

Big Thunder Mountain Railroad: The Wildest Ride in the Wilderness Returns with a New Track and Good Old Rollicking Fun

Hold onto your hats and glasses! The wildest ride in the wilderness reopens March 17 with an upgraded track, restoration of the historic Rainbow Ridge Mining Town, new paint on portions of the mountain and updates to the train vehicles. Guests taking a ride on this runaway mine train will discover some new surprises, too.

- Along with the new track, Big Thunder Mountain Railroad reopens in 2014 with an enhanced audio system that sharpens the sounds heard by guests on the trains and in the caverns and buildings. Even the wildlife at Big Thunder can be heard more distinctly.
- Big Thunder Mountain Railroad celebrated its grand opening in September 1979, becoming the third peak in the Disneyland Park “mountain range of thrill rides.” It was preceded by Matterhorn Bobsleds (1959) and Space Mountain (1977) and followed by Splash Mountain (1989).
- The attraction’s setting evokes 19th century gold-mining territory, with rugged bedrock and desert cactus. Guests board a mine train for a thrilling, high-speed adventure past the spires and buttes of the old West and into the tunnels and shafts of a dark and mysterious mine.
- Since its opening in 1979, Big Thunder Mountain Railroad at Disneyland has carried more than 225 million guests who are warned to “hold onto your hats and glasses” as they prepare to dip and drop into the canyons and caves of the Big Thunder ghost town.
- The unusual rock spires of Big Thunder Mountain were inspired by the “hoodoos” of Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah. The tallest spire on Big Thunder Mountain reaches 104 feet.
- Objects that may be spotted by guests in and around Big Thunder Mountain include a century-old stamp mill, hand-driven drill, press gears, picks shovels and other artifacts acquired from abandoned mines in Nevada, Colorado, Minnesota and Wyoming, as well as museums and swap meets.
- Subsequent versions of the attraction appeared in Magic Kingdom Park, Walt Disney World, Florida in 1980; Tokyo Disneyland Park in 1987 and Disneyland Paris in 1992.
- The miniature town of Big Thunder, seen at the end of the attraction, first appeared in 1956 as part of the Rainbow Cavern Mine Train and Mine Train through Nature’s Wonderland attractions. Many Disneyland fans still call it by its original name: Rainbow Ridge. The town is said to have been a favorite of Walt Disney, who built miniatures himself as a hobby.
- Other items from the Nature’s Wonderland days include the caves of Rainbow Caverns, the rockwork buttes at the entry to Balancing Rock Canyon, and some of the animals – the dynamite-devouring goat, coyotes, possums, snakes, turtles, vultures – who appear among the rocky cliffs surrounding the mine tunnels.
- Big Thunder Mountain Railroad was the first major design project for Walt Disney Imagineer and Disney Legend Tony Baxter, whose subsequent projects at Disneyland included the new Fantasyland of 1983, Splash Mountain and the Indiana Jones Adventure.

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