

Listener Questions

Matt writes in with a follow-up to last week’s EPCOT After Hours question:

You get in at 7pm so you can do some of the smaller attractions at that stage/ walk round world showcase.

I would recommend watch fireworks around Remy and then make Remy your first ride, which should be close to the event starting time (Starts at 9:30pm so you have half an hour which is outside park hours)

Also when do the maths on cost you didn’t count the value of being to able to as many Mickey ice cream bars as you want.

I have a similar trip booked for February but unfortunately it is the week where there is only Magic Kingdom and Hollywood Studios after hour events(I would definitely book if there was Epcot as it is by far my favourite park) I have no real interest in the Hollywood Studios event but is the Magic Kingdom one worth it.

Main reason would be for the two fireworks shows. Would you recommend booking just to have the chance to see Disney Enchantment?

Gene also writes in about EPCOT’s After Hours with this:

I’d also mention that the After Hours event is attraction-focused only, and the World Showcase and all its shops and dining are greatly limited. I have found the EPCOT After Hours event means not being able to visit many of the World Showcase pavilions.

On another note, I once asked the show about the return of Tables in Wonderland, and y’all thought that was never going to happen. Just wondering, with the reality now of so many parkgoers opting for Lightning Lanes and eschewing TSR dining (other than character meals) would it make sense to make dining for locals more appealing to fill those empty tables by bringing back TiW?

Len says:

From Matt:

My family and I are staying in a 3-bedroom Grand Villa Theme Park View at Bay Lake Tower for New Year’s Eve Eve and New Year’s Eve this year. What’s the best room number to request?

Len says: I’ve stayed at a BLT 3BR GV and so have some experience there.

All of the 3BR GVs are on floor 14. They’re all going to have fantastic views. Also, since they’re so high up, you’ll see less of the BLT parking lot and more of the park.

I think [8416](#), [8420](#), and [8422](#) are your best bets for better MK views, since they’re oriented towards the park.

A couple of other things about these rooms:

- They face west, and with all the glass can get very warm in the afternoon and evenings. Be ready to use the huge shades to keep the place cooler.
- You should be able to take the stairs to the 16th floor to watch the fireworks, even without a reservation.

From Michelle:

1) What happened to the Festival of Fantasy parade? It seems to be a shell of its former self. Last week, there was a small group of lost boys, two walking thorns, three coral dancers, and two dancers before Rapunzel’s float. I remember being so delighted by the group of ballroom dancers in their gorgeous feathers who started the parade and then a full unit of dancers between every float. I know it got pared down after COVID, but with each return trip I was hopeful it would come back to its former glory. Instead, there seem to be fewer elements each time I go back (RIP Merida’s float). Are they slowly phasing out the parade? I know this is “No Negative November”, so should I spin this as my beloved dancers are getting some well deserved rest?

2) Why doesn’t Disney sell books at the gift shops? At Epic Universe, I was happy to see the original How to Train Your Dragon novels in the Berk gift shops. My family loves to read, and we have always wanted to bring home Disney books as souvenirs and can never find one.

With the rise of Romantasy novels and the prevalence of specialty book crates offering sprayed edges and special covers, why hasn’t Disney jumped on this opportunity? I’d love to buy some special editions of the classic fairy tales. Imagine what they could charge if they put some crystals on the front, to make them look like the books in the opening sequences of classic animated movies.

And from Regan:

Heard your mention on this week’s podcast that The Edison may have been inspired by the Hyperion Wharf concept, and my callous arrogance compelled me to butt in. The Edison at WDW is an imported concept - the original Edison operated in an actual former power plant in the basement of a building at 108 W. 2nd Street in Downtown Los Angeles for over a decade, until it became a COVID casualty.

