

"The Keys to the Kingdom" Tour
Magic Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World, Orlando, FL
Sunday, February 21, 2010, 9:00AM - 2:00PM

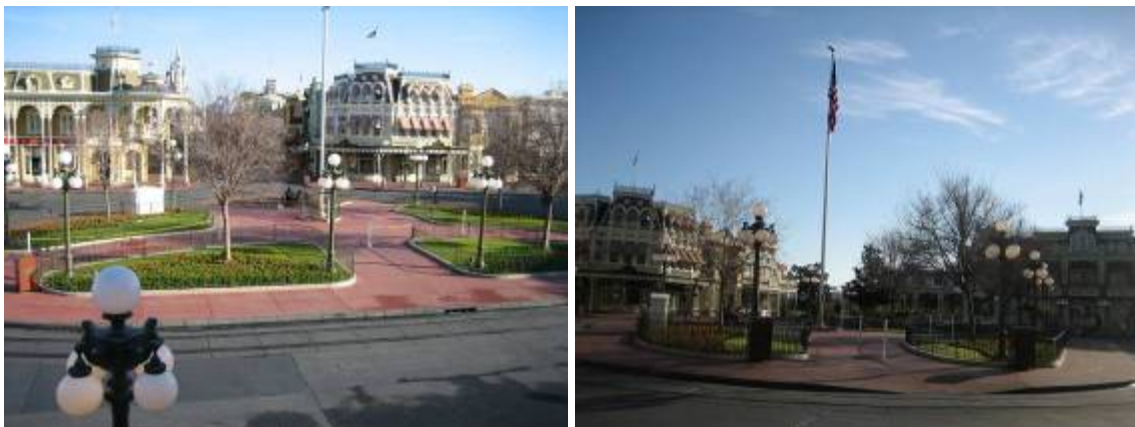


"Do not be fooled by its commonplace appearance. Like so many things, it is not what outside, but what is inside that counts." *Narrator* of **Aladdin**

We entered the park at 8:15AM and walked over to the tours building. I signed us up for the 8:30AM tour, but they checked us in for a 9AM tour. It didn't matter so much to me, especially since it gave me time to snap a few more photographs! As we checked in, Gregg asked us to choose our lunch meal and Claire gave us our backstage badges and earphones (to hear her easier.)



Another guide there, Marc, saw my bag tag and asked me what tours I have done. I told him we had just taken the Backstage Magic tour and he mentioned he was a guide on the inaugural season of tours, which only consisted of Wyoming and Hawaii. We spoke about it for a few minutes and then I was off to take my morning photos for the empty park. A very nice CM took a picture of me in front of the train station and I eventually made a beeline for a Photopass photographer - a picture is a picture!





By the time I had walked back to the Tours Building, the park was having its opening ceremony. It was fun to watch the people rush into the park!

WALKING ROUTE SECTION #1

Claire called us all together around 9:05AM. There were thirteen of us: a family of four, a mom and daughter, a single, two other couples, & us.



It took about five to ten minutes to get the microphone working properly with all our headsets, but after that we were on our way!

The Magic Kingdom was the first park built at the resort, opening on October 1, 1971.

The first thing Claire did was take us to the edge of the Town Square facing the castle where she began with a Q&A session about the Magic Kingdom and Main Street, USA. It was fun because she handed out stickers for every question answered correctly! She asked us to name four

'keys' to their customer service: safety, courtesy, show, and efficiency (in that order.) She pointed out the window on the corner buildings, M. T. Lott (say it real quickly a few times).



She explained how the windows represented those that made important contributions to the Florida Project (AKA Disney World.) That window, for example, listed the names of all the 'pseudo' companies that purchased the land. She then asked us to look for examples of the four keys as we walked a short distance to Center Street.

Main Street, USA features some stylistic influences from around the country, such as New England and Missouri. This is most noticeable in the "four corners" area in the middle of Main Street where each of the four corner buildings represents a different architectural style.

We followed her down the side street - a good thing too, because we were all looking for 'keys' - and took seats at the tables located at the end of the street. She conducted another Q&A session, asking us what we saw and pointing out some other facts.



She pointed out the lightning rods on several locations atop the buildings. She said that lightning can strike between one and three-hundred times during a rain storm in Florida. She pointed out the small black tops to the rods that were Nextel service antennas.



