Fantasy rules at Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom theme park in central Florida. I mean, where else can you see grown men walking around, singing "Yo ho ho ho, a pirate's life for me" while toting zonked-out toddlers on their shoulders?

But there is reality amid the fantasy — four venerable stars of steam railroad rescued from their Central American obscurity by the Disney people to add to the mystique and mayhem of magical family holidays.

Roger E. Broggie, a precision machinist and Walt Disney's original "Imagineer" who headed his studio machine shop, did well when Disney asked him to save money by finding and rebuilding two vintage locomotives for Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif., instead of constructing them from scratch. He then decided to do the same for Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

In 1969, Broggie discovered a fleet of Baldwins stored in Merida, Mexico, on the Yucatán Peninsula. He arranged a trip, taking along Transportation Superintendent Earl Vilmer to determine the condition of the locomotives.

Officials of the fast dieselizing Ferrocarriles Unidos Railway took Broggie to a storage yard, where Baldwin Ten-Wheelers Nos. 274 and 275, both built in May 1925; Mogul No. 260, built in September 1928; and still-in-service American-type No. 251, built in February 1916.

For more than 40 years, the engines had hauled bales of sisal (a strong fiber obtained from the leaves of Yucatán's agave plant that's used in making rope), other cargoes, and passengers to the docks in Progreso.

The four 36-inch gauge wood-burners cost Disney $8,000 apiece. Broggie and Vilmer were permitted to select half a standard-gauge boxcar load of brass bells, whistles, light housings, and other fittings.

The locomotives were loaded on five freshly painted flatcars and moved via an all-rail route of more than 2,600 miles — via the Yucatan railway, the Del Sureste Railway, the National Railways of Mexico, Missouri Pacific, Louisville & Nashville, and Atlantic Coast Line — to the Tampa (Fla.) Ship Repair & Dry Dock Co. for restoration.

Bringing back the prizes

At the shipyard, Broggie and Vilmer met George Britton,
Before they were stars: United Railways of Yucatan’s steam power was nearing the end of regular service when these images were made. No. 274 (top) was powering a mixed train at Tecoh, Yuc., on Oct. 4, 1964; two days before dieselization, while No. 260 posed for the camera at Merida, Yuc., on March 9, 1963. Top: Frank Barry; bottom: Henry Bender Jr.

Los Angeles supplied the boilers. The park’s fiberglass shop crafted cabs from a carbon-resin material to replace the worn-out wood-and-steel ones. Original domes, bells and other accessories were used, and the fireboxes were modified to burn low-sulfur reformulated diesel oil No. 2. New pistons had to be hand-lapped to fit old cylinders. Of all the brass had to shine like the sun, without scratches or blemishes.

“If we found a problem, we redid it,” Britton says. “That’s the way it had to be. The locomotives had to look beautiful as well as function perfectly. And that’s still the case.”

Britton’s job in rebuilding the engines was anything but easy. The park’s fiberglass shop provided an out-of-sight maintenance area with the Seven Seas Lagoon and proximity to the Frontierland train station and the Magic Kingdom. But Britton’s work was anything but easy.

“Each guest (the park has no “visitors”) is given a nifty name badge and a classy pin to take home and show to friends,” Britton says. “I looked at the cars instead of the engine. The first thing I told them was that if I didn’t know the first thing about railroad engines, “ Britton says. “I didn’t know the first thing — but I was willing to learn.”

And learn he did. The temporary job became permanent because it was a dream come true. Britton has spent more than 3,000 hours inside the Magic Kingdom:

“Walking around on the Big Thunder Mountain attraction as we passed, and the sharp-eyed Blanchard saw a third,” Britton says. “There’s a guy hiding back there,” he grinned. “He didn’t want to ruin your show.”

The train continued to Mickey’s Toontown Faire, where passengers were to get their backstage look. Conductor Irwin Hamburger lined the switch to preserve the mystery. We spotted a couple of Disney people walking around on the Big Thunder Mountain attraction as we passed, and the sharp-eyed Blanchard saw a third. “There’s a guy hiding back there,” he grinned. “He didn’t want to ruin your show.”

Taking the tour

The locomotives had to look beautiful as well as function perfectly. And that’s still the way it is today.”

Blanchard misidentified the locomotive pulling the show train as the green-boilered Lilly Belle because it usually hauls the show trains green coaches. In fact, on the point that day was one of the Ten-Wheelers, the red-boilered Walter E. Disney. The Lilly Belle was back at the shop primping for a boiler inspection, which Blanchard said he aced two days later.

“I looked at the cars instead of the engine,” Blanchard sheepishly admitted.

“Then we boarded the show train for a private trip around the park. We took the rear seats in the last coach, because the protective railings on the left side of the first three cars had been removed to allow characters to disembark at Main Street later from both sides of the train. After zipping by the Frontierland station at 7 or 8 mph, the train trundled across a swing bridge harvested from the Florida East Coast Railway at Wakasso, Fla. The span carries the railroad over a canal that connects the Rivers of America with the Seven Seas Lagoon and provides an out-of-sight maintenance area for Disney watercraft. We spotted a couple of Disney people going on the train.”

The train continued to Mickey’s Toontown Faire, where passengers were to get their backstage look.

Conductor Irwin Hamburger lined the switch behind us and we backed onto a spur leading to the park’s rectangular “roundhouse,” although no photos are allowed past the switch to preserve the mystery. We spotted a couple of Disney people going on the train.”

