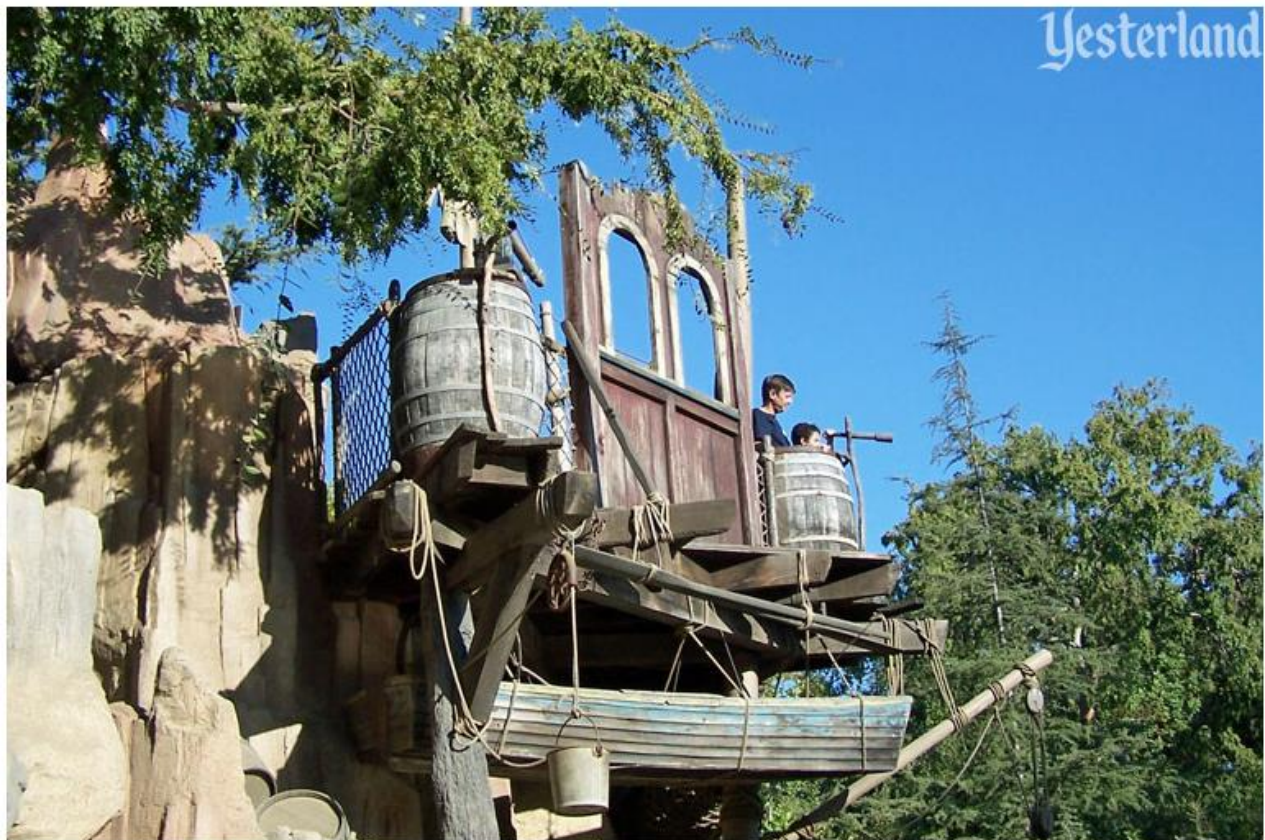


Photo by Chris Bales, 2006

Spyglass for kids

Disneyland fans blamed Disneyland's lawyers. But, hey, at least kids could still play on it, just as it was still possible to explore the dark caves of the island. It was even still possible to get a scraped knee.



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2007

### Pirate takeover

In 2007, the attraction that had been called Tom Sawyer Island Rafts since 1956 became Pirate's Lair on Tom Sawyer Island. Banking on the success and appeal of its Pirates of the Caribbean movie franchise, The Walt Disney Company gave Tom Sawyer Island a pirate makeover. It was an odd juxtaposition of the world of Tom and Huck and the world of Captain Jack Sparrow.

Castle Rock gained a Jolly Roger flag on its mast, crossed swords below the double arches, and various other piratey props.

A 2007 Disney press release suggested, "Guests also should keep a keen lookout for pirates at other island landmarks like Tom & Huck's Treehouse and Castle Rock, where—as legend has it—marauders have stashed their hoard of loot."

And the trees kept growing.



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2009

Hidden in the forest

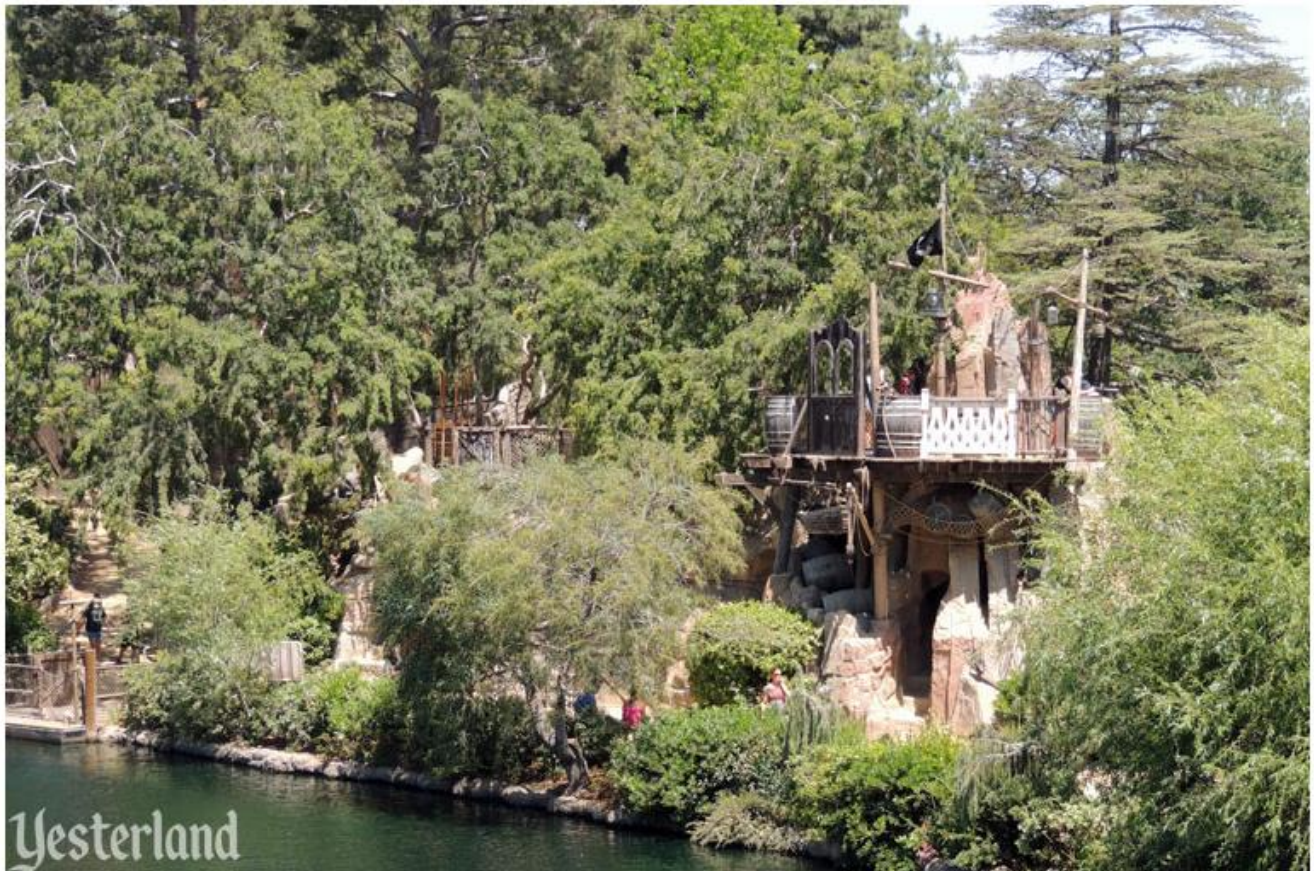


Photo by Werner Weiss, 2013

Castle Rock in 2013



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2015

The other side of Castle Rock in 2015



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2017

Castle Rock in 2017

Castle Rock may not look the same as in 1956, but it really hasn't gone to Yesterland. Castle Rock is still part of Disneyland, providing a similar experience for children today as it did for their grandparents.

Except that their grandparents had the option of getting hurt.

# INDIAN WAR CANOES



Photo by Charles R. Lypany, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Most Yesterland ride vehicles run on electricity. A few, such as the Pack Mules and the Conestoga Wagons, are animal-powered. Others involve a diesel engine or steam engine.

One attraction has human-powered vessels. Welcome to the Indian War Canoes!