2026 Schedule

Dinosaur and Dinoland closes

RnRc Closes

Buzz Re-Opens

BTMRR Re-Opens

2025 Schedule

May - Epic Universe

May 19-22 Previews for Villains and Little Mermaid shows

May 22 - Opening

Walt Disney World

May 27 - Villains at DHS, Little Mermaid show at DHS

Summer (June, July, August)

MK nighttime parade Disney Starlight: Dream the Night Away

July 22 - Test Track

Aug 27 - Beak & Barrel

September

October

November 1 - Zootopia: Better Zoogether

December

South Florida Water Management District permit searches

<https://www.sfwmd.gov/doing-business-with-us/permits>

Location Information

Click To view project boundary

County

ORANGE

City/Municipality

BAY LAKE

Project Address (Street, City)

Dinoland Drive
Disney's Animal Kingdom

select Permit Family for more search fields

ERP

WC

WU

application Status

Resolved

application No

Project Name

Customer Full Name

Company Name

disney

Water Body Name

RCID2

Water Body Type

RCID M54

Water Body Class

RCID M54

Water Body ID

RCID2 (M54)

Special Drainage District

CENTRAL FLORIDA TOURISM OVERSIGHT DISTRICT

Received Date (From)

Received Date (To)

12/31/2024

Final Action Date (From)

Final Action Date (To)

Permit Number

Search

Basic Search

Clear

Customer Association

Full Name	Company	Association
II Jose Garrido	Walt Disney Parks and Resorts US, Inc	Applicant Owner Operating Entry Permittee
II Minerva Perez	Walt Disney Imagineering	Engineering Consultant
II Timothy Stanford	Central Florida Tourism Oversight District	Payer Interested Party
II	Disney Worldwide Services, Inc.	Payer

Application Search Results

Download

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Application No*	Permit No *	Project Name	Permit Type *	Application Type	Received Date*	Final Action Date**	Application Status*
200305-2955	49-103143-P	Brown Ranch Access Road	Exemption	New	03/05/2020	03/30/2020	Resolved-Completed
180702-2	48-00714-P	K Building	Individual	Major Modification	07/02/2018	07/24/2018	Resolved-Completed
160901-6	48-00714-P	Legal Description Change Letter Mod	Individual	Minor Modification	09/01/2016	02/10/2017	Resolved-Withdrawn
160901-6	48-00714-P	DHS Construction Laydown	Individual	Minor Modification	09/01/2016	02/10/2017	Resolved-Withdrawn

COMMERCIAL BREAK

We’re going to take a quick commercial break. When we return, Geology Jim tells us how Disney built the Matterhorn. We’ll be right back.

MAIN TOPIC

Matterhorn Bobsled Origin Story
Feature piece for November 2025

Okay. On this podcast, we’ve talked a lot about Walt Disney, the guy who basically invented the theme park. Likewise Walt Disney, the guy who ... Well, while he may not have actually introduced sound cartoons to the world. Feature-length animated films as well ... But Walt definitely moved that art form to the next level.

What I’d like to talk about today is Walt Disney, producer. That guy who – **the year** that Disneyland first opened (**1955**) – suddenly found himself needed to churn out a crazy amount of content.

I mean, listen to this ... That year, Disney Studios had to have **four** feature-length films (among them “Lady & the Tramp.” Which was the first feature-length animated film to ever be produced in CinemaScope. Which meant a lot more work).

Walt also had to prep 25 new episodes of his weekly “Disneyland” TV show (which was beginning its second season on ABC on **September 14th of that year (1955)**).

Then there was the “Mickey Mouse Club” TV series. Which was going to debut on ABC just **three weeks after that** on **October 3, 1955**. And since that show was going to air in the afternoons **five days a week Monday through Friday** ... Well, Walt needed to have **101 episodes** of “The Mickey Mouse Club” ready to go on ABC that year.

