

# I Can Dig It: Dinoland, U.S.A.: Disney's Animal Kingdom Park

by Melissa Sue Sorrells Galley, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When you think of quintessential Walt Disney World experiences, DinoLand U.S.A. is probably not the first thing that comes to mind. But, for my money, DinoLand is a shining example of the complexity and depth of story you can find in the details at Disney Parks. Here in DinoLand, the storyline is embedded in every inch, so get your pick, chisel, and brush, and let's uncover some magic!

It looks like all dino bones and midway games on the surface, but the underlying story here is wrought with tension. It's about small-town economics and big-thinking academics. You can see the tensions bubbling to the surface all over, from the way Chester and Hester do business to the subtle academic battles being waged in The Boneyard.

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□I'll be the first to admit that the story is complex and takes a bit of unpacking, so here're the basics: DinoLand was a sleepy little town along Route 498 until, in 1947, fossils were discovered. Over time, the town's fossil exhibition grew, attracting increasing attention from the outside world. What started as a man with a chisel evolved into the Dino Institute, an academic institution and tourist attraction for the dinosaur-hungry public.

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□Seeing an opportunity to make a quick buck, Chester and Hester, who owned the gas station in town, set up Chester and Hester's Dinosaur Treasures. The garish, attention-getting lights, colors, and signage are designed to distract travelers and lure them away from the Institute.

And then, a breakthrough: scientists at the Dino Institute developed ground-breaking time travel technology, allowing them to offer tours of the early Cretaceous Period. Suddenly, business was booming, as guests lined up to take a journey in a Time Rover.

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□Seeing more and more holidaymakers roll through town, Chester and Hester fought back, introducing Chester and Hester's Dino-Rama. The centerpiece of their carnival is Primeval Whirl, a 'time-travel' ride designed to siphon even more tourism dollars their way.

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□The dichotomy here is striking. At the Institute, you have museum-quality offerings, including lab notes, multimedia displays, and fossils. There's also the museum-style Dino Institute Gift Shop, offering educational toys and tee-shirts. On Chester and Hester's end, you've got some hastily thrown together carnival games and rickety-looking rides

sitting next to a tchotchke shop.

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□As you walk through Restaurantosaurus, the land's quick service restaurant (and really an attraction in its own right), you can trace this history, and some of these tensions come into sharp relief. Formerly a sleepy fishing lodge, the unique eatery has expanded along with the settlement. Look around and you can see remnants of the original lodge, remnants of a dino-centric museum, and remnants of the days of preserving dinosaur fossils in plaster.

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□In the current timeline, the building serves as a dormitory, mess hall, and recreation center for the grad students and interns working at the Dino Institute. You can see their influence is the irreverent sense of humor found throughout (and on top of) the building. Next time you're in town, take a closer look at the 'hand'-drawn murals and drawings in the Quonset Room (off the original Lodge Hall) and the relaxed, collegiate vibe of The Hip Joint, their rec room.

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□When they're not scrawling jokes on the walls or launching plunger-tipped arrows at the town's decrepit-looking water tower, the graduate students and interns are in The Boneyard. While your children let their inner carnotaurus out to play, take some time to read the bulletin boards posted around the dig site. You'll get a laugh, and you'll probably learn something, too!

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□What's most fascinating to me is how many layers there are to this story. Above and beyond the great historical and sociological details, the land is also entirely in sync with the overall themes of Animal Kingdom, especially the message of sustainability.

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□So many of the things you'll see around the newly bustling town are retrofitted and repurposed. Look at Chester and Hester's money-making enterprises: huge truck tires, re-purposed from their auto shop, serve as planters in front of Chester and Hester's Dinosaur Treasures, which itself used to be a gas station. (And scientists have long theorized that gas is made up of recycled dinosaurs.)

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□In Chester and Hester's DinoRama!, Fossil Fuels, a water squirt game, recycles bits and parts from their old gas station to create a carnival game. Vintage Airstream travel trailers, a staple of the previous business, are reconditioned for use as a snack cart in DinoRama and as a building extension at the local lodge. Take a look inside Restaurantosaurus, and you'll notice that the condiment rack in the plastering room looks like it's fresh out of a paleontologist's lab (because it is).

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□ It's the million little details like these that win me over: 'Lullaby for a Brontosaurus' playing while you wait in line for lunch; the 'punny' signs, awards and notes that Dinoland's interns have left for each other all around; '-osaurus' added to the end of everything, which makes even an "Authorized Personnel Only" sign funny.

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□ So next time you're in DinoLand, prime your funnybone, take a look around, and appreciate the rich and varied details Walt Disney Imagineering buried for us here.

*About The Author: Melissa Sue Sorrells Galley works in higher education communications in upstate New York, where she lives with her husband, Robert, and her cavapoo, George. Her favorite Disney characters are Elliott (also known as Pete's Dragon) and Figment. Follow her [@msorrellsgalley](http://msorrellsgalley) or read about her recent [adventurous trip to Disney World](#) on PassPorter.com.*

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