

## Disney's Fort Wilderness Campground: A Walt Disney World Resort Review

by Kim McCain, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Fort Wilderness campground is a hidden gem of Walt Disney World. If you are looking for a relaxing day away from the parks this is a good place to unwind for a whole day. The Fort consists of 700 open and wooded acres. It is a mile long as the crow flies and a half mile wide. It is made up of 20 loops of campsites. It is very shaded and cool, and you can spend an entire day there and barely spend a dime, if you wish.

To get there you can catch a bus at the Ticket & Transportation Center (TTC) that will take you to the Outpost end of Fort Wilderness. Or, you can hop on a boat at Magic Kingdom that will put you at the Settlement end of the Fort.

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□ There are a variety of ways to get around Fort Wilderness, but one thing you can't do is drive - there's no parking inside the campground's entrance, and take the buses that circulate throughout the resort. You can also walk, ride a bike, or rent a golf cart. Bikes can be rented from the Bike Barn, which is in the middle of the campground behind the Meadow Trading Post. Take the Orange bus that goes up through the campground's center to get there. Bikes are \$8 for an hour or \$18 for a full day. Golf carts can be rented at the Outpost. Reservations for these are recommended.

□ The resort has two large playgrounds. One is located at Pioneer Hall near the marina and the other at the Creekside Meadow recreation area in the center of the campground.

□ During the holidays the campers decorate their sites. It is a lot of fun riding around the campsites "looping" to see the decorated sites. They are seen best after dark. Or there are two trails that you can ride on: Swamp Trail, a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile loop along Bay Lake, and the Fort Wilderness Exercise Trail, a 2.3 mile paved and sand path.

Trail rides on horseback are offered at Circle D Livery, by Outpost Depot. They are offered six times daily, weather permitting. The rides, which cost \$46 per person, last approximately 45 minutes. Riders must be at least 9 years old and 48 inches tall and can weigh no more than 250 pounds. The pony rides are for children 2-8 years old, weighing no more than 80 pounds. They are offered from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and cost \$5, and can be found at Tri-Circle-D Ranch & Farm, near the Settlement. This is also where the all the horses that are seen in the Magic Kingdom live.

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□ Something new and exciting is the Archery Experience. It is located near the Bike Barn behind Meadows Trading Post. It takes about 90 minutes, and costs \$25 per person ages 6 and up. It includes all the equipment and instructions on how to use a compound bow. This can be booked 90 days in advance and reservations are recommended because it can only accommodate 10 people at a time.

□ There is a nightly campfire program that is free and open to all Walt Disney World guests. In spring and summer it usually starts around 7:00 p.m. and during the fall or winter season around 8:00 p.m. It is held behind the Meadow Trading Post in the campfire area. The program begins with a sing-along led by a Disney cast member that lasts around 40 minutes. There is a marshmallow roast around a campfire, and Chip and Dale join in the fun. S'mores kits can be purchased from the Chuck Wagon that is located there or at the Meadow Trading Post, which is close to the campfire. The trading post also offers all kinds of basic groceries and beverages. After the campfire program a Disney movie is shown on a huge outdoor screen. There is plenty of seating on benches and bleachers. If it rains, the sing along is still held on the porch of Meadow Trading Post.

□ The Settlement Outpost and the Meadows Trading Post are two specialty shops that are located in the Fort. They offer Fort Wilderness specific items such as T-shirts, license plates, spare tire covers, and cups, among many other items. They also offer grocery and food-related items. Pioneer Hall is located near the marina and offers buffet-style, all-you-can-eat meals. The menu is different than most other restaurants in Walt Disney World, and includes western-style BBQ ribs, fried chicken, and brisket, along with all the fixings.

□ After the movie, the Electric Water Pageant can be seen from the beach by the marina, at around 9:45 p.m. The pageant consists of 14, 40-foot long lighted and animated floats that play music as they travel around the resorts on Bay Lake and Seven Seas Lagoon.

□ There is a full day of fun at Fort Wilderness. These are just a portion of the activities available. You will not realize that you are still in Walt Disney World when you are there, and I guarantee you will want to go back!

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