She mentioned the rode slope, other window names (Elias Disney, Walt's father, is on Center Street), the red sidewalks (best photo background contrast, determined by KODAK) and of course, the use of 'forced perspective' in the buildings and attractions (Main Street, USA three-story buildings are actually only two stories).

Main Street, USA is sloped slightly, getting higher as you walk toward Cinderella Castle, so that when guests leave at the end of the day they have an easier downhill walk.

As we moved down the street again towards Cinderella's Castle, we paused for a minute to watch the Main Street, USA Trolley Show.



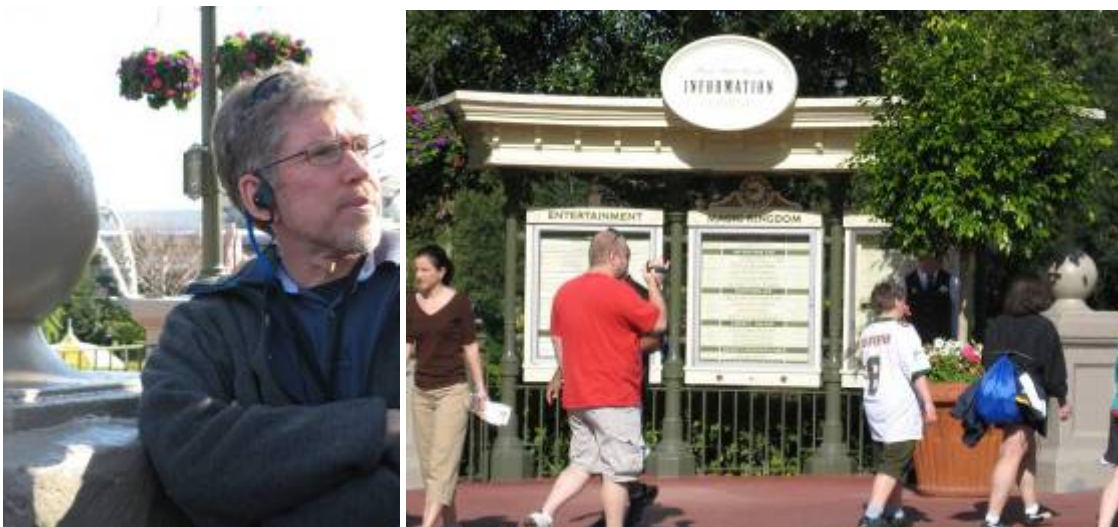




As we approached the Central Plaza, Claire pointed out more windows - Dick Nunis, Ron & Diana Miller, and finally, Walt Disney, who is on the last window facing Cinderella's Castle.

Symbolically, Main Street, U.S.A. represents the park's "opening credits". Guests pass under the train station (the opening curtain), then view the names of key personnel along the windows of the buildings' upper floors.

We stopped once again so Claire could ask questions, hand out more stickers, and point out some more nuances. She brought our attention to the 'Tips Board' and discussed the differences in appearance of the 'Tips Board' at each WDW theme park and how it helped guests with the 'efficiency' key. She pointed out how the Tomorrowland walkway was twice as wide as other spoke's walkways to draw you to it, and how the light fixtures match land theme - not just the land, but also the time period and the gradual change within each land. She also pointed out the less-than-obvious speakers in the lamps around Central Plaza, for the parade and show music.





As we walked toward Adventureland, Claire even pointed out the subtle changes from one end of the Crystal Palace building to the other, to accommodate both lands - Victorian at one end and jungle theme at the other - at either end of it.

As you walk from land to land, look down. The walkways/pavement changes as you move from one land to another.

As we crossed over to Adventureland, the phrase 'sensory tickle' was brought to our attention. After a few of the naughtier adults finished giggling at that, Claire explained that Walt wanted every guest to experience a change to every one of their senses into each land; this included changes in ground texture between lands!



(FYI, it is a wooden planked bridge into Adventureland.) Claire found us a shady seated area just before the Swiss Family Robinson Tree House where we could all sit down and rest while she offered us Walt Disney's life history in 'twenty minutes'.

Walt Disney's original name for the character was Mortimer, but when he took the idea to his wife, Lillian, she suggested 'Mickey', which happened to be the name of a man Lillian dated before she met Walt.

