

Survey Marks: The Hidden Mickeys Beneath Your Feet

by Patty Winter, PassPorter Guest Contributor

During your visits to Walt Disney World or Disneyland, you've probably searched for subtle images of Mickey Mouse's head in wrought-iron railings, chandeliers, and wallpaper. But have you ever thought to look right beneath your feet?

Survey marks are small disks (usually about 3" in diameter) placed by surveyors to mark specific locations. At Disneyland and Walt Disney World, disks with Disney-related etched images have been placed during the construction of theme parks, hotels, and other structures. Millions of people walk right over them every year without noticing them. That means they can make a fun new treasure hunt for you and your family during your Disney vacations.

Recently, I had the pleasure of attending a presentation by current and past chief surveyors of Walt Disney World. They showed striking pictures of the conditions under which surveying is done in the 47-square-miles of swampland that is Walt Disney World. There were photos of surveyors waist-deep in swamps, of 15-foot alligators and 8-foot cottonmouth snakes.

On a lighter note, they also talked about some of the unusual, "only at Disney" assignments they've been given over the years, such as determining the precise coordinates of the track inside Spaceship Earth, or the proper placement of the air lines to the seats in Honey, I Shrunk the Audience. Another time, the pyrotechnics folks at the Magic Kingdom were concerned that their fireworks weren't going up as far as they wanted, so they asked the surveyors to determine their height. Not typical tasks for professional surveyors, but then, Walt Disney World isn't a typical place to work. Besides, such assignments are a pleasant change from wading through a swamp full of poisonous snakes!

Walt Disney World only began using survey disks a little over 20 years ago. Originally, the surveyors marked specific locations with survey nails, or with "X"s scribed in concrete. But in the early 1980s, an enterprising salesman at a survey monument manufacturing company had an idea: Wouldn't it be fun to install unique Disney-themed disks instead of boring old nails?

The salesman approached the Disney World survey department with a disk design that featured the familiar three-circle Mickey Mouse

symbol. The largest circle had latitude and longitude lines, making Mickey's head look like the Earth. It was a design that combined Disney whimsy with a representation of the coordinate system that underlies all surveying. Disney's surveyors loved it, knowing that Disney World visitors would enjoy the Mickey-themed disks.

Subsequently, survey disks were added to construction projects at Disneyland. For many years, the design was based on the Disneyland logotype rather than a graphic. But when Disney's California Adventure was being built, a new disk was developed that depicts each park's signature object: Sleeping Beauty's Castle from Disneyland, and Grizzly Peak from California Adventure. That style is now used throughout the Disneyland Resort.

"Okay," I hear you saying, "but where the heck are these things? I've never seen one!" Believe it or not, most of them are right under your feet, in the concrete walkways between buildings. Others can be found in the curbs that line walkways, parking lots, roads, or bodies of water.

For example, at Epcot, there's one near the dinosaur topiary outside Universe of Energy. Two were recently installed behind the Main Street railroad station at the Magic Kingdom. At California Adventure, you can find one in the runway markings outside of Soarin'. Next door at Disneyland, there's one near Rivers of America, outside the entrance to Pirates of the Caribbean.

Not all the disks are inside the theme parks. There are a couple at the Animal Kingdom bus stops, one at Downtown Disney in Anaheim, three between the Polynesian and the Grand Floridian, one at Disney's Wide World of Sports, and some at Typhoon Lagoon, just to name a few locations.

So, are you ready to look for some Disney survey marks yourself? Here are a few ways to get started:

1. Study photos of known disk locations. Once you've seen where they are, you can keep your eyes open for those locations when you visit Disneyland or Disney World. There are two main Web sites that have Disney survey mark photos: mine at <http://www.wintertime.com/disneymarks>, and the Disney World and Disneyland categories on <http://www.waymarking.com>. (Waymarking is a new hobby that's a spin-off from geocaching. See my article about Disney geocaching in the May 2, 2005 issue of PassPorter News.
2. Use a GPS receiver. On both my site and the Waymarking site, you can get latitude and longitude information for all the known survey

marks. Simply enter those coordinates into your GPS receiver and use it to zero in on each disk.

3. Just keep your eyes open! I know it's hard to remember to look at the ground when your attention is constantly being drawn to castles and five foot high mice and screaming coaster riders. But look for survey disks whenever you think of it, and you just might spot some! One family recently told me that they promised their six year-old daughter a Disney Dollar for each mark she found. She found six during their trip -- including a new one at Epcot that no one had ever reported to me before!

What should you do if you find a mark? If it's one already listed on Waymarking.com, you can log your find there. (See the Disneyland and Disney World waymarking categories for logging requirements.) If it isn't included there yet, you can create a new waymark for it. And of course, if you come across one that isn't listed on my Disney benchmarks page, please let me know about it! (Benchmark is another word for survey marks.)

Are there other Disney survey marks waiting to be found? You bet! As I was working on this article, I got reports of two newly discovered marks at Walt Disney World: the one I mentioned at Epcot, and another at the Shades of Green hotel. And you never know when more might appear. As Walt Disney World's chief surveyor told me, "We're slapping them in wherever we see wet concrete."

What about Disney sites in other countries? From what I've been told, the surveyors who worked on Disneyland Paris and Tokyo Disneyland chose not to install disks. But a Disney engineer has said that there are 11 marks at Hong Kong Disneyland, none of which have been reported publicly yet. Will you be the first to find one?

Happy hunting!

About The Author: Patty Winter is a freelance marketing writer in Silicon Valley. She recently traveled to Orlando for a week to attend a presentation by the Walt Disney World surveyors and to confront the yeti on Expedition Everest.

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