

l-r: Jack Lemmon, Glenn
Ford, Victor Manuel
Mendoza
COWBOY, 1958

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or 100 years filmmakers have been drawn to New Mexico's cinematic treasures – incandescent beauty, radiantly capricious atmospheric light and a sense of mythic character pervading the landscape. The following are a sampling of film locations that share in the distinctiveness that has brought filmmaking to all areas of New Mexico.

Bonanza Creek Ranch

One might think it is the coveted beauty and history of the Bonanza Creek Ranch that brightens Glenn Hughes' eyes as he speaks. It may be the mirth that bubbles up with the memories of the many special films made on his land. Then again, it could be that his eyes are speaking a language all their own – that unspoken language coming from the soul, shared by those whose love for the land has been cherished for generations.

It was called the Jarrett Ranch when Hollywood first showed an interest. The year was 1955 and the film *The Man From Laramie*, starring Jimmy Stewart. Hughes says that a former chauffeur for Mary Pickford, Louie Clifford, had started a cab company in Albuquerque while maintaining his Hollywood connections. It was Louie who brought Hollywood producers to the ranch. They quickly saw a stunning landscape that had, no doubt, equally enthralled the miners and settlers over the course of centuries – sloping green pastures (once the site of the gold mining town Bonanza) fed by a continually running artesian spring, ponds flanked by enormous grizzled cottonwoods and a century-old apple orchard hugging the base of Cerro de la Cruz. All a prelude to thousands of acres of open range land.

Other projects were soon to follow, such as *Cowboy* in 1958 with Glenn Ford and Jack Lemmon. For this Hughes actually brought 1,200 Corriente steers up from Mexico to use for the cattle drives. “We had an awful time with those cattle,” he recalled. “They trucked them in, and they were nervous, skittish.” Then they were put in pens with hot fences. The first day of shooting the cattle drive scenes, about 15 cowboys saddled up to move the herd. “Those cows from old Mexico had never seen a man on a horse,” Hughes grinned. “When they rode in among those cows, they went *beserk!*” The cattle tore down more than a mile and a half of railroad fence, and then scattered – some of them went all the way up to Hyde Park (in the mountains northeast of Santa Fe). The owner

New Mexico
on
Film

100 YEARS
OF
FILMMAKING
IN
NEW MEXICO

A Magical Land Begets

Timeless Imagery

by Mikelle Cosandaey

of a small dairy miles away called to complain that some steers had climbed on his haystacks and had his milk cows scared to death. “He was afraid of them, and I don’t blame him because they were a little rank,” Hughes said. “Those darn things, they just went everywhere!” Eventually the herd was gathered up, but about 200 were still missing. Hughes took it all in stride. “It was a great movie,” he shrugged.

“We do this because it’s fun,” admitted Hughes, and what makes it fun for him are the people he’s met and worked with. “I learned a long time ago that movie people and producers are just as common as the guy walking down the sidewalk. They are all people just like everybody else. Maybe they do things that look glorious that you would envy, but it’s really a lot of hard work. Yeah, they get paid good, but they work for it. Don’t think they don’t,” he said.

Hughes was open, then, to an offer in 1989 from an Italian producer wanting to build a stylized Western town set on his ranch. (There had been a set built once before, in 1980 for *The Legend of the Lone Ranger*, which was later torn down.) Daisy Town, as the new set was called, was built for the European television series *Lucky Luke* starring Terence Hill. The town was constructed around a two-story Victorian house that had been built for the movie *Silverado* in 1984. This house, which was also used in *Lonesome Dove*, was altered to become a mercantile.

Lucky Luke filmed for several years, and in 1994 Terence Hill returned with an Italian-German co-production, *The Fight Before Christmas*. A large ranch house set was constructed alongside a pond, and both it and the Western town set have been popular film sites ever since.

Hughes comes from a long line of New Mexico ranchers. His father and grandfather owned the Forked Lightning Ranch near Pecos years before it was eventually sold to Greer Garson and her husband Buddy Fogelson in the 1940s. Garson would show off the bullet holes in the mantel to visitors – which resulted from the gunfight Hughes’ father was involved in when New Mexico was still a territory. Personal history may be behind Hughes’ resolve to keep the Bonanza Creek Ranch intact. “It’s our intention to keep this thing in one piece, just the way it is,” he said. “It’s hard to hold it together, but I’m bound and determined to do it.” If history is an indication, the movie industry is well positioned to benefit in the years ahead.

Cook Ranch and the Silverado Set

Anyone entranced by a beautifully made Western movie is no stranger to that rush of exhilaration evoked by scenes of lumbering wagon trains heading west on precarious rutted trails, or those unforgettable wide-angle shots of horsemen galloping across an endless expanse of range land, their dust drifting into the backdrop of jagged mountains and piercing sky. These days another sensation can surface, too: a peculiar sense of dread that this gorgeous open territory may soon be swept up by the forces currently diminishing open space in the American West.

Terence Hill

LUCKY LUKE, 1990-91

courtesy Paloma Productions

Photo: Richard Twarog