And things got even crazier in the **Fall of 1956** ... Which is when ABC told Walt that they wanted him to make good on that promise he made back in **1953** (Which is when that television network – in exchange for providing the seed money [more importantly, securing the bank loan] that Walt needed to fund the initial construction of Disneyland ... got Disney to agree to produce three TV shows for that network:

- The "Disneyland" weekly TV series
- The "Mickey Mouse Club" show (which – again – ran **5 days a week** in the afternoons on ABC)
- And now – in addition to that – ABC also wanted "Zorro."

To be specific, ABC wanted a half hour-long western that would then lead off that network's Thursday night line-up starting at 8 p.m. Which is why – in the **Fall of 1956** – Walt now had to prep 39 episodes of "Zorro." Which would then begin airing on ABC in **October of 1957**.

And Walt is doing all this while he's riding herd on Disneyland during its **first two years of existence**. Where there's a crazy amount of trial by fire. Where Walt learns the hard way that ... A) people who've already paid to get into Disneyland aren't then interested in paying an additional admission fee to go see the "Mickey Mouse Club Circus." And B) in regards to Disneyland's Phantom Boats, giving little kids control over an actual boat is a very bad idea. They'll leave the dock and never come back.

Even so, Walt throws himself into this new world ... One where he has to come up with ideas for **three different** TV shows and new ways to expand his family fun park. Not to mention keep Disney Studios humming along making **three to four new** feature-length films for theatrical release every year.

Quick thought: Walt was the king of content creators back before anyone thought that what we do here on the Internet is content creation.

Of course, in a situation like this, you actually have to have things – books, magazine stories and the like – to turn into content. This is where Disney's literary acquisition team comes into play. They're the Studio employees who actually read all of these things and then make recommendations about whether or not the Studio should go ahead and acquire the film or television production rights to these books or magazine articles.

Which brings us to "Banner in the Sky," which the J.B. Lippincott Company published back in **January of 1954**. Written by James Ramsey Ullman, it's a fictionalized version of the first ascent of the Matterhorn.

Which – in the real world – is this mountain in the Alps that straddles the border of Switzerland and Italy. At **14,692 feet**, the Matterhorn is one of the highest summits in all of Europe.

More to the point, because of its near symmetrical pyramidal peak, the Matterhorn remained unclimbed 'til the **19th century**. In fact, when the first ascent was made back in **1865**, *four of the seven men* who took part in that climb then fell to their deaths.

And since that time, **over 500 climbers** have died attempting to climb the four faces of the Matterhorn. This is why the Germans call this peak "Berg der Berge." Which means "mountain of mountains," a place where only the most experienced of climbers. Others flat-out call the place – given its deadly history – the Murderhorn.

Anyway ... "Banner in the Sky" comes out in **January of 1954**. And while it's not a best seller, this James Ramsey Ullman book is that year's runner-up for the Newbery Award. Which the American Library Association presents annually to what it sees as the most distinguished children's book to be published the previous year in the US.

Anywho ... Disney Studios (given that it largely produced films for the family) pays close attention to who gets the Newbery. So when "Banner in the Sky" became that year's runners-up, the folks in the literary acquisition gave it a read and liked what they saw. And they then recommended to Walt that the Studio option this book's movie rights.

And Walt was – like – "Really? Make a movie about that mountain where all those people died? That's something we can turn into a TV show or a feature film?"

And the literary acquisition team was – like – " ... the central character in this story is Rudy Matt, a **16-year-old** boy who's determined to conquer the Citadel. Which is the mountain that towers over the village in Switzerland where Rudy lives.

15 years previous, when Rudy was just a baby, his father – Josef Matt – died while attempting to summit the Citadel. In the years since then, no one has attempted to kill this murderous mountain. Out of respect for this tragedy that has befallen the Matt family.

Anyway, Rudy has decided – to honor his Dad's memory – he's going to do what his Dad couldn't. Which is climb the Citadel."

Anyhow ... The literary acquisition ends their recommendation by saying " ... Besides, the mountain in 'Banner in the Sky' isn't called the Murderhorn ... er ... Matterhorn. It's called the Citadel. So people who see this movie or TV show aren't going to associate the mountain in this production with the real Matterhorn."