Claire began her story as far back at his early childhood, and really did offer us some interesting tidbits of information in those twenty minutes! She mentioned is 4th grade drawing of flowers with faces (later recreated in his 'Silly Symphonies' cartoon short, as well as his need for adventure that took him to France during the war as a sixteen-year-old Red Cross worker (after changing his birth certificate a little!!)



Of course, she mentioned his unfortunate trip to NYC with Lillian, where he found his cartoon, Oswald, as well as his artists had been essentially stolen from him, and how he recovered so gracefully!

To disguise the shallowness of the Jungle Cruise river water, a brown dye is mixed into it (using the waterfall.)

At the end of her story, Claire asked us if we wanted to ride an attraction. Of course! Off we headed to the Jungle Cruise around the corner! We waited a moment for Claire to set it up and a few moments later, we were boarding the Orinoco Ida! Claire was our 'skipper' for the trip and she pointed out dozens of details that it would have taken me many visits (and years and dollars!) to see for myself!



She pointed out the animatronics door on backs of land animals, Hidden Mickey on the airplane fuselage and as we left the 'Temple', and the camouflaged heaters near the misters! She mentioned the gorilla was finally given a silverback during the development of the Animal Kingdom when the designers discovered a gorilla of that size would have one! She pointed out the tour guide climbing up the pole had the same face as the cemetery grounds keeper (with the dog) in the Haunted Mansion (and how that pole he was climbing actually would fold in half for maintenance!!) She pointed out how the three wooden carved faces on the poles in the sand resembled Mickey, Donald, & Goofy! As we came to our last turn before the dock, she noted that Robin Williams worked as a skipper for a short time but was let go because he would habitually keep his boats out for up to a half hour with his stories.

The Tiki roofs in the Animal Kingdom are authentically made by locals from Africa, but Disney didn't have that option in 1971.

As we made our way through Adventureland, Claire stopped one more time in front of the Tiki Room: Under New Management, and stood on the bench underneath so she could tap the thatched roof with her riding crop.



We got the point. Once again we noticed the ground change - a pebbled strip of walkway - as we entered into Frontierland. As we passed the Golden Oak Post quick-service counter, Claire pointed out that it was named after the ranch where all the Disney Studios western movies were filmed.



We reached an employee gate just as the Hoedown show was beginning. We had a great view of the characters and cast members as they made their way into Frontierland and down the street to their show area in front of the Country Bear Jamboree.



As we made our way into the employee gate, we had some other park guests attempt to follow us backstage and Claire very kindly explained the situation to them before we continued on our way!

Parades cannot rehearse while visitors are in the park, so they have to schedule a time when the park is not open, usually at night.

As we entered the backstage area, we could see that the path curved so that the guests could not see where it ended. Claire explained that the park designers wanted to be sure the guests did not see the backstage areas. We passed through a doorway in a tall wooden fence and voila! we were there! Where, you ask? It was definitely backstage! No flowers, plain tan buildings, and a just to our right was a 'pet friendly' sign, which Claire explained was a restroom area for guests' service animals. We walked down a short, steep hill in the path, and it was noted that is necessary to get on top of the 'first floor' tunnels. Looking out in front of us, we could see the float building, the AVAC system, and the back of the Splash Mountain attraction. Claire walked us over to the floats garage and tried to show us the Spectromagic floats, but discovered they were being used for practice. She decided to show us the floats used in the 3PM parade instead. They were HUGE! Although we had seen the floats during the parade the last two days, this was really up close and a whole different perspective! Claire gave us some details, including, pointed out the drivers' seat location and mentioning they were all electric-powered vehicles. There were some other cast members hanging around watching us, so Claire led us out of the building and onto her next point of interest.

In addition to strict height requirements, all Disney characters (face and mask) are given guidelines for "autographs" so each autograph resembles the same one written by your predecessor a few years ago.

As we walked toward the Splash Mountain attraction, Claire gave us another mini-quiz about character costumes and attractions: The Queen of Hearts character is always a man because the costume itself is so heavy; the 'Beauty & the Beast' Beast costume is the second heaviest. As we passed some life-size animal figures, she pointed out that some animals in Jungle Cruise get up to forty-seven coats of paint to look natural. She noted the hippopotamus as we walked by, he had no lower half (wasn't needed in the water) and he only had two simple mechanisms that made him move during the ride. Claire also mentioned other fun facts about the park – she mentioned that Mr. Toad's Wild Ride was replaced by The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh because guests were more familiar with the Pooh storyline and characters than those in the movie, Mr. Toad and the Wind in the Willows.

