1,500 Disney employees in front of Cinderella Castle

LIFE
Disney World Opens

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Mickey opens in Florida

DISNEY MOVES EAST

The new site is Florida, but the air is pure old Disney. Who else could be responsible for this carefully crafted vision of the American past, the intricate, hokey, hugely expensive assemblage of lives and places that never were? Walt Disney World, which opened this month, is $400 million worth of amusement park, vacation resort and planned model city emasculated onto the scrub-pine flats outside Orlando, Fla. The Disney trademark is all over it: the businesslike use of fantasy, the no-nonsense approach to nonsense.

Disney World incorporates some lessons learned in the original gold mine called Disneyland that opened 16 years ago at Anaheim, Calif. Some changes are minor. At Orlando the vinyl leaves on the Swiss Family Robinson Tree are draped with live Spanish moss. No such decoration at Anaheim. Disney World’s 18-story Cinderella Castle is more than twice as high as its Anaheim counterpart and houses a lavish restaurant. Anaheim has only one President, an animated Abraham Lincoln, but Disney World’s Hall of Presidents offers all 36 of them—in costume, in motion, and getting along famously.

The biggest lesson Disney’s people learned in Anaheim was on the periphery of the park, where a jungle of independent restaurants, hotels and other amusements moved in. “At Anaheim,” says a Disney officer, “we lost control of the environment.” They also lost control of an estimated $500 million business created by Disneyland’s draw. For these and other reasons, where Disneyland is just over 200 acres, Disney World is gigantic: 27,400 acres. With two Disney-run hotels built and three more planned, with a Disney-run transit system already shuttling the first of this year’s estimated ten million visitors around, control of the environment and the moneymaking is not likely to escape again.

Photographed by YALE JOEL

Visitors throng Walt Disney World’s Main Street, a flag-waving, lightbulb-bedecked version of a turn-of-the-century American town. Mickey Mouse, played by an undersized employee who specializes in the part, leads a gaggle of Disney characters through the park.
A WORLD WITH LOTS TO DO IN IT

At the heart of Disney World’s 27,400 acres is the Magic Kingdom (foreground), a theme park much like California’s Disneyland. A stern-wheeler offers a winding cruise of the Rivers of America in the foreground. The red-brick Haunted Mansion (far left), Cinderella Castle (center) and Main Street (upper
right) are Disney landmarks. The most striking differences are outside the park, where the A-shaped Contemporary Resort-Hotel (top center) straddles a strip of land between the natural Bay Lake (left) and the Disney-made Seven Seas Lagoon (right). Boats, trams and a monorail passing through the hotel lobby shuttle visitors around the park. Fifteen miles from Orlando, Walt Disney World aims to be a year-round vacation spot offering golf courses, horseback riding and water sports as well as the diversions of the Magic Kingdom. Disney already employs 6,000 people but, despite its acknowledged spur to the economy, some residents worry about rising prices, traffic jams, unbridled development and "relatives coming in out of nowhere to visit." The project rates passing grades from many environmentalists, although they fear further land use on the periphery of the project may deplete and pollute the region's water.
THE ANIMALS STAR ON STAGE AND STREET
MICKEY MOUSE REVUE

The Disney empire, which began in 1927 with a man, the late Walt Disney, and a mouse named Mickey, now includes hotels, resorts, amusement parks, motion picture and TV production, and merchandising. In 1970, the burgeoning company grossed $157 million. The Disney organization treats its founding figures and all their many descendants reverently, with the highest place belonging to Mickey. His face, a clever blend of flowers, decorates the lawn at the main entrance to the Magic Kingdom. A costumed Mickey leads frequent parades on Main Street and greets visitors. An electronic, animated, speaking Mickey (“Audio-Animatronic” in Disney-speak) leads an orchestra of colleagues in the Mickey Mouse Musical Revue.
GLOOMY CROONER

A melancholy electronic balladeer named Big Al stars with the Country Bear Jamboree. Other new Disney shows attempt to evoke nostalgia (“The Mickey Mouse Revue”) or indulge in straightforward flag-waving (“The Hall of Presidents”), but the Country Bear Jamboree offers simply comedy, with 18 electronically controlled bears performing lively hillbilly numbers.