Photo by Charles R. Lypany, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Canoe base at the Indian Village



This isn't a "sit back and relax" ride. Get ready to work. Grab either a child- or adult-size oar, and climb into a long canoe. You and every other canoe guest will help to propel the craft around Tom Sawyer Island, the site of Fort Wilderness.

You'll be helped by two actual American Indian Guides—one in front and one in back. Their impressive biceps will compensate for all the pre-schoolers onboard.



Photo by Charles R. Lypany, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Passing the Old Mill, Tom's Landing, and Catfish Cove

This ride isn't on tracks. You may take different routes on various trips. In fact, you might even pass another canoe.



Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1960, courtesy of Robin Runck

River congestion

The river can be quite busy. Your Indian Guides will make sure that your canoe doesn't collide with a Keel Boat.



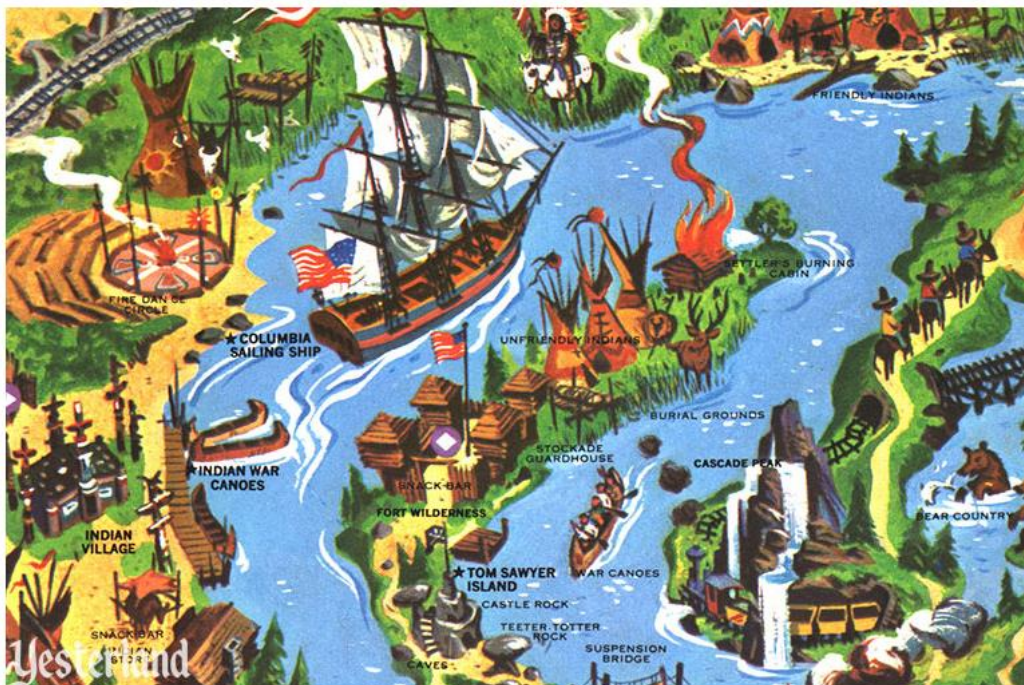
Photo by Fred M. Nelson, Sr., 1959

Wide open river

Your canoe may also have a part of the river all to itself. That's when your guide might ask you to row really hard to see how fast you can go.

Here's some advice. Try not to sit behind a 4-year-old. You'll wind up soaked.

Indian War Canoes opened July 4, 1956, as part of Disneyland's new Indian Village in Frontierland.



Part of the 1968 Disneyland souvenir map © 1968 Walt Disney Productions

American Indians in Frontierland, from the 1968 Disneyland souvenir map

As the 1968 map shows, Native American lore—or at least the Hollywood version of it—played a prominent role in early Frontierland. That’s not surprising, given the popularity of Westerns on television and in movie theaters in the mid-1950s. The Davy Crockett episodes of Walt Disney’s Disneyland television series featured friendly and unfriendly Indians, which inspired scenery along the Rivers of America.

Indian War Canoes operated on busier days only, primarily in the summer and on weekends.



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2003

Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes sign

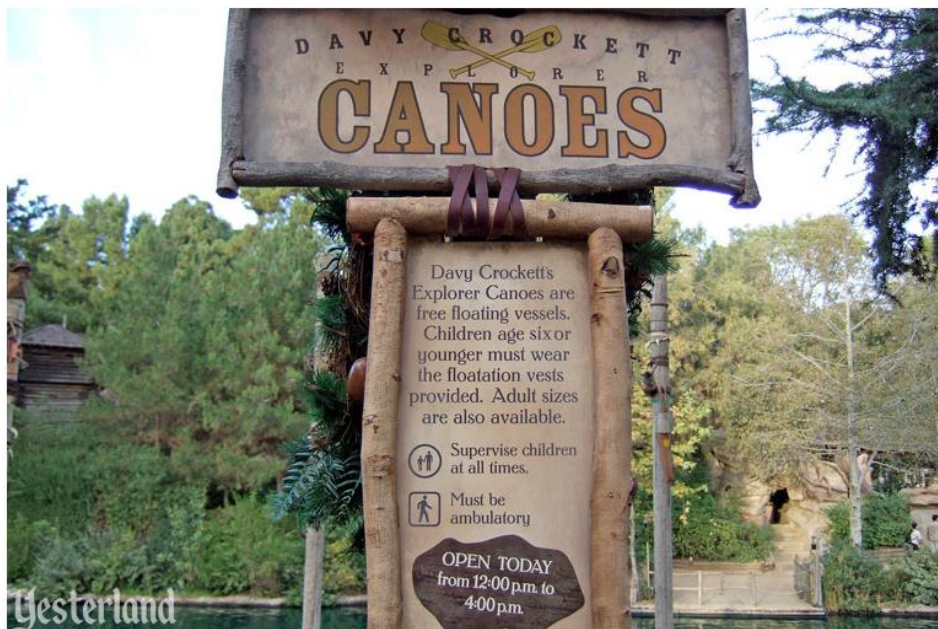


Photo by Allen Huffman, 2005

What to expect

On May 19, 1971, Indian War Canoes became Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes. The Indian Village closed permanently that year to make way for a seventh land at Disneyland.

When the new land, Bear Country, opened in March 1972, Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes ensured that the land would have more than one ticketed attraction.

In 1989, Bear Country became Critter Country. The canoe ride gained the distinction of being the only single-location ride to be in three different lands over the years. (The Disneyland Railroad is in multiple lands only by virtue of having multiple stations.)



Photo by Werner Weiss, 1996

*Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes at scenic Cascade Peak*



Photo by Werner Weiss, 1996

*A mighty waterfall at Cascade Peak*



Photo by Werner Weiss, 1996

“Stop rowing. Oars above your heads!”

Magic Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World permanently closed its Explorer Canoes ride in 1994, but the ride continued to operate at Disneyland.

On October 3, 1998, it seemed that the Disneyland ride would join its Magic Kingdom counterpart on the list of defunct Disney attractions. On that day, Disneyland's Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes closed unexpectedly—before its scheduled end-of-season closing.

Many fans and cast members didn't expect to see the canoes ever again due to Disneyland management's push to increase profits by reducing expenses. Each canoe required two cast members, making the attraction expensive to operate in relation to its capacity. It seemed to be a repeat of what had happened to Disneyland's original Submarine Voyage. It had just closed in September 1998, as its Magic Kingdom counterpart had closed in 1994.

The canoes were back in summer 1999 after all. And, even better, when that summer wound down, the canoes became a year-round attraction, as reported by E. Scott Reckard in the Los Angeles Times on August 31, 1999:

Another change involves the Davy Crockett Explorer Canoes, a Frontierland summer fixture and a favorite of employees who compete in canoe races before the park opens. In a break with recent practice, Disneyland Executive Vice President Cynthia Harriss has decided to keep the canoes operating past the end of summer, said a worker who a year ago had feared the attraction would be closed forever to save money. “We were all completely floored” by Harriss' decision, the employee said.

Hooray!



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2004

After the removal of Cascade Peak

Cascade Peak, shown in the photos from 1996, is gone. Originally opened in 1960 as part of the Mine Train Through Nature's Wonderland, the hollow, man-made peak was bulldozed in Fall 1998. Over the years, water had severely damaged the peak's structure, including its wooden framework. The economical solution was to remove Cascade Peak and its beautiful waterfalls.



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2005

Load area for Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2013

### Female guides

When the ride opened as Indian War Canoes, only Native American men were “cast” as canoe guides. By the time the ride was renamed Davy Crockett’s Explorer Canoes, the guides were still always men, although not necessarily Native Americans. That didn’t change until 1995 when Disneyland finally opened what had been gender-specific attraction positions.