The AVAC (Automated Vacuum Collection) system moves garbage through pipes at 60 miles per hour using compressed air. The system operates at twenty-minute intervals.

We passed the AVAC system central building and turned to walk between it and the Splash Mountain reservoir. We heard the AVAC system cycle every twenty minutes, and it sounded like a mild 'bang'. It wasn't bothersome, but I am glad we were warned about it! Claire let us study the back of the Splash Mountain attraction and pointed out the structure, as well as some of interesting fact about the reservoir: The Magic Kingdom is required to hold pool operator license because of the water 'pool' in this attraction; the reservoir can fill as high as twenty-one feet when the ride is not in use. The water is cleaned with bromine instead of chlorine to keep from potentially damaging guest clothes when they get wet. By this time, the 9:30AM tour group was right behind us waiting to check out this area, so we headed back to make our way back into the park to get to our next touring spot.

WALKING ROUTE SECTION #2

We walked back up the hill we had originally entered down and headed toward the exit. As we passed through the fence on our way back out to Frontierland, I noticed a full-length mirror next to door way in fence that I didn't see on the way in. It had a sticker note across the bottom reminding cast members to check costume! We had to cross back over the railroad tracks and then through the low wooden-fence, and we were back in the magic! Magic Kingdom, I mean!

The years on the buildings (and its style) in Frontierland correspond to the Westward Expansion.

We walked down the street of Frontierland, and Claire offered us some other insights into this land: She said the sidewalks and building porches are situated above the roadway because that is how the streets looked in western towns in the 19th century. (This kept the dirt from the road off of ladies' dresses and men's shoes.)



She noted the birdhouses posted around the area, in both Frontierland and Liberty Square, and informed us that they were actually speakers for parades and shows. Claire mentioned how the Imagineers had a challenging time finding a way to camouflage the speakers authentically for each of the land's time period. She jokingly commented that the birds in the area must be 'neurotic' with all the 'useless' birdhouses around! We then reached Liberty Square and we all

took a seat on the bench under the Liberty Tree: all but Claire, of course, who offered us another ten minute course on the history and making of this land.

The Liberty Tree is an actual 38 ton, 100-year-old oak found on the property and transplanted to the Magic Kingdom location.

Claire explained that the Liberty Tree had originally been moved from another area of the resort (where Animal Kingdom is today) before the Magic Kingdom opened. The tree was dug up, and slowly moved by crane to it's current spot.



Unfortunately there was an accident along the way, and the crane slipped and dropped the tree. As a result, it split, but luckily, tree specialists were on hand and made their best attempt to graft it back together. She pointed out that the success of the repair only proves the 'magic' of the park itself!

The Liberty Bell replica was cast from the mold of the actual Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. It is the last bell ever cast from these molds.

The Liberty Bell in Liberty Square was the only bell (of the three cast from the mold) that didn't crack after it cooled. Unfortunately, the mold broke after the casting of this bell, so no more were ever made. Clair also walked us over to the buildings in this land and pointed out the windows. She noted a rifle in one window, used to symbolize that the head of a house was home and ready to defend it. She also pointed out two lanterns in one window, representing Paul Revere's signal to the colonists.



At this point, we had reached the Columbia Harbor House and were invited in by Gregg, who we had met during check-in. He directed us upstairs, which turned out to be a large seating area, roped off into three sections.



We were located at the front of the room and our meals and pins were set up for our group amongst four tables. The meal flew by, as our tablemates were friendly and our sandwiches were tasty and filling! The 9:30AM tour group arrived soon after us, but they sat two sections away, so we didn't see them until lunch was over and we were leaving.

The Haunted Mansion was given a Dutch Gothic Revival style based on older northeastern mansions, particularly those in older areas of Pennsylvania and in the Hudson River Valley region of New York.

Outside of the Columbia Harbor House, Claire inquired into the groups' interest in riding the Haunted Mansion attraction. Almost everyone enthusiastically agreed and before we headed over

there, she reviewed a large number of details that I hadn't gotten to catch in the last two days! First, she asked us to observe the ornate architecture around the top edge of the building. She noted that the roof is lined with chess pieces, because other Imagineers decorated the original model with the designer's chess game pieces one night and the designer chose to incorporate them.

A portrait of Master Gracey rests above the grand fireplace and slowly changes into a rotting corpse.

