

Redwood Creek Challenge Trail: Disney California Adventure

by Dorothy Compton, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Having lived several years in Eureka, California, the heart of the coast redwood region, I always wanted to visit the Redwood Creek Challenge Trail at Disney California Adventure Park.

Many times we just walked by, but on our last visit I insisted we go check it out. Boy, am I glad we did!

Located near Grizzly River Run, the challenge trail was originally themed with a focus on the movie, Brother Bear (there is still a statue from Brother Bear at the entrance). Disney has since added Russell and Doug from the Pixar movie, UP! and subtitled the area, Wilderness Explorer Camp. Each child can become a Wilderness Explorer, earning six badges while exploring the two-acre area. The badges are in tracking, bravery, rock climbing, wolf howl, animal spirit, and puzzle solving.

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□ Upon entering the trail, you are greeted by a "Ranger" and given an activity map marked with six different places where you can earn your badges by performing interactive tasks. The attraction incorporates features from all over Central and Northern California, where either coast redwoods or giant redwoods can be found. It is not crowded and since much of the area is lower than the rest of the park, the crowd noise is muted allowing you to relax with an abundance of shade and places to sit.

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□ Immediately after entering, you will see a large version of the trail map. On the map's back side, behind some trees, is a sitting area where you can sometimes find Doug greeting visitors and posing for photos. Russell may show up here for character greetings, too but that hasn't happened when I've visited. Without Doug or Russell present the sitting area may be easily missed, but it is shady and offers a view of the entire challenge trail.

Start your exploration by turning to the right. Just before you walk through a hollow, burned-out redwood you will see a sign that tells the story of how "Big Sir" got its name. This name is, of course, a play on Big Sur, the mountainous region on the California coast south of San Francisco, which is the farthest south the coastal redwoods grow. The story is quite cute, so read it before you proceed. As for the walk-through tree, there are many such trees wherever redwoods grow. Redwood bark, which can be several inches thick, is very fire resistant, so even though the inside of the tree may be completely hollowed by

fire, the bark remains.

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□ Next on the trail is the Millennial Tree, showing a cross-section of a tree that was over a thousand years old. Since trees can be dated by counting their rings, Disney has labeled some of those rings with the date and an event that occurred that year. For example, this tree sprouted in approximately 818 A.D. in a forest outside present-day Porterville, at 6000 feet in elevation. There are many other dates marked on the wood, all the way until the tree was toppled in a wind storm in 1937.

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□ Along the trail are signs describing the wildlife found throughout the redwoods. Each sign displays the name, picture, footprint or tracks, and a fun fact of a forest friend. For instance, the fun fact for the striped skunk is, "Known for its strong odor, this skunk's spray can hit an enemy up to 15 feet away." Other animals showcased include bighorn sheep, California quail, king snake, porcupine, river otter, black bear, mountain lion, coyote, beaver, yellow-bellied marmot, and elk.

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□ Next to the Millennial Tree is a large sign that displays all the tracks of those same animals found in the forest. As real tracks would never survive the traffic, Disney has imprinted animal footprints in the concrete path, almost like fossils. The challenge is to find the footprints as you walk the trail. There is a further challenge to find Kevin's tracks! Hint: they're close by!

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□ There are three lookout towers to be climbed, labeled Mt. Whitney, Mt. Shasta, and Mt. Lassen. There are even radios in both the Mt. Whitney and Mt. Shasta lookout stations so the "rangers" can talk to each other! Try it! My son and I first talked to each other, and later he chatted with whoever who would talk back. Posted next to each radio are the "official" codes to be used, with the warning, "Rangers -You are responsible for knowing these radio codes." Some are real (e.g. 10-4 means message received) but others are uniquely Disney and fun (e.g. "10-3 Do not disturb - nap in progress," and "10-13 Never mind...a bear got it"). Also posted is the "alpha code," including pronunciation (e.g. A - alpha - al fah, B - bravo - brah voh).

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□ The lookout stations have some other wonderful details. Mt Lassen has a collection of rocks and minerals mined in the area. The walls have U.S. Forest Service maps as well as photos of real-life lookout towers and wildlife. Posters of the flora and fauna alongside promotional park posters further decorate the walls. There are binoculars to look through, and netted footbridges connect the lookout stations for those daring enough to cross.

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□ Besides a gentle path to walk along, there are more challenging ways to get down and/or up, and to and from the lower portion of the attraction. You can slide the Hoot and Holler slides in the Mt. Shasta lookout tower, climb Eagles Ascent (a net ladder up to the Mt. Lassen lookout), or climb the Squirrel Scramble (another net ladder up to Mt. Lassen Lookout). There are various stairs and bridges, some of which are made of netting or suspended/swinging wood. Other activities include a rock slide, a tunnel tree, a suspended log tunnel, Kenai's Spirit Cave and the Sequoia Smokejumpers! These last two, I'll describe a bit more.

□ The sign outside the spirit cave says, "Ancient legends say that a secret legend between animals and humans is revealed within this cave. Touch the paw print to discover the animal whose qualities you share." Once inside the cave, you place your hand in a designated place on a video screen. After a short bit, the monitor will tell you what animal you are most like. There are seven different animals: wolf (wise and loyal), eagle (intelligent and brave), skunk (curious and adventurous), salmon (instinctive and strong-willed), beaver (hard working and industrious), moose (dependable and honest), and bear (loving and strong). You will have to find out for yourself which animal you are most like!

□ The smokejumper is a tire swing and zip line for kids to ride. Real smoke jumpers are fire fighters who parachute in to hard-to-reach areas to fight wildfires. Located at the very middle of the lowest part of trail, the zip line looks like a lot of fun. Unfortunately, it's just for kids (42" min. to 63" max.). I will tell you though, that even if you can't ride you should visit the area, as it has drinking fountains and loads of shady places to sit.

□ After you have found all your badges by visiting the different areas and scratching off the silver "badges" on your map, you are invited to attend the Wilderness Explorer Ceremony to receive your Senior Wilderness Explorer Badge (a sticker). Russell appears at the end of the show, and is available for photos. The 15- to 20-minute ceremony takes place in the Awahnee Camp Circle, located in the lower portion of the attraction, and again, nicely shaded.

□ Just behind the camp circle on the challenge trail's upper section are several animal totems. The totems present native American legends about different animals. For instance, the Wek-Wek totem tells the Miwok tale of a fire kindled at the base of a rock. When the rock split open, out flew Wek-Wek the hawk. Other legends include Ah-Wahn-Dah (turtle - Miwok), Kahn-Kool (raven - Miwok), Catala (bullfish - Wintu), Ase (buzzard - Wintu), Oosh-Kinah (dragonfly - Serrano), Told-le-loo (mouse -

Maidu), and Welketi (frog - Maidu).

☐ Of course the one thing besides the redwoods that defines the trail is creek. Although quite small, there is a creek that runs throughout the entire area that even includes a small falls. You cross the creek several times, and can even put your feet in it (especially if you have sandals or flip flops on). The sound of the water rippling is quite calming, and along with the forest theming, brings refreshment to my soul. I love the smell of redwoods! Hiking in the great outdoors has never been made easier. If you've never stepped in to the Redwood Creek Challenge Trail, give it a try next time. You may find yourself transported to another world!

About The Author: Dorothy Compton lives in Northern California with her husband and four children. Having been born and raised in southern California, she visited Disneyland many times in her youth but became reacquainted in the last ten years and only recently became an annual passholder.

Article last updated: 09-27-2012

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