Here’s an excerpt from an Orange County Register article about the change to the policy (“‘Unisex’ Policy at Disney Theme Parks: Disneyland’s Yearlong Program Means Women in Submarines and Men on Storyland Boats as Hosts,” by Marla Jo Fisher, July 12, 1995):

For 40 years, the theme park chose ride operators based on gender—with frilly-frocked women working Storybook Land and men in pith helmets wisecracking through the Jungle Cruise.

But last month, the first woman took up oars to help guests paddle canoes around Tom Sawyer Island, and the first man in 38 years piloted a Storybook Land Canal Boat through the whale’s mouth. Soon, female conductors will be working the Main Street Omnibus and Disneyland Railroad, and female sailors will be on the Columbia and Mark Twain Steamboat.

The revolution was triggered by Suzanne Barnaby, 33, a ride operator who went to Walt Disney World in February and came back and asked her boss, “Why do they have women pilots on the Jungle Cruise there and we don’t?”

The next time you’re at Disneyland, grab an oar and paddle around Tom Sawyer Island. The Rivers of America loop has been shortened for Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge. The trees along the shore are much bigger. Your guide could be any qualified cast member. The attraction name has changed. But your experience will still be similar to what guests enjoyed in 1956.



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2018

Not operating

Or at least try to grab an oar. Unless you're there on the right day at the right time, the attraction won't be operating.



# INDIAN VILLAGE

Welcome to Frontierland's rustic Indian Village on the shores of the Rivers of America. Representing many tribes, the Indian Village presents the culture, customs, and arts of Native Americans.

Wander among teepees of the Plains Indians, an Iroquois birch bark longhouse, and a cedar plank house and totem poles of Indians of the Pacific Northwest. There's even an Indian burial ground.

Meet the full-blooded Indian Chief.

At the Ceremonial Dance Circle, watch colorful performances of authentic dances (summer, weekends, and holidays only).

Buy authentic crafts at the Indian Trading Post. At the Indian Village Dugout, enjoy mile-long hot dogs, beverages, and cookies.

Grab an oar and climb aboard one of the Indian War Canoes—the ride where you provide the propulsion.



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor

"Chief White Horse" (Truman W. Dailey) posing with guests



Photo by Helmut Weiss, 1958

Posing with Fort Wilderness in the background



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor  
Teepees of the Plains



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor  
A chance to look inside a teepee—but not to go inside



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Northwest Coast decorated plank house



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Northwest Coast totem pole



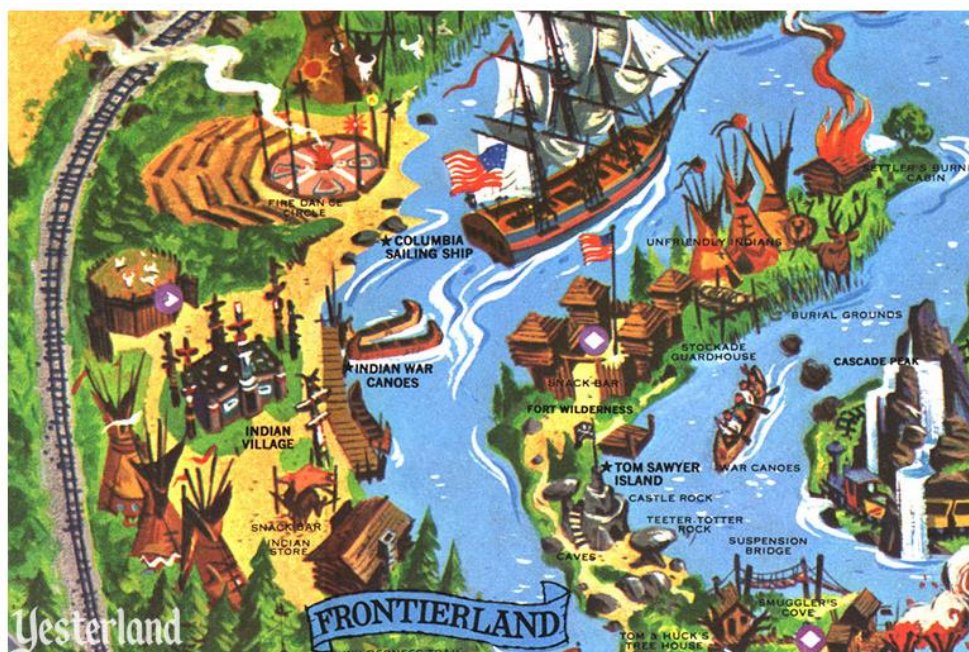
Photo by Werner Weiss, 1969

Weaving demonstration

The first Indian Village at Disneyland opened in 1955 in Frontierland, near Adventureland. It made sense to feature American Indians in Frontierland. On the relatively new medium of television, Westerns—shows featuring “Cowboys and Indians”—were king in the 1950s.

In 1956, the Indian Village moved to the location that it would occupy until 1971. To reach the Indian Village, guests walked through a tunnel to a distant dead-end corner of the park.

According to a May 13, 1956 article in the Los Angeles Times, the “completely new Indian Village in Frontierland” cost \$100,000. It was part of Disneyland’s \$2 million expansion program in 1956, which also included the Disneyland Skyway (\$300,000), the Rainbow Caverns Mine Train (\$500,000), Storybook Land (\$200,000), and Tom Sawyer Island (\$250,000).



Snippet from 1968 Disneyland Souvenir Map © Walt Disney Productions

Indian Village on the 1968 Disneyland Souvenir Map

Aside from some enhancements in 1962, the Indian Village did not change much over the course of 16 years.

In 1972, a new land, Bear Country (now Critter Country), featuring the Country Bear Jamboree, replaced the Indian Village. The tunnel became an open air walkway. Indian War Canoes became Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes. The Indian Trading Post kept its name and theme until 1989, when it became the Briar Patch due to its proximity to Splash Mountain, themed to Walt Disney's *Song of the South* (1946).

There continued to be American Indian villages along the Rivers of America—but only tableaux with mostly simple animatronics, not anything guests could enter.

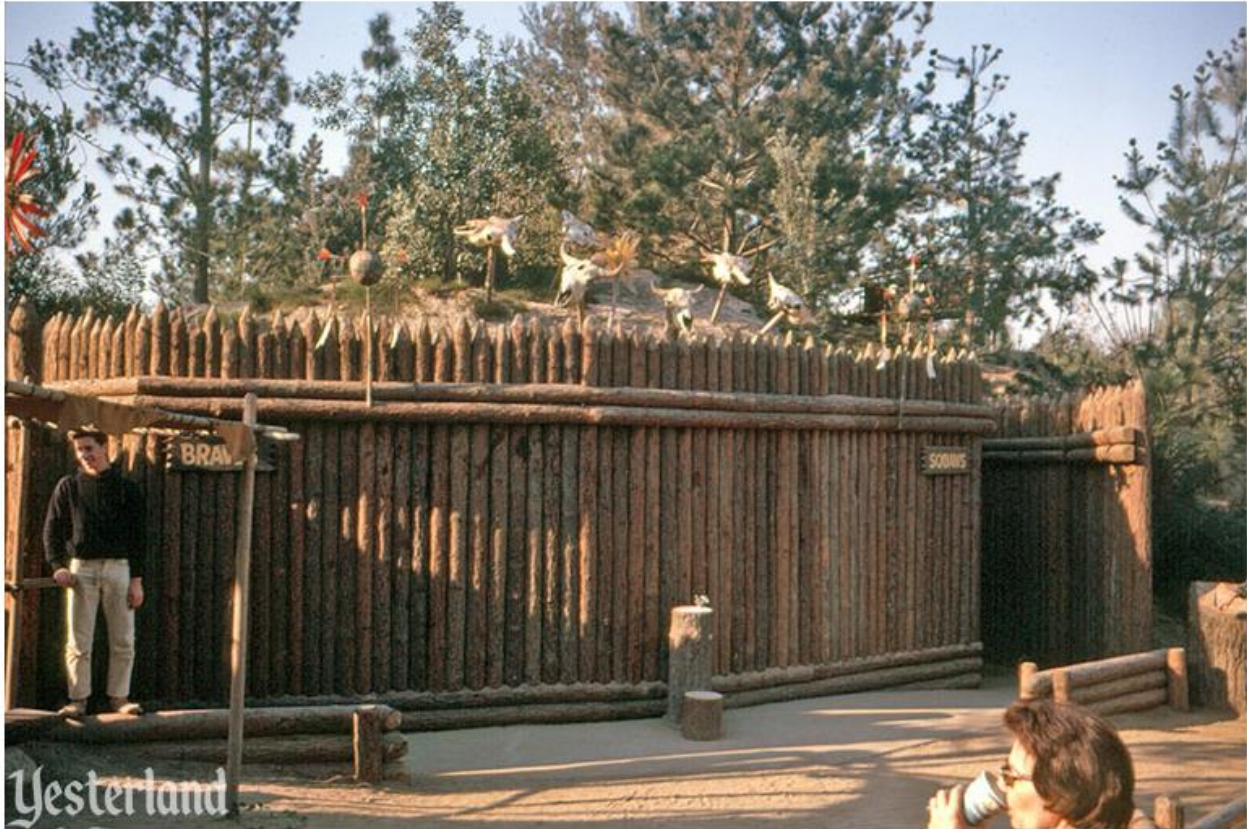


Photo by Charles R. Lympany, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor

#### Restrooms

By the norms of the mid-20th century, Disneyland's Indian Village was authentic and respectful. Interpretive signs described how the parts of the village represented different Indian Nations and how the structures would have been used. The Native American cast members were encouraged to share their cultures with park guests. The ceremonial dances and craft demonstrations were genuine.