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TLC, 1996). This is his www.TrainsMag.com train chuffed away to pick up its load of cos
side again, we disembarked and the show
there are safety and liability concerns. Out
side a working railroad shop, after all, and
inside while safely on the train. This is un
the upstairs) far enough to give us a look
usher Disney monorail trains in and out of
At the Disney shop
we backed across.

"Most of them are usually late," Blanchard
quipped, so there was plenty of whistle as we
backed across.

At the Disney shop
The 1-spot shoved our rear car into the
five-track shop (where 10 concrete beams
usher Disney monorail trains in and out of
the upstairs) far enough to give us a look
inside while safely on the train. This is un

Blanchard says. “Even the twins (the Ten-
and photographed the Bruggie getting a
drink from the railroad's only operating
water tank. That’s routine all day long on
every third trip around.

“They don’t have to take water that of-
ten," Blanchard said. “But it’s a good show.
Why not?"

Between Toontown and Main Street,
passengers are treated to serious stack talk
on a stiff 2 percent grade. In fact, when the
Toontown station opened coincident with
Mickey Mouse’s 60th birthday in 1988, there
were concerns about the tiny engines pull-
ning fully loaded trains from a dead stop.
Not to worry; they’ve consistently performed
that grade like stout artichokes. Britton
says there are other grades on the loop, but
they’re all downhill.

Fact is, on our tour, No. 3 made two
starts on the grade. Blanchard flipped a
switch and sounded an old automobile horn in
the cab, signaling an emergency. A rookie
crew member was being tested in the en-
gine. The newbie passed.

“I guarantee you, we do emergency
stops,” Blanchard says. He recalled an inci-
dent when a passenger dropped a camera
off and activated the flasher signals for Flo
Andersen W ay, a four-lane access road used by
supply trucks and employees — er, cast
members — coming to work.

Off and activate the flasher signals for Flo-

While a passenger drops a camera
off the left side of the train and a grand-
mother jumps over the handrail and rolls to
the ground after it.

“More likely, though, I’ll see somebody
hanging out of the train," he says. “If
they’re still doing it after three announce-
ments, we stop. We take those things seri-
ously. We don’t talk about it, but we have
to be trained to do it.”

Engines Nos. 3 and 4 would haul all of
this day’s guests. But when crowds are heavy,
all four trains run; the show train for the

**Garden Railways’ December issue features a
free article on California’s Disneyland rail-
road. For more details or to purchase a copy,
go to www.trains.com.**

Walt Disney World Railroad 4-4-0 No. 3,
the Roger E. Bruggie, lets off steam as a
monorail passes overhead. (Larry R. Failure)

Walt Disney’s other genuine steam
Walt Disney's only other steam power not manufactured from scratch are Disneyland Rail-
road’s Baldwin’s 3, 4, and 5, the Forney-style 0-4-4T Fred Gurley, was built in August
1895. Converted to a 2-4-4T, the engine was named for the A. McPherson, Topaka & Santa Fe
chairman and a close Disney friend. No. 4, an 0-4-0 switcher named Ernest S. Marsh, dates
from April 1925 and was converted to a 2-4-0. The Gurley was originally Godchaux Sugar
Co. No. 1 in Hammond, La. Disney obtained it from a railroad photographer; it entered
Disney service in 1958. The Marsh originally belonged to Raritan River Sand Co. in Rar-
tan, N.J., then went to an amusement park in Fremont, N.J. Disney acquired it from a
scrap metal dealer and placed it in service in 1959. They didn’t look like much when they
arrived in California, but Walt Disney was pleased that their purchase and restoration had set
the company back only $94,000, instead of the $100,000 it cost for the park’s first two
steamers. No. 5, a Forney-style 0-44T, converted long ago to a 2-4-4T, was built in Septem-
ber 1962 for a Labuchre Crossing, La., plantation. Disney acquired the engine in 1999 and
put it into service named for Disney animator and railroad enthusiast, Walt Kinkaid, in 2005. Op-
eration of the two original engines was so successful, Bruggie was inspired to “go for the
old” again when it came time to power the trains at Walt Disney World. — Bob Withers

Wheelies) don’t drive the same.”
All four engines have been overhauled in
recent years by the Tweetsie Railroad
shop in Blowing Rock, N.C. The locomo-
tives travel to and from Western North
Carolina via flatbed truck.

Station stops are honed to a science.
One long and one short blast of the whistle
announces the train’s approach, and the
conductor or firewoman rings the bell until
the train stops. After a minute and a half,
the engineer blows one short; after two
minutes another short. At two and a half
minutes, enough time to get 360 passen-
gers off and 360 more on, the engineer
checks for a green or yellow-over-green
signal and blows the traditional two shorts.
If the conductor gives a highball, the engi-
near answers with one and departs.
For almost four decades, the obscure lit-
tle engines have hauled Magic Kingdom
visitors, carrying 6.8 million in 2008. They’ve
remained accident-free and in tip-top shape —
a nostalgic touch of reality amid the fan-
ciful fantasy of Walt Disney World.

ROB WITHERS is a Baptist pastor and re-
tired newspaper copy editor in Huntington,
W.Va. He is the author of The President Travels by Train (TLC, 1996). This is his
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Railroad Story (Pentecost, 1997), for their
with this article.