The project was conceived by California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo team BF10FA, and created for the 2017 Walt Disney Imagineering’s Imaginations Design Competition.

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The competition is a way for students and recent graduates to showcase their talents and for Walt Disney Imagineering to identify new talent.

Semifinalist
Deep through the rivers of Maine, on an island known by few, lie the ghostly remains of lost communities. The 1,755 acres of Swan Island are now alive with the whispers of the past. Just as the glowing embers of a campfire signify the remains of that which once thrived, Swan Island represents the flickering memories of an existence still capable of being revived.

Surrounded by water, yet only a few canoe strokes from the mainland, Native Americans and colonial entrepreneurs established livelihoods that harnessed the natural qualities of this native oasis. Legends say the remnant homes are alive with that which once was.

Present-day brings vast wildlife and the stray camper to the unoccupied territory. Bald eagles, wild turkey, and white-tailed deer alike drift through the indigenous forests.

Ember Park offers a chance for the past to truly transcend upon the present. This resort experience reignites the history of the land, and finally provides those whispers with a voice. The revitalization of Swan Island utilizes augmented reality to create a historical narrative, harnessing the rich culture of the island.

Guests partake in a stimulating, adventure-filled stay. Visual storytelling and hands-on outdoor experiences function to thrill visitors while offering comprehensive knowledge of this riverine destination.

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<th>Team Member</th>
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Story behind the design

As the seasons pass in the bustling state capital of Augusta, only a few miles to the north, Swan Island seems to stand still in time. Stretched along the banks of the Kennebec River, wild deer roam where settlers once walked. A few desolate structures once forgotten in time are waiting to be remembered again.

As the years tick by, Swan Island has welcomed the bravest of venturers to its shores. A modern-day ghost town campground, the enclave is accessible only by canoe and has continued to connect visitors to the more primitive ways of life.

Every aspect of the Ember Park experience is designed to further one’s exposure to nature while capturing the island’s archival moments and reawakening the lost history of Swan Island. Guests will encounter the truths of the Native American and Colonial people who once populated the scenic island through the advancements of today’s augmented reality capabilities. With Ember Park, explorers can now embrace the true history of the island.

User/ Guest Experience

Ember Park provides for an outdoor, immersive experience. The island harnesses the abilities of augmented reality and brings relevant cultural antiquities to light. Through sound and graphic manipulation, visitors can relive the past so clearly, it’s nearly tangible.

After arriving to Ember Park by boat, guests are provided with the AR glasses and taken through a historical timeline. The journey begins in the years the Abenaki tribe thrived, and progresses through the colonial era to the present day.

Throughout a guest’s voyage, adventure excursions are too equipped with the AR technology. These nature-based activities implement the newest advancements to engage even the most diverse of families.

Explorers spend the evenings in their yurt-like accommodations – reminiscent of the simple Native American housing, but with progressive and technologically advanced revisions.

Each technology at Ember Park ultimately allows resort visitors to see the island for the historical treasure trove that it is, while enjoying all the camping and recreational amenities of today.
Swan Island was the leading choice for consideration because of its natural wildlife and forest, and its rich history that spans several hundred years. The historical component of the site – through its Native American beginnings to its colonial demise – gives room for a thematic resort-like experience that garners the whispers of the past, and transforms them into the technologically rich educational opportunities popular today.

Swan Island is also ideal because of its close proximity to larger cities, being within 50 miles of an airport, hospital, and various other resort hotels, means traveling to and from the site is facilitated by local development. The island also takes part in the rich seasonal beauty that the pine forest of Maine has to offer, giving guests a new experience each season they come.

The rich history of Swan Island, and the remaining structures and artifacts on site are a tremendous asset for conversion into a historically themed resort. Campers on the island today report finding arrowheads and fragments of pottery from the once thriving Abenaki tribe, while the 34 existing homes and watchtowers seemed to freeze the island in the colonial state it was once abandoned in. Conversion of this beautiful island into a living museum is made a breeze with the abundance of resources available on site for utilization in telling the story of the land.
Ember Park
at Swan Island, Maine

WHISPERS OF THE PAST

Island Arrival
FERRY & VISITOR CENTER

Guests arrive to Ember Park by boat, departing from the neighboring city of Richmond, Maine. The short trip is augmented by stunning views of the island’s natural scenery and welcome center, where guests check-in to the resort, receive their AR glasses, and embark on the opening tour.
The use of augmented reality at Ember Park allows for a unique guest experience, connecting visitors to nature rather than further separating them from it. The technological implementations alleviate the need for immense ecological impacts.

Within the park, guests make use of their AR glasses to view the island as it once was. After arrival, visitors are taken on a scenic, timeline tour through Ember Park, passing by forgotten structures that still stand today. With augmented reality, these lost scenes are once again brought to life, displaying the immense history of the land.

Ember Park offers a multitude of exploration opportunities and activities which further make use of this technology. The specially designed AR glasses connect to smart phone devices, enabling QR codes to be utilized around the park. The glasses also display data automatically via hidden routers in certain regions of the resort.
Explorers of Ember Park spend the evenings in their tent-like accommodations – reminiscent of the simple Native American housing, but with ecological and technologically advanced revisions. This style of housing manages to capture and enhance the campground-like qualities of the island which are often utilized today.

Ember Park offers two yurt-style housing options: grounded and elevated. The former are a low cost option that provide guests with a more up close experience with nature, as well as ensuring accessibility for all. The elevated option, being the more expensive of the two, provides guests with a more modern tree house experience. Many of these yurts are connected to each other through a series of platforms, winding through the forested pillars of nature.

The glass roofs of the elevated accommodations double as a skylight – offering spectacular views of the night sky – as well as innovative, see-through solar panels. These panels offer additional energy for the resort.

Themed eateries around the resort offer high-quality meals from sustainable food sources. These options also hold cultural context on the island, like the S’more Sundae.

Many endearing keepsakes can be purchased at Ember Park, including plush animals of commonly spotted wildlife. These souvenirs function to delight guests even after their stay on the island.
Ember Park offers active, nature-based entertainment opportunities for voyagers of all types. Several of these activities utilize the augmented reality glasses which stand as the pinnacle of the resort’s true magic.

Programming at Little Swan draws inspiration from Low Impact Development initiatives to provide memorable experiences, while being ecologically friendly and innovative. Most of these activities are open year-round, with only changes in theme based upon the current season.

**WITH AUGMENTED REALITY**
- Outdoor Amphitheater – Showcases Abenaki and European live demonstration shows, 4-D movies, and star gazing education with AR enhanced constellation displays
- Outdoor Laser Tag – Single or co-op teams play against AR animated characters through the forested setting
- Outdoor Arena – Guests use the Ember Park smartphone app to seek out hidden objects within the arena
- AR Hiking – Ember Park glasses provide visitors with navigational information such as picturesque photography points and directions back to the campsite

**WITHOUT AUGMENTED REALITY**
- Cross-Island Zipline – Guests glide over the water on a line stretching from Little Swan to the main island
- Obstacle Course – Adventurers test their physical skills on the daunting camp obstacles
- Biking Course – Promoting eco-friendly travel, bikes are available for use on a matrix of paved pathways
- Rock-Climbing – Guests reach new heights with the multitude of rock wall difficulty options
- Kayaking – With respect to historic modes of transportation, visitors can explore the channel between the two islands and discover new wildlife
- Fishing – Ember Park encourages a strong link to history with one of the favorite pastimes of the colonial settlers