Disneyland's "Chief White Horse"—Truman Washington Dailey (1898-1996)—was not just someone who looked the part. As the last fluent speaker of the Otoe-Missouria language, he did much to preserve and pass along his knowledge, history, traditions, and language. He is the subject of a doctoral dissertation and a Wikipedia entry.

There were also elements that would not pass muster today. The restrooms were labeled "braves" and "squaws"—terms that are now considered offensive. The term "Indian Chief" is now controversial. Setting out in an Indian War Canoe as a "war party" must have sounded better in 1956 than it does today. And then there's the issue of a theme park putting "full-blooded Indians" on display.

But everyone should agree that Disneyland's Indian Village was \$100,000 well spent by Walt Disney.

## CEREMONIAL DANCE CIRCLE



Photo by Helmut Weiss, 1958

While visiting the Indian Village, don't miss a performance at the Dance Circle. You'll gain a greater appreciation for Native American traditions as you watch six authentic tribal dances: the Omaha (called the War Dance by white settlers); the Shield and Spear; the Eagle; the Zuni-Comanche; the Mountain Spirit, and the Friendship dances.



Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1959, courtesy of Robin Runck

On the shores of the Rivers of America



Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1961, courtesy of Robin Runck

Across the water from Fort Wilderness

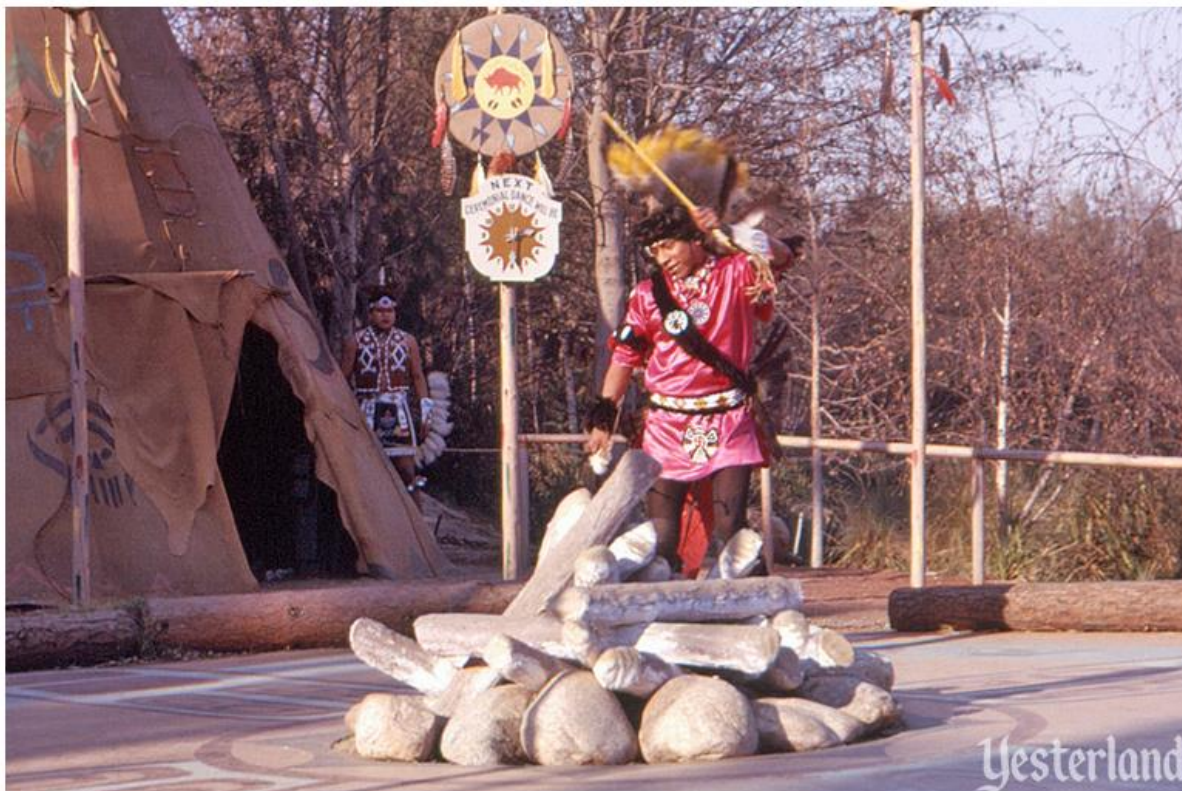


Photo by Charles R. Lympany, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Free show at Frontierland's Indian Village



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Good family entertainment and education



Photo by Merrill A. Garner, 1958, courtesy of M. Scott Garner

Wilderness setting far from park's busier parts





Photo by Merrill A. Garner, 1958, courtesy of M. Scott Garner

The Eagle



Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1961, courtesy of Robin Runck

Another look at the Eagle

Yesterland



Photo by Charles R. Lympny, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Authentic cultural performances



Photo by Charles R. Lympny, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Authentic costumes

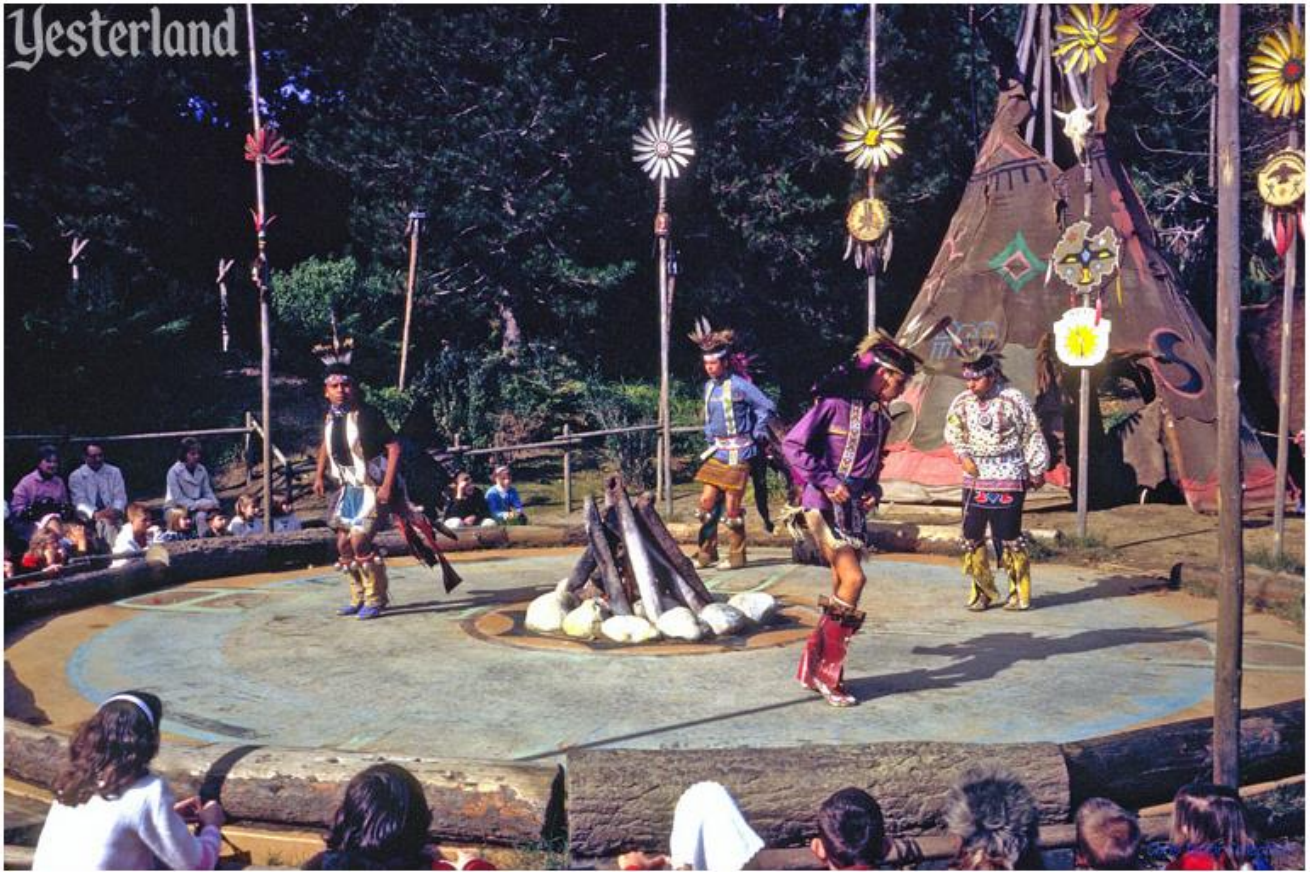


Photo by Charles R. Lypany, courtesy of Chris Taylor

Real American Indians



Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1961, courtesy of Robin Runck

Ready to join the dancers?