Then, she pointed out the stretching room didn't have to be an elevator at this park, so the ceiling actually rises instead the floor lowering. She noted the Hidden Mickeys in the frame of Master Gracey in the first room. She mentions the invisible piano player's shadow and the inverted busts in the library whose eyes follow us as we go past.



She asked us to observe the clock features - the horns and tail - as well as the claw-like shadow across it as we ride by. She told us the stretching door in the long hall was made of rubber. She mentioned how the 'Pepper's Ghost Effect' is used in the ballroom scene; The glass panels needed for the room - 2 currently used and two for backup - were flown in by helicopter before the roof was added to the building.

The bride in the attic wedding portraits wears an additional strand of pearls for each new wedding. This along with the wedding gifts displayed around the portrait, represent her increase in wealth with each marriage.

She noted in the attic the husbands head disappears in each picture and the ghost bride herself chants her vows evilly as we leave the room. She told us to look out for the Hidden Mickey in Grim Reapers hand in the end of the ride through the cemetery. As we finished the ride and found a 'hitchhiker' in our doom buggy, she explained that the 'ghosts' are on a conveyor belt behind the mirrors and are backlit so they show through the mirrors. The mirrors are designed such that only the color green shows through. After she finished, Claire walked us up to the exit where we waited a moment before entering through the 'servants' quarters' (AKA the handicap entrance.)

She walked us over to the portrait of Master Gracey and pointed out her earlier observations. She then led us into the stretching room and finally, onto the doom buggies. The ride was a real treat and went faster than the first two times because we were on the lookout for all we had just heard about!

WALKING ROUTE SECTION #3

After we all exited the ride and found each other, Claire pointed out one last observation to us. She noted that Mr. Toad was given a proper 'burial' after his attraction was removed - and pointed it out in the pet cemetery on the hill a few feet from the attraction exit! Funny!



We then walked from the Haunted Mansion attraction to the Emporium Shop on Main Street, USA. Along the way, we paused at the Liberty Square Bridge when we reached it. There, we were offered some additional information regarding Cinderella's Castle. All of Claire's extensive knowledge base has been very informative up until now, and it only got more interesting!

There are no actual stones in Cinderella Castle in Magic Kingdom, since the whole shell of the building is fiberglass.

Claire first pointed out the wire that Tinkerbell flies on for the Wishes Spectacular show. She noted the stained glass windows that behind it sits the Cinderella Suite. At that point, I asked her if the guests in that suite are stuck in their all night long and she mentioned that if they choose to leave the suite, they have an escort and they are limited to certain areas of the park. Claire reminded us that forced perspective is also used in this castle, where the windows on the upper floors are smaller than those on the lower floors. We continued on to Main Street, USA and walked through Casey's Corner to get to the Princess section of the Emporium Shop. When we all finally arrived there, Claire offered us some insight on the interior art. She pointed out that the painting at the back of the shop room mirrors the view of the front of the emporium from out on Main Street, USA.



She also pointed out the lady and gentleman clothing and accessories above the doorways on both sides of the room. At this point she explained to us that we would be exiting the store through the back door which has an airlock to guests can not see the backstage area behind it. She said the 'airlock' is small and might require two trips, but we were fast friends by then and all fourteen of us managed to fit in it at once!

On all the Disney World maps all of the parking lots are shown as green forest land instead of parking lots.

As we stepped out into east parking lot, we once again walked from a bright, vibrant park into a bland, colorless area. (It seemed much more of a contrast here, since the walkway behind Frontierland had been lush with trees and bushes.) Claire pointed out where the maintenance and HR buildings were, as well as the Jungle Cruise maintenance facility, and the backstage parade route. She noted that the park map shows this area a wooded land and people regularly suggest that it should be made into picnic areas because they do not realize it is actually a parking lot.

Kingdom was built over a series of tunnels, called Utilidors, a portmanteau of utility and corridor.

We finally headed toward a stairwell that would take us to the famed underground tunnels. As we reached Stairwell #19, Claire pointed out an AVAC canister sitting in a small room adjacent to the main set of buildings there. She noted that the canister looked like any large metal trash can (and she was correct.) These canisters are where the cast members take the garbage and in turn, the canisters are attached to a central system of pipes in the tunnels that send the trash to the main unit behind Frontierland.