Which is why Walt then says "What the hey" and acquires the movie rights to "Banner in the Sky" in **July of 1957**. And this project basically flies through the pre-production process at Disney Studios. Because – less than 11 months later – this movie is now shooting on location in Switzerland in June of 1958.

So how do we go from a movie – which deliberately isn't set on the Matterhorn because that mountain has killed over 500 climbers – to the Matterhorn Bobsleds at Disneyland? We'll get to that in a moment. But first ... This.

SECOND AD BREAK

And we're back.

Okay. So back now to “Third Man on the Mountain,” which is what Disney’s movie version of James Ramey Ullman’s “Banner in the Sky” wound up being called.

This Ken Annakin film (By the way, this was the ***third film*** that Annakin had made for Disney Studios. The first was “The Story of Robin Hood and His Merrie Men.” Which Disney released to theaters back in ***June of 1952***.

Walt was so impressed with Ken’s work on “Robin Hood” that – as soon as that film was done shooting – Disney had Annakin direct another live-action swashbuckler for his studio. That was “The Sword and the Rose,” which was released to theaters in ***July of 1953***.

Anyway ... Walt really liked working with Ken. So much so that – even while Annakin was working on “Third Man on the Mountain” – Walt was already talking with Ken about the next movie he wanted him to direct for Disney Studios. Which was that version of “Swiss Family Robinson” that was released to theaters in ***December of 1960***.

Quick side note: Ken Annakin was just proud of the fact that – of those four films he directed for Disney Studios – ***two*** wound up inspiring attractions-of-size at Disneyland.

- The Matterhorn Bobsleds – which first opened at the Park on June 14, 1959
- And then the Swiss Family Treehouse – which originally opened in Adventureland on November 18, 1962 (This Disneyland attraction got a new name ***two years ago today*** [i.e., ***The day*** this podcast goes live. As in ***November 10, 2025***. Anyway ... On ***this day in 2023***, it then became known as the Adventureland Treehouse)

And speaking of different names ... Once upon a time, there was ***almost a third attraction*** in Disneyland that was then ... Well, based / named after a Ken Annakin film.

To explain: For the longest time, there was a castle that was going to be built at the end of Main Street, U.S.A. that didn’t have a name. Early plans for the Park state that this structure was – first – the medieval castle. Later on, it was then known as Fantasyland Castle.

Then Walt decided that it might be smart if this structure were associated with a specific Disney character. So first it was known as Robin Hood Castle (tying this building to that live-action movie that Ken directed for Walt back in ***1952***. There was even some talk – at this point in the project – to extending the moat in front of the castle in such a way so that ... Well, one of the daily entertainment offerings at Disneyland would then be a recreation of that moment from “The Story of Robin Hood and His Merrie Men” where Robin first met Little John, and they then had their fateful encounter on that log crossing that stream).

But then Walt thought better of that idea and decided that it really should be a royal who lives in Disneyland’s Castle. Which is why – for a time – this building was then known as Snow White Castle. But then – to help hype Disney Studio’s upcoming animated release (Which seriously fell behind schedule and then wouldn’t arrive in theaters ‘til December of 1959) – this same building then became known as Sleeping Beauty Castle.

Anywho ... Again, Annakin almost had three attractions at Disneyland named after those four movies he’d made for the Studio. More to the point, Ken was ***only the second*** film director to be named a Disney Legend. This happened back in ***2002***. And that’s how highly the folks at Disney thought of Ken Annakin, who we lost back in April of 2009 at the age of 95.

Anyway ... Given the Matterhorn’s murderous reputation, Annakin insisted that – for safety’s sake – all of the actors & behind-the-scenes crew working on Disney’s “Third Man on the Mountain” on-location shoot undergo two weeks of mountaineering training before cameras started rolling.