Photo by Charles R. Lympany, circa 1961, courtesy of Chris Taylor

### Friendship dances

If you're a child, you'll be invited to join the dancers for the Friendship dances.

The Ceremonial Dance Circle was part of Disneyland's second Indian Village, which opened in 1956.

The Summer 1957 issue of Disneyland's promotional magazine, *Disneyland Holiday*, described the park's Indian Village and the dance performances:

One of the founding principles upon which Disneyland was designed was the preservation of our American heritage.

This principle may be seen in many of the free shows and exhibits in each of Disneyland's realms—and one of the most popular among many free performances is the preservation of Indian traditions and customs in Frontierland's Indian Village.

Built on the banks of the Rivers of America, the Plains Indian settlement is authentic in every detail. Animal hide tepees, a birch bark "long house," spears and other implements and especially the population of real Indians take visitors into a World which has disappeared from the American scene.

Highlight of a visit to the village is the performance of ceremonial dances by the representatives of 16 tribes.

With bright feathers and beads decorating their colorful headdresses, moccasins and other articles of clothing, the Indians perform such generations-old ceremonies as the Friendship Dance, Indian symbol of welcome to visiting tribes; the Scout Dance, oldest Indian dance, keyed by freedom of expression; the Horse Tail, Eagle, Buffalo and Warrior Shield dances.

All have specific meanings for the Indians—messages that are related to visitors by Chief Shooting Star, a Sioux, while Lee High Sky (Shawnee), Little Arrow (Winnebago), Eddie Little Sky (Sioux) and other representatives of America's true natives perform.

Nearby, as the sound of Indian chants and drums carry through the settlement from the Ceremonial Dancing Circle, Indian war canoes glide away from shore for a trip around the Rivers of America. Paddled by guests themselves, the canoes are guided on these journeys by Indian braves, skilled in the handling of their craft.

Among the tribes represented in Frontierland are Apache, Shawnee, Winnebago, Hopi, Navajo, Maricopa, Choctaw, Comanche, Pima, Crow and Pawnee.

When the Indian Village closed in 1971 to make way for Bear Country (now Critter Country), so did the Dance Circle. The Hungry Bear Restaurant now sits about where the Dance Circle was.

# SILVER BANJO BARBECUE



Down on New Orleans Street  
Over in Frontierland  
Near Tom Sawyer Island is  
Don DeFore's Silver Banjo in  
Enchanting Yesterland.  
Finest Barbecue this side  
Of the Mississippi!  
Ribs, Beef, Pork & Chicken.  
Everyone most cordially welcome!

**Yesterland**

When you get hungry during your visit to Yesterland, head over to the Silver Banjo Barbecue for some delicious barbecued spareribs. You'd rather eat fish? Then enjoy some fish and chips with barbecue sauce—or tartar sauce if you prefer.

It's not a coincidence that the proprietor of this establishment reminds you of Thorny, the Nelsons' affable neighbor on TV's *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. It's Don DeFore, star of television, movies, and Broadway.

The Silver Banjo Barbecue is located right next door to the Aunt Jemima Pancake House where you might see another celebrity—friendly Aunt Jemima.



Manager Verne DeFore and proprietor Don DeFore invite you to come on in.

In Disneyland, Don DeFore's Silver Banjo Barbecue opened in 1957, taking over the space that had previously been the original home of Casa de Fritos.

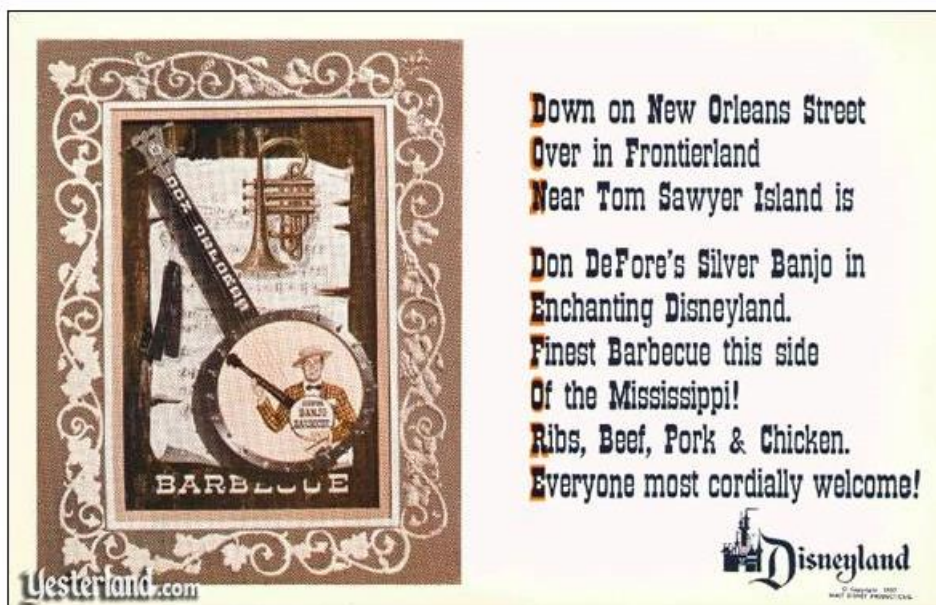
The Silver Banjo Barbecue closed in 1961 to allow expansion of the neighboring Aunt Jemima Pancake House. With subsequent name changes and remodeling, the restaurant became Aunt Jemima's Kitchen, the Magnolia Tree Terrace, and now the River Belle Terrace.

Don DeFore is best known to baby boomers and rerun fans as "Thorny" Thornberry on *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriett* and as George "Mr. B" Baxter on *Hazel*, for which he received an Emmy nomination. His distinguished acting career includes over 90 movies including *The Stork Club* (1945) with Betty Hutton; *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944) with Spencer Tracy, Van Johnson, and Robert Walker; and *My Friend Irma* (1949) with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.

"New Orleans Street" on the postcard below referred to an area of Frontierland (near Adventureland) with wrought iron balconies in the style of New Orleans, not to New Orleans Square which opened in 1966.



Don DeFore (1913-1993)



Silver Banjo Barbecue postcard from 1957

# NATURE'S WONDERLAND



Photo by Werner Weiss, 1975

Welcome to a great attraction in the tradition of the Jungle Cruise—only this time it's the environment and animals of North American wilderness areas instead of those of the world's jungles.

The loading platform for the Mine Train Through Nature's Wonderland is in the Western mining town of Rainbow Ridge. As you wait to board the train, listen to the sounds emanating from the buildings, such as the music from the Last Chance Saloon and the screams from the dentist's office above it.



Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1961, courtesy of Robin Runck

Rainbow Ridge



Inspired by Disney's True-Life Adventure nature movies of the 1950s, Nature's Wonderland is home to more than two-hundred lifelike, animated mammals, reptiles, and birds.

As your train travels through Bear Country, Olympic Elk, Beaver Valley, the Living Desert, and Rainbow Caverns, you will see:

- Mighty waterfalls cascading off Cascade Peak
- Industrious beavers building a dam
- Brown bears swimming and resting—and even one scratching his back on a tree
- Two bull elk battling
- Saguaro cacti that look strangely human
- Balancing rocks that may just lose their balance as your train car passes by
- Devil's Paint Pots—bubbling pots of mud in all kinds of colors
- Geysers shooting water high into the desert air
- Colorful, glowing waterfalls inside Rainbow Caverns.



Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1961, courtesy of Robin Runck

### Platform

Take a seat on one of the benches facing each other in your bright yellow ore car. Or sit on the jump seat when the ride attendant closes the ore car door. When your train pulls out of the station, an old miner begins a recorded narration:

"Howdy, folks! Welcome to the little minin' town of Rainbow Ridge, the gateway to Nature's Wonderland. As we head for the wilderness, a couple of suggestions: please stay seated at all times, and keep yer hands and arms inside the train. The animals get mighty hungry. And, uh, no smokin' please, 'cause we don't want to start a forest fire. Now, beyond these hills lies Nature's Wonderland. Yer apt to see a whole lotta wildlife, so... keep a real sharp hunter's eye."



