

Ye Olde Magic Kingdom: Past Attractions and Hidden Tributes

by Jill Clinevell Shelton, PassPorter Guest Contributor

For many dedicated Disney fans, visiting Walt Disney World has become as much a part of their lives as visiting family or old friends. We travel to "Uncle Walt's" and feel as if we've come home. Most of us have favorite attractions or sights that we can't wait to see as soon as we enter into that magical place. But, what happens when our **favorite Magic Kingdom attraction** is no longer there?

The Disney Imagineers also have a special place in their hearts for many of the classics that have gone by the wayside, and so, find a way to honor the ancestor in the new attraction. What are these attractions that many of us loved and some never had the opportunity to experience? What sits in their footprint today? How are our old favorites memorialized?

One of the most popular rides in Fantasyland today is **The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh**. Most children today love Pooh and his friends and can't wait to get aboard their "hunny" pot for a trip through the Hundred Acre Wood. But Pooh is relatively new to the neighborhood, only arriving in June 1999. Pooh replaced a classic fan favorite, Mr. Toad's Wild Ride which opened with the park in 1971.

Mr. Toad's Wild Ride was a romp in a roadster driven by the eccentric Mr. Toad. It was based on the book (and Disney cartoons), "The Wind in the Willows". It was not 3-D or even animatronic as Pooh is now, but it did have a twist. When the rider chose the right or left line in which to stand to wait their turn, they also chose their adventure, as there were two tracks and two experiences. However, no matter which track was chosen the adventure always ended the same: a head-on collision with an on-coming train!

Plenty of **fans were quite upset** when the announcement was made to replace Mr. Toad with Pooh. They staged green shirt sit-ins and wrote letters of protest. The decision was made, however, and Pooh moved in. But, if you look closely as you're riding through The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, you'll see a picture hanging on the wall of Owl's house in which Mr. Toad is handing over a "deed" to Owl. A second portrait has fallen onto the floor of Moley (another character from the Wind in the Willows) and Pooh. And, if you'd like to see and touch a part of Disney history that is no more, you can find one of the original roadsters from Mr. Toad's Wild Ride in the Exposition Hall on Main

Street.

Across the way from The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh the Imagineers placed the Pooh's Playful Spot (which has since been moved), a soft playground for preschoolers featuring Pooh's tree house and spilling hunny pots. It's hard to imagine now that the Hundred Acre Wood used to be an 11.5 million gallon lagoon! 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea opened to the public in October 1971. It was a submarine ride down to the ocean bottom complete with divers, coral reefs and even a giant squid. Based on the Jules Verne classic novel and the Disney movie, this quickly became a favorite of many visitors. However it was closed in 1994 after 23 years of operations due to maintenance and loading issues. The lagoon remained intact for 10 years and was used as staging for Ariel's Grotto while the old queue was used for the Fantasyland Character Festival. Then, in 2004 the lagoon was drained to make way for Pooh's Playful Spot. Since then, even the usurper Playful Spot has been moved to make way for **Fantasyland's new expansion coming in 2011-2012.**

Not to miss an opportunity to memorialize such a beloved attraction, the Imagineers **hid a tribute to 20,000 Leagues inside the tree house** in the new playground. If you squeeze into the doorway of the tree and turn again to face outdoors, you will find a small blue submarine "carved" into the door frame. Additionally, one of the famous submarines has a new home on Disney's Castaway Cay, the private island for Disney Cruise Line guests. Visitors can swim to the Nautilus and explore her once again, but this time in the real ocean!

Another popular Magic Kingdom attraction whose home has a similar but more extensive history is **Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin**. Who doesn't like spinning through space and zapping targets to defeat the evil Emperor Zurg? But, back in 1972, this Tomorrowland space housed a very different attraction.

If You Had Wings was a whirlwind trip around the world in the comfort of a vehicle similar to the Buzz Lightyear ride minus the laser guns. You passed through scenes showcasing different locales such as the Speed Tunnel through which your vehicle slowly moved, but the films that sped all around you made you feel as if you were truly flying. If You Had Wings lost its sponsorship through Eastern Airlines in 1987 and was changed that same year to If You Could Fly, with new music and no references to Eastern. In 1989 If You Could Fly closed and reopened six months later as Dreamflight, sponsored now by Delta. This time the attraction was completely altered but rode on the same track. Dreamflight remained open for seven years, closing briefly in June 1996 when Delta dropped its sponsorship and reopened as Take Flight. Take

Flight ran until January 1998 when it was closed to make way for the new Toy Story attraction. Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin premiered in October of the same year. Buzz makes use of the original track and room structure as well as the speed tunnel. The Imagineers also made use of some whimsical cutout chickens originally located in Dreamflight and Take Flight - the chickens can now be found in the room with the volcano in the Space Ranger Spin.

A close neighbor to Buzz Lightyear in Tomorrowland is that menacing alien, Stitch, in **Stitch's Great Escape** which premiered in the Fall of 2004. But, even before the ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter, which opened in 1995, then closed in 2003 to make way for Stitch, there was a long-running staple in the same location for many years.

Flight to the Moon

At the time Flight to the Moon premiered in 1971, it was already outdated as NASA had already succeeded in landing on the moon. It remained open by the same name until 1975 when it was briefly revamped as Mission to Mars with a new destination of the Red Planet. Mission to Mars continued to shuttle guests on quick trips to and from outer space until 1994.

Although, seemingly not as well-loved and missed as other "extinct attractions," Mission to Mars and Flight to the Moon are memorialized in the Tomorrowland Transit Authority. As we remember favorite attractions of the past that now have a new tenant, we also should note that there are a few lesser-known attractions that have simply vanished. Some of these are the Plaza Swan Boats that took guests on an enchanting trip around the waters surrounding the castle, the Davy Crockett Explorer Canoes in which guests and two coon-skin capped cast members paddled around the Rivers of America, and, of course, the Skyway which shuttled guests from Fantasyland to Tomorrowland and back again high above the "World". However, most of our favorite past attractions that are gone today, are not completely forgotten, and if we search hard enough we might notice a special hidden secret just for those of us who remember.

About The Author: Jill is a former schoolteacher and a stay-at-home mom of two little Disney princesses. She and her family love learning about Disney secrets and history and are currently planning their next trip to Walt Disney World, a Grand Gathering, for later this year.

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