Also ... While “Third Man in the Mountain” was shot on location in Switzerland (The outdoors stuff, I mean. The scenes set indoors in this film were then shot on a soundstage in London weeks after all of the on-location stuff had wrapped), this movie wasn’t shot anywhere near the actual Matterhorn.

It was shot in Zermatt, some ***145 miles away*** from the Matterhorn. Though Walt – when he was in town to sell Ken on the idea of making a movie version of “Swiss Family Robinson” for Disney as his next project – did make the ***nearly four hour-long drive*** over to that part of the Alps to see for himself why people were so impressed with this particular peak.

So Walt gets out of the car and sees the Matterhorn in the distance. And he immediately gets why people are obsessed with this specific Alp.

As the story goes, Walt walks into the nearest gift shop and buys a postcard with a dramatic picture of the Matterhorn on the front of it. He then addresses this postcard to Vic Greene, who – at the time – is the lead art director at WED. And other than Vic’s address, Walt reportedly writes only two words in the back of this postcard. Which are “... build this.”

So – just to be clear here – the Matterhorn Bobsleds aren’t based on Disney Studio’s “Third Man on the Mountain” movie. And how could then be? After all, this Fantasyland favorite – Disneyland’s first really-for-real thrill ride – opened on ***June 14, 1959***. Whereas Disney’s movie version of “Banner in the Sky” wouldn’t open in theaters ‘til ... Well, ***66 years*** ago today. By that I mean: ***November 10, 1959***.

By the way, if you’re a classic science fiction fan, it is kind of a trip to see Michael Rennie – who played that alien visitor in the original “The Day the Earth Stood Still” (first released to theaters back in ***September of 1951***) – basically playing the lead in this Disney film. He’s Captain John Winter, who – spoiler alert – eventually leads the first successful ascent of the Citadel.

Kept expecting Rennie – as he struggled up that mountain – to turn to the camera and say “Klaatu barada nikto.” The original “Day the Earth Stood Still” (directed by Robert Wise, by the way) is still a great film. The remake for **2008** with Keanu Reeves isn’t bad either. Whereas “Third Man on the Mountain” ... It’s okay.

Beyond that ... At some point, we need to bring Jim Shull on “Disney Dish” to discuss that time when the Imagineers discussed changed the ride configuration of Disneyland’s Matterhorn in such a way that you’d actually experience this Fantasyland attraction in the exact same way that a luge athlete might in the Olympics. As in: Lying flat on your back, feet first.

And – yes – I’ve seen the pictures of the actual test vehicle they used at Disneyland to test a luge-themed redo of the Matterhorn. Not to mention an image of Mr. Shull actually lying down on this thing prior to then riding around the track of this thrill ride to test this vehicle.

But that’s Jim Shull’s story to tell. Not mine.

WRAP-UP

That’s going to do it for the show today.

You can help support our show by subscribing over at Patreon.com/jimhillmedia, where we’re posting exclusive shows every week. Our latest show is on [Disney’s Corporate Lounges](#) and there’s a link in the show notes.

And here’s a link to [Jim Shull’s Disney Journey](#) channel on YouTube.

NOTES

You can find more of Jim at JimHillMedia.com, and more of me, len at touringplans.com and on The Case For ... With Chris Cox, a new podcast where Chris, Jim, and I debate one theme park topic at a time, such as

PRODUCER CREDIT

Regular Show: We’re produced spectacularly by Eric Hersey and David Grey, bringing their world famous stuffed mushrooms and bacon dips to the second annual South Carolina Pimento Cheese Festival, on Saturday, March 14, 2026 at Saluda Shoals Park, that’s on St Andrews Road - look for the entrance between the Aldi and the Wendy’s - in beautiful, downtown Columbia, South Carolina.

BRIDGE TO CLOSING

While Eric and David are doing that, please go on to iTunes and rate our show and tell us what you’d like to hear next.

CLOSING