Photo by Marion Caswell, 1976, courtesy Dennis Caswell

Beaver Valley

“As we come out of this first tunnel, we’ll be entering Beaver Valley. Looks like the beavers are building another dam. Yes, sir, they’re really busy as a... well, busy as a beaver. Them little marmots over the tunnel must be a-whistlin’ to all you pretty gals. I can’t say I blame ‘em.”



Photo by Werner Weiss, 1969

Cascade Peak

"If yuh've never gone beneath a waterfall before, then get set, cause we're comin' up on Big Thunder, the biggest falls in all these here parts. Yuh don't hafta worry though... unless the wind changes. Them other two falls they call the Twin Sisters—reckon that's cause they're always babblin'."



Photo by Werner Weiss, 1975

Bears in the trees and on the ground

"We're comin' into Bear Country now, folks, and, while we're crossin' the old trestle, ya gotta sit real still. No tellin' how long she's gonna last."



Photo by Dennis Caswell, 1975

Bear Country, not to be confused with [Bear Country](#)



Photo by Dennis Caswell, 1975

Caught one!

"Ya know, bears are one of the most playful animals there is. Lazy, too. All they want to do is lay around and scratch and fish and swim... that is when they ain't sleepin'."

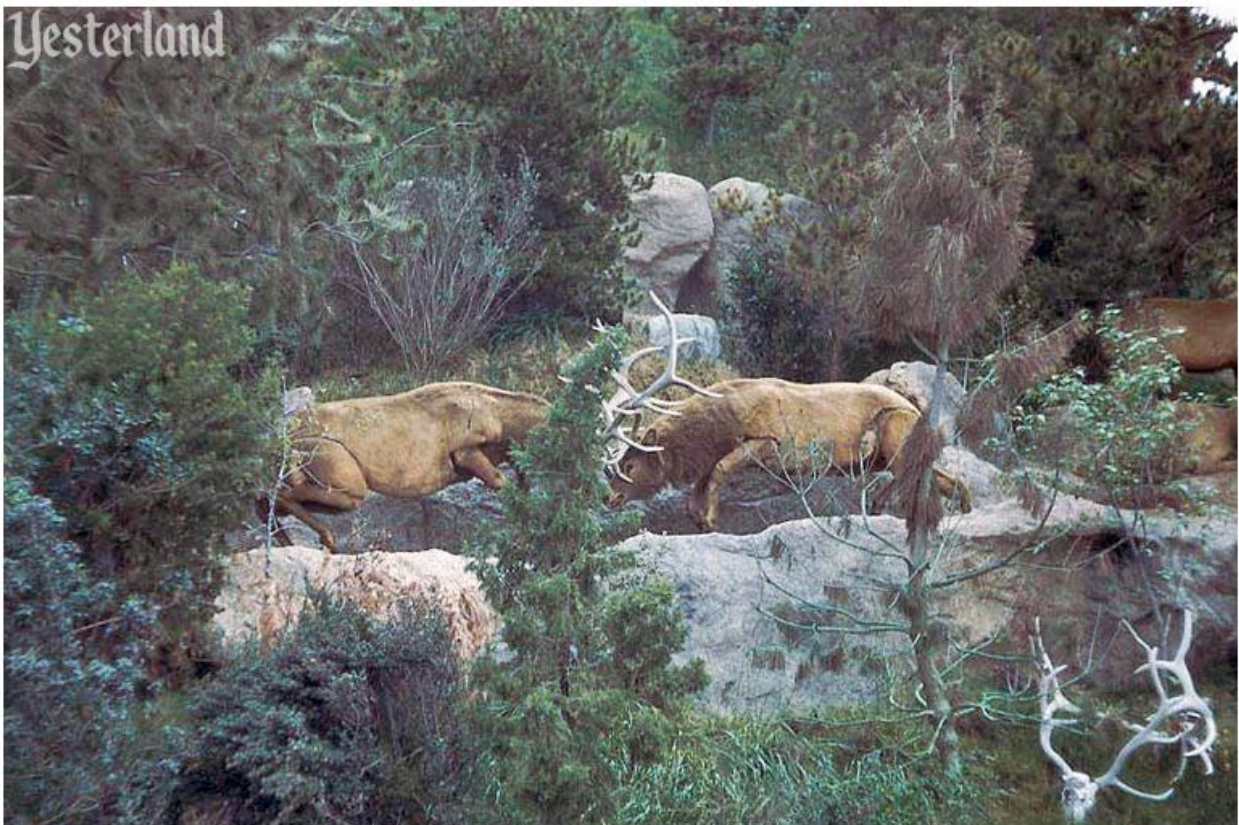


Photo by cpo57, [CC BY 2.0](#) (modified)

Olympic Elk

“You know, Nature’s Wonderland is awful pretty, but sometimes she can be a mighty rugged place to live. Out here in the wilderness, the struggle for survival leaves only the strong and sometimes the lucky. Say, look on that bank, ‘cross Bear Creek, there. Now there’s a real struggle for survival. Two stags are battlin’ for them cow elk. Maybe you folks can tell me, though—does gettin’ two womenfolk mean you’re the winner or the loser? Never could figger that’n out.

“As we pass through ol’ Natural Arch Bridge, ya can see the great Living Desert down below. Ya know, the desert’s a dry place, and full of some pretty mean varmints. Gotta be careful of sidewinders, wild pigs, and even mountain lions. But the desert’s got her beauty, too. The yeller streaks a-runnin’ through them sandstone cliffs are called ‘coconino.’ The red, we call them ‘supai.’”

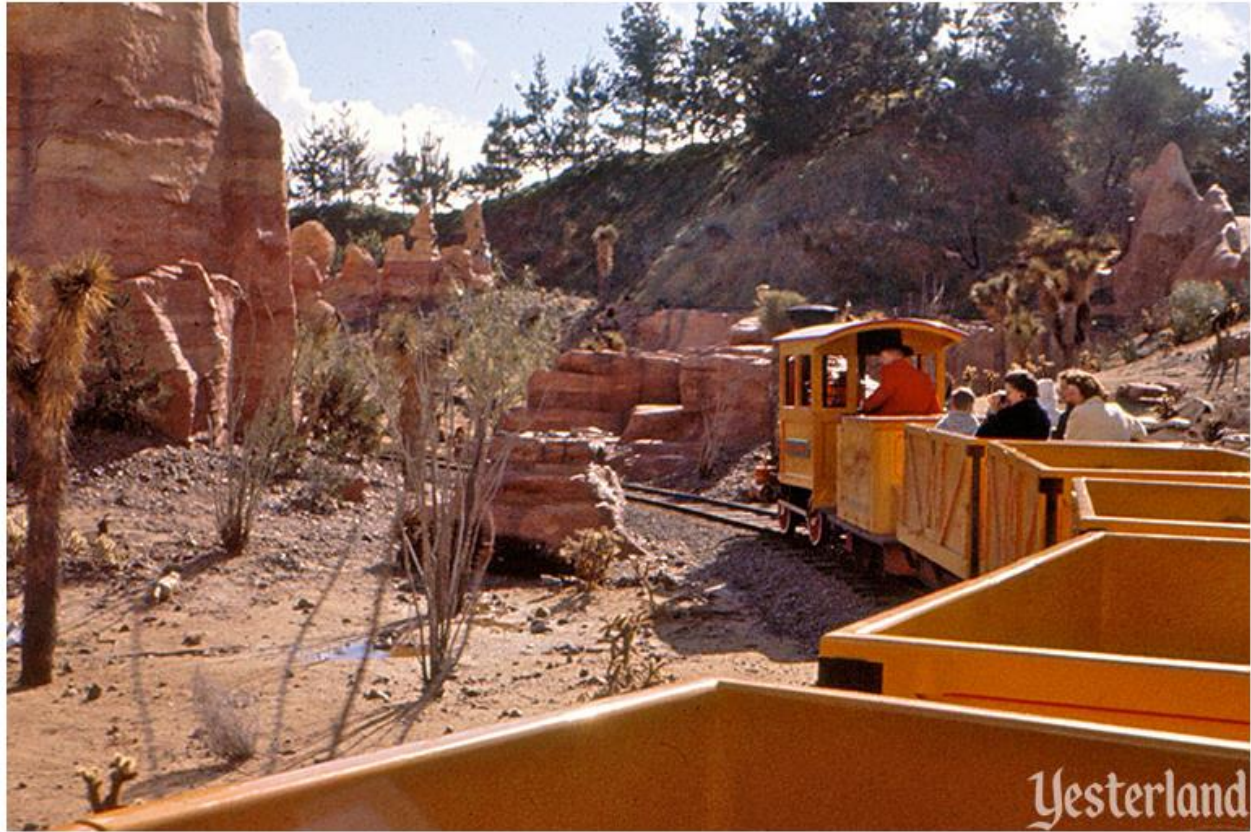


Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1961, courtesy of Robin Runck