WALKING ROUTE SECTION # 4: UTILIDORS

As we reached the bottom of Stairwell #19, we could see that the corridors were about eight-to-ten feet wide, which made them deep enough to store supply pallets along one wall and still manage to be able to maintain a path for golf carts and other electric-powered vehicles. We were warned to step to the side when carts came by, and good thing, too, because at least three vehicles passed by during the forty-five minutes we were down there. Claire gave us time to get a good look around. There were large maps of the Utilidor Floor Plan at the intersection we were standing in and then another one at the corner that we walked north to. Just then, we were passed by other cast members from the tour department, one in particular, Mike, who seemed to like to joke with Claire. He stood behind her for a moment or two and repeated her movements while she

was pointing out some highlights of the tunnels. She took it in stride when she caught him and sent him on his way!

The walls are color coded for the land in which they are under to allow easy navigation. Since some people are color blind, the names of the different lands and pictures relating to each land also appear on the walls.

The walls of the Utilidors under Main Street, USA were painted a light peach color on the top half and a muted maroon on the bottom half. Claire pointed out the wires above for the animatronics and electronics. She pointed out the crates, and walked us to the map at the corner nearby and pointed out some highlights. She showed us where the Mouseketeria was and all the satellite break rooms around the park. Next to the map was a community board that had notices and current events for cast members. Someone asked if emergency teams ever transported guests through the tunnels and she said that they do not, but that the emergency team uses the tunnels to get to places and it saves a lot of time. She continued with her overview of the tunnels and people regularly walked by (and checked us out.) We did get to see a 'headless character', in a sense. Only a few minutes later, a cast member comes walking out of the nearby stairwell with the Mad Hatter wig and nose on (but regular street clothes otherwise.) He did a double take when he saw us, but he didn't slow down (as he continued on his way to 'Wonderland', I guess.)

The 'Hall of Presidents' wigs are made of human hair and cost an average of \$2,000 to \$4,000 each.

We then continued west down the tunnel where more supply pallets dominated the north side of the hall. As Claire began to point out the framed posters on the walls, a cast member in a Liberty Square outfit passed by with another cast member. Claire gave us a brief history of the posters, which began with advertisements for Disney's original cartoons. As we walked down the hall, she pointed out a huge aerial photo of the Magic Kingdom across the hall on the north side. She gave us a rundown of the parade route and other points of interest from that photo. Just past the row of posters were two display cases hung on the upper half of the wall that held cast member costume items and animatronics pieces. It included a Cinderella wig, an animatronics head, and some notes and write-ups on these items. Claire noted that wigs were a running joke amongst cast members because: "fake people wear real hair and real people wear fake hair".

If a guest or cast member needs medical attention, an "alpha unit" is called rather than an "ambulance" so that guests do not become nervous.

At this point we reached the intersection of another hall at the end of these display cases. Just off this intersection on the other hall (that ran south) was a door with the label 'e-Team' office. Just as we reached the intersection, Claire pointed out an Alpha unit at the far end of the south-bound tunnel. It was only the size of a small electric truck, and it was more uncomfortable to watch than expected. Just knowing it was on the move for a guest made it a less than appealing sight! At the corner of the intersection, an LCD TV was set up about seven feet off of the ground. Below the TV was a small paper sign from the tours department that said not to stack items in front of the TV. Claire unlocked a small metal box next to the sign and took out a remote to start a video on the TV.

The park's computer system, the Digital Animation Control Systems (DACS), is operated and monitored from control rooms in the Utilidors.

The short video was about ten minutes long and highlighted two specific areas in the Utilidors. The first was the DACS systems (Digital Animation Control System) which was main engineering. This area controlled most, if not all, of the lights, sounds, music, audio-animatronics, and any other electrical or automated system in the park. The second area was the laundry and costuming section, which included information about cast members procedures for borrowing costumes. Cast members are allowed to sign out up to five costumes at a time and can launder the costumes themselves or bring them back for laundering. Each costume has a barcode, and they each get checked after laundering to make sure they are still in good condition. After the video, we walked the rest of the way down the hall we were on (to the west) and then simply headed back upstairs through stairwell #21 to the west parking lot.

WALKING ROUTE SECTION #5

When we stepped out into the sunlight again, Claire collected us together and pointed out some more buildings: the break room, the Goofy bus stop, the executive offices, security and once more, the endpoint of the Tinkerbell wire. She then led us to a break in the white fence (where there was another full length mirror for cast members to check their appearance.) One step through the fence, and we were back on Main Street, USA! It was almost like fallin OUT of a rabbit hole! (The break in the fence was between Tony's Town Square Restaurant and ??.