The Living Desert



Photo by Dennis Caswell, 1975

Ol’ Mister Bobcat

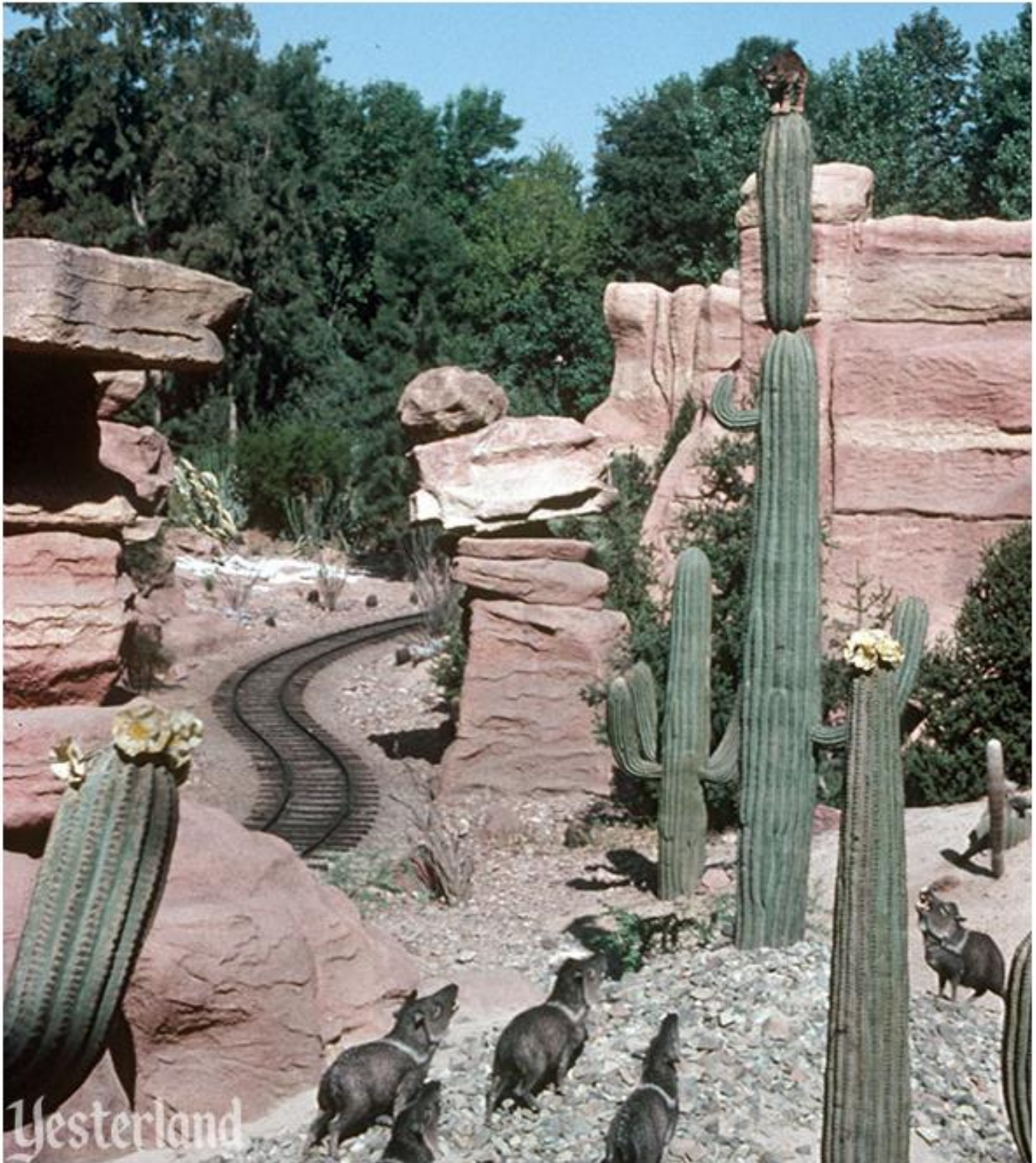


Photo by Marion Caswell, 1976, courtesy Dennis Caswell

### Wild pigs

“Aha! Look down there on yer left. Them wild pigs has caught up with ol’ Mister Bobcat. He’s in kind of a sticky situation!”



Photo by Werner Weiss, 1975

Saguaro forest

"Now ahead of us, folks, is a giant saguaro cactus forest. The desert heat sometimes gets to ya and makes these here cactus take on strange shapes, like animals... and sometimes even people."



Photo by Dennis Caswell, 1975

Yes, even people



Photo by Marion Caswell, 1975, courtesy Dennis Caswell

Devil's Paint Pots, "bubblin' pots o' mud"



Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1969, courtesy of Robin Runck

Geyser Country too



“Say... ever hear of the Devil’s Paint Pots? Real mystery of the desert. Bubblin’ pots o’ mud in all kinds o’ colors. This is Geyser Country too. Uh-oh, there she blows! Sure glad ya all brought yer raincoats. But look out now! We never know when she’s gonna go off. That’s why we call her Ol’ Unfaithful. Look out now! Heh-heh! You folks in them last cars be ready... she’s a-threatenin’ again!”



Photo by Werner Weiss, 1975

Ol’ Unfaithful

“Ya know, I hear tell a long time ago, dinosaurs roamed this area. Of course, all you find now is cactus, snakes and coyotes—and sometimes the sun-bleached bones of an ancient animal.

“There’s the voice of the desert—the coyote.”



Photo by Roger J. Runck, 1961, courtesy of Robin Runck

Balancing Rocks



Photo by Marion Caswell, 1976, courtesy Dennis Caswell

Startin' to tumble!

"Now folks, we gotta get through balancing rock canyon. Look out! They're startin' to tumble! Watch that wildcat, lady! Oooh! Heh, heh! Glad he stayed up there! We've known these critters to take on a full-grown deer more'n ten times their size and weight.

"You know, last trip, a mountain lion showed up right over that tunnel. There's one now, so you better all be real quiet!"

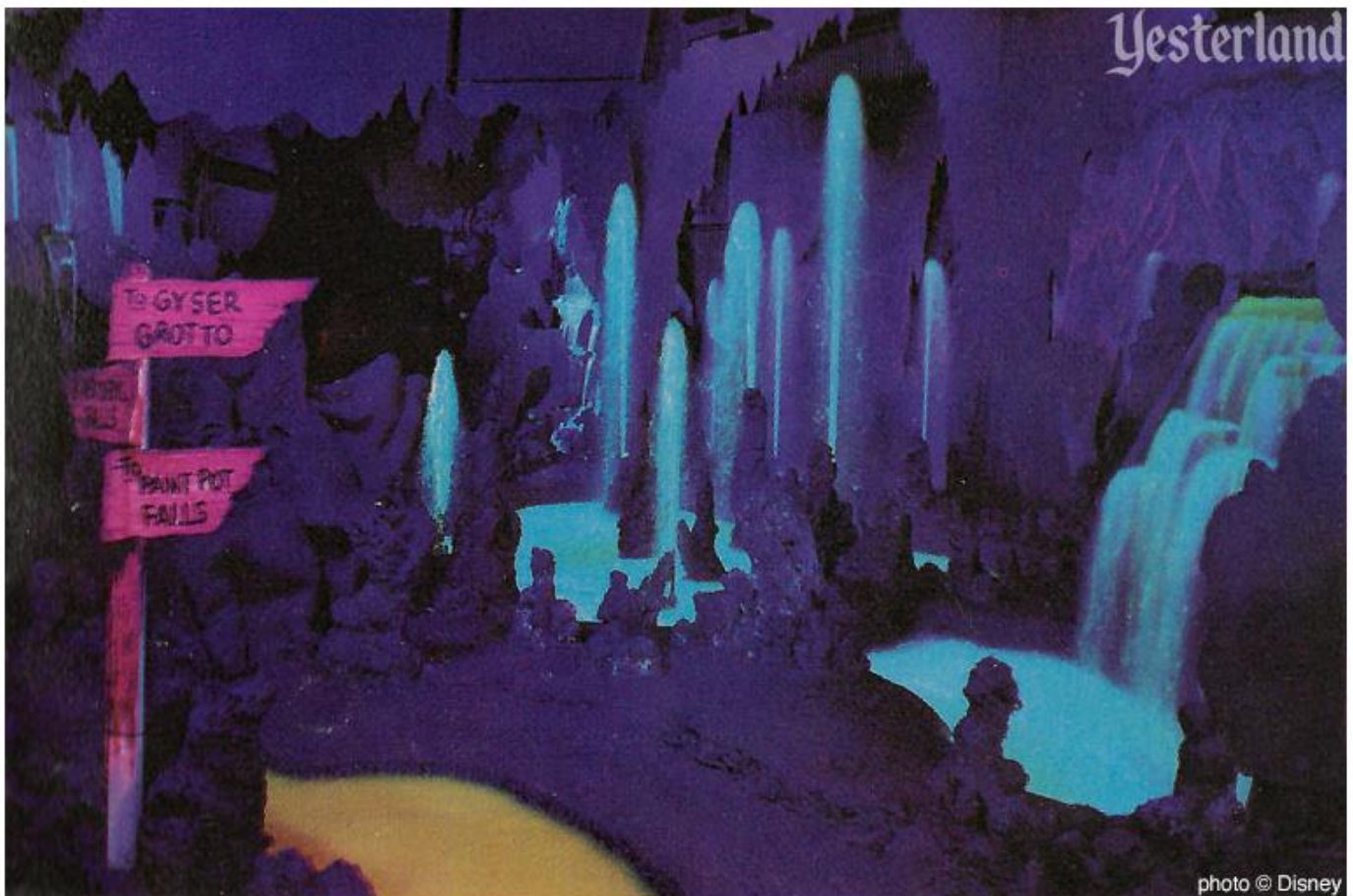


photo © Disney

From Walt Disney's Guide to Disneyland, 1961 © Disney

Inside Rainbow Caverns

"Now, we're goin' deep into the earth to view the dazzling Rainbow Caverns. You'll see giant stalagmites, stalactites, 'n colorful falls on ever' side. Say, if ya look real careful, you'll see geyser grotto, 'n even the witch's cauldron."