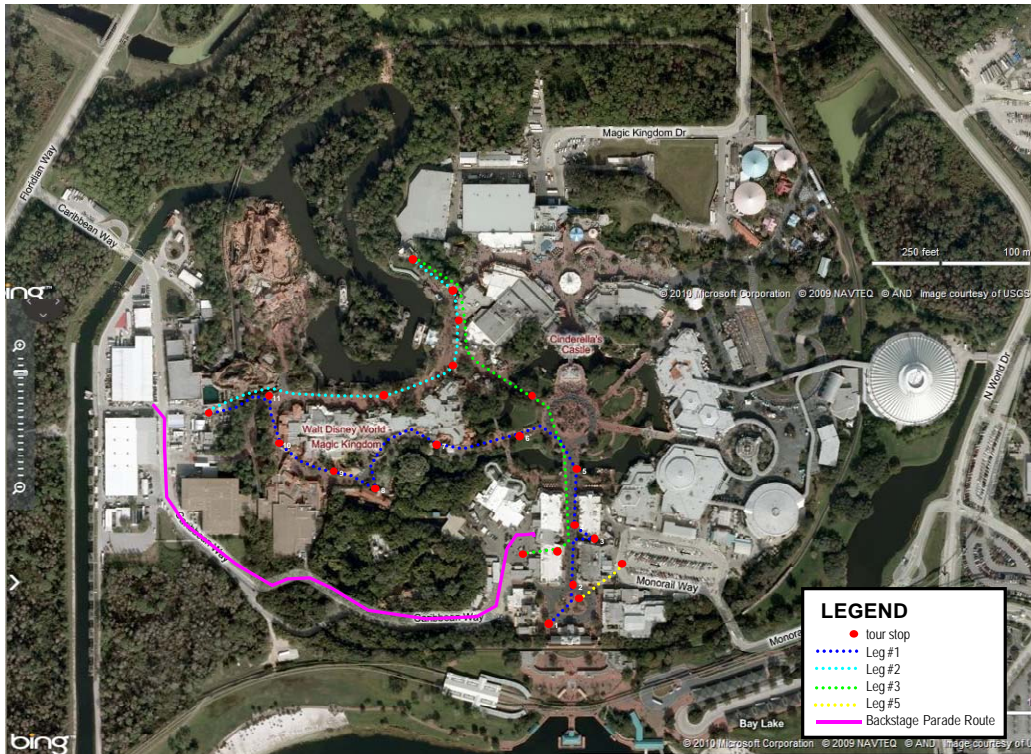
The park contains two statues as tributes: the Partners statue of Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse in front of Cinderella Castle and the Sharing the Magic statue of Roy O. Disney sitting with Minnie Mouse in the Town Square section of Main Street, U.S.A. Both were sculpted by veteran Imagineer Blaine Gibson.

Claire led us over to the Sharing the Magic statue in the center of the Town Square. She pointed out some things around us, like how Exhibition Hall was going to be removed for Character Meet and Greet soon (so now was a good time to check it out!) She noted that Walt (in the Partners statue) is pointing down Main Street, USA to Roy and Minnie Mouse.



On this note, she concluded her tour and asked us if we had any questions. We had asked a lot of questions throughout the tour so everyone was actually quiet. She also offered us more stickers if we would like them. We thanked her for our tour and decided to spend out last few minutes at the park where Claire had recommended... Off we headed to Exhibition Hall!

The Keys to the Kingdom tour route followed this path through the park:



FYI, below is a list of on-line reports of this tour:

http://allears.net/btp/tour_kk16.htm

<http://themouseplace.com/tour2.html>

<http://www.disboards.com/showthread.php?t=2186962> (post#7)

<http://www.disunplugged.com/2009/03/31/take-the-keys-to-the-kingdom-tour/>

<http://www.enchanter.net/writs/disneytour1.html>

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/travel/shattuck/4848590.html>

<http://www.publicspark.com/2009/07/30/keys-to-the-kingdom-tour-general-description-and-review-with-spoilers/>

<http://micechat.com/forums/walt-disney-world-resort/28279-summers-keys-kingdom-tour-review-spoilers.html>