Photo by cpo57, (CC BY 2.0) (modified)

Returning to Rainbow Ridge

"Well, I see we're comin' back to Rainbow Ridge again. I hope you all enjoyed yer trip into Nature's Wonderland. Please stay in yer seats until I get the train stopped, will ya? And then just lift up the jump seat in the middle, and the door'll come right open."



Photo by Marion Caswell, 1975, courtesy Dennis Caswell

Exit at Rainbow Ridge

"Now, to find the exit, folks, just head right for the front of the train. And if ya got a mountain lion sittin' next to ya, don't feed him. Just tell him to hop out and hightail it back to his own stompin' ground. Well, thanks for ridin' along, and come on back when yer out here in these here frontier parts, will ya? So long!"

Here's a secret that not many people know. If you board the Mine Train around 8:50 p.m., the train will stop on a hillside above the Living Desert. You'll be treated to the best view of the fireworks anywhere in the park. Each pyrotechnic burst in the sky illuminates the otherwise almost-dark Living Desert. No crowds. And no noise, except for sound effects from the Living Desert and the explosions in the sky.

The Mine Train Through Nature's Wonderland opened in Disneyland in 1960 as an expansion of the Rainbow Caverns Mine Train (1956).

On June 12, 1960, Walt Disney hosted an old-fashioned picnic to show off the new attraction to 700 press representatives, their families, and other invited guests.

A Los Angeles Times article ("Mechanical Animals, Visitors Frolic in Disney's New Nature Wonderland" by Richard West, June 13, 1960) described the event. Here's an excerpt from it:

[Walt] Disney and his three cowboy-hatted grandchildren were the official hosts at the all-day ceremonies.

Tammy Miller, 3, her sister, Joanna, 5, and their brother, Chris, 5, and Disney wielding tiny hatchets, cut through a sapling to open the animated beaver set.

The beavers slapped the water with their tails, dived and bobbed to the surface.

Then the youngsters, children of Ron and Diane Disney Miller, boarded the Western Mine Train with their grandfather to see all the animated animals in Nature's Wonderland in action.

They saw black bears diving for fish in a mountain stream, deer frolicking on a hilltop, tusked boars sniffing the air, howling coyotes, hooting owls, cawing crows, and a mountain lion with lighted eyes peer out from a dark cave.

Most electrifying to youngsters may be a big mountain cat climbing a tree to get at a nest of baby hawks. Mother hawk was on guard, however, with her sharp beak and talons, ready to drive him off.

Other highlights of the journey were Rainbow Caverns, with multi-colored waterfalls and music, and Cascade Peak, 75-ft. high mountain with three waterfalls plunging into Frontierland River.

In all, there are 204 animated animals in their natural habitat in Nature's Wonderland, situated on a seven-acre site in Frontierland. They may be viewed either from the Western Mine Train or from pack mules.

Nature's Wonderland was built at a cost of \$1.8 million. It is Disneyland's 45th attraction.

The Mine Train Through Nature's Wonderland operated until January 2, 1977. In its final years, the attraction had been demoted from an "E" ticket to "D" ticket. The time had come to replace the venerable mine train with a different kind of mine train.



Photo by Allen Huffman, 2005

Much faster than the old *Mine Train*

Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, a thrill ride themed as a mine train, opened in 1979.



Photo by Werner Weiss, 2007

Across the former Beaver Valley pond, as it looked in 2007

But not all is gone. And as you walk along the trail across from Big Thunder Mountain Railroad towards the paths to Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, you're walking through what's left of Beaver Valley. Look across the pond for an old Mine Train tunnel.

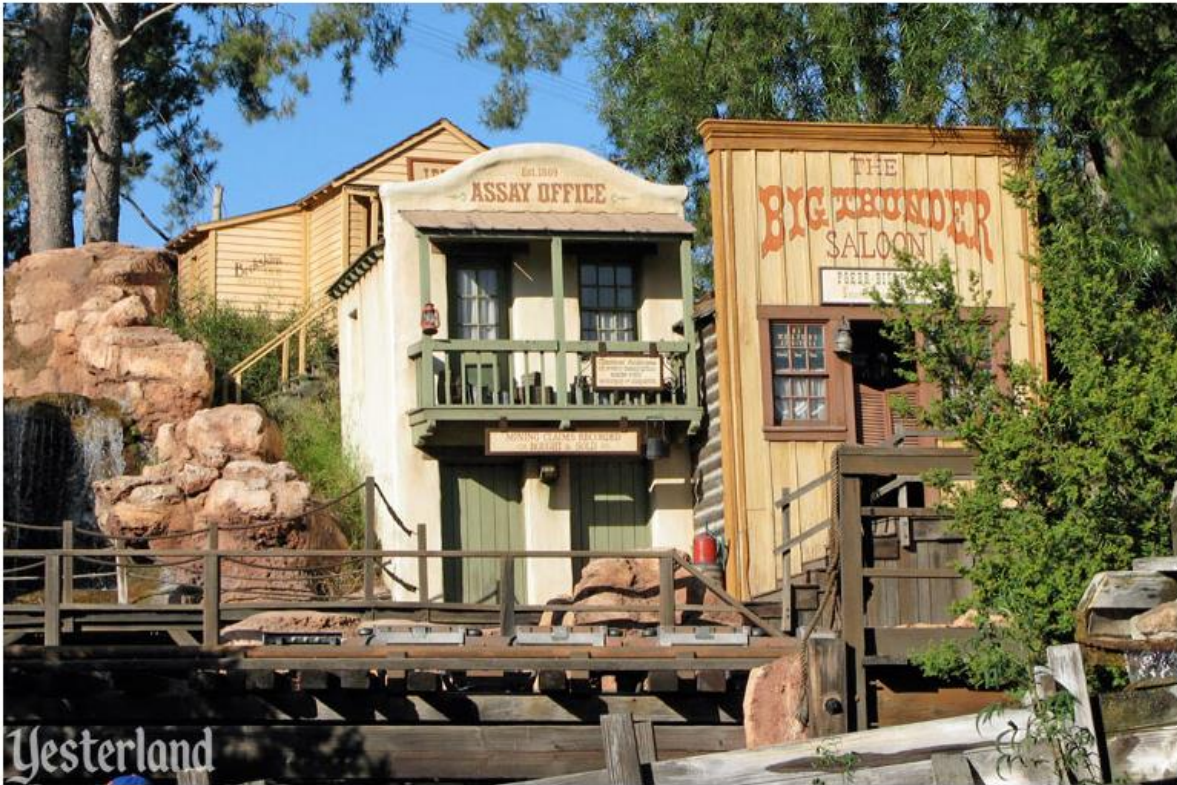


Photo by Werner Weiss, 2007

Rainbow Ridge, long after the demise of the *Mine Train*

Parts of Rainbow Ridge survived the transition to a thrill ride. Buildings from the little town still grace the hills above the waiting area for Big Thunder Mountain Railroad.



Photo by Werner Weiss, 1996

*Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes* and Cascade Peak in 1996

The biggest part of the Mine Train ride to survive the demolition of the old ride was Cascade Peak, a rugged mountain with several large waterfalls. Back in 1960, Cascade Peak was surrounded by little trees, giving the appearance of a mountain rising majestically above a forest. As the trees grew taller over several decades, Cascade Peak appeared to become smaller and smaller. The actual height of the peak didn't change, but our perception of its height was changed by the relative scale of the trees and the peak.

Until the end of Summer 1998, the waterfalls of Cascade Peak continued to roar into the Rivers of America. Before the end of 1998, Cascade Peak was completely gone. Years of water damage had taken their toll on the man-made peak's structural integrity. The problem was solved with a bulldozer.