

MEMORY MOTEL

Dow Hotel and Dow Villa Motel
Lone Pine, California

BY AUDREY T. HINGLEY

You might be surprised to discover how many film buffs drop by Lone Pine, California, looking for worms.

Sandworms.

Truly tremendous ones.

They're diehard sci-fi fans, you see—or, at the very least, they've cultivated a fondness for the 1990 creature-feature-cum-eat-'em-up western *Tremors*. You can tell who they are, because they tiptoe around the landscape as if there's a mean annelid the size of a Mack truck burrowing beneath their feet. That's what *Tremors* was about, after all—huge, horrid, and hungry things that terrorized a frontier town in the Sierra Nevadas. And it was filmed right here in these here hills.

Indeed, odds say many of the cast and crew members stayed at the Dow Hotel and Dow Villa Motel, located along Highway 395 in the shadow of Mt. Whitney. And they weren't the first. Beginning with Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle's 1920 silent film *The Round Up*, Lone Pine became a popular destination for Hollywood filmmakers. At the foot of the Sierra Nevadas and only 170 miles from Hollywood, the area's streams and distinctive rock formations provided perfect crusty backdrops. A man named Walter Dow realized early on that production companies required lodging. He opened his hotel in 1923.

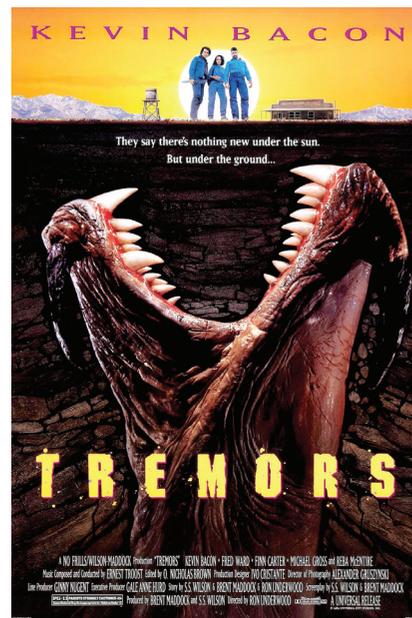
More than four hundred productions have since been filmed in or around Lone Pine. Western films remain the dominant genre,

although sci-fi films like *Tremors* have had their moments here, too. *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (1989) was filmed here. So were parts of *Django Unchained* (2012) and the scenes that featured the estate of Maximus in the Roman blockbuster *Gladiator* (2000).

Dow sold the hotel in 1957 to Mr. and Mrs. Joe Bonham and Mr. and Mrs. Ivan Turner. After their parents' deaths, the Bonham daughters, Jeanne Willey and Lynne Bunn, bought out their parents' partners and took over the Dow Hotel in 1978. The restored hotel boasts fifty rooms; an additional forty-two rooms are in the property's updated adjacent motel sections.

Anchored by a distinctive staircase and massive stone fireplace, the hotel lobby features walls lined with framed photographs of famous guests, autographed pictures, film memorabilia, and vintage hotel photos. The old key box, originally at the front desk check-in area, dates to the 1920s and is on display in the lobby. The hotel retains the distinguished air of its Hollywood heyday, when guests such as Robert Mitchum and William Boyd (who played Hopalong Cassidy in sixty-six films) stayed here. Restored rooms are named for Hollywood stars and boast themed décor—among them the John Wayne Room, where the actor stayed less than a year before his death, and the Roy Rogers Room, a two-room suite dedicated to Rogers.

"Lynne and I [grew up working] the phone switchboard when the movies came to town," Willey recalls. "John Wayne filmed his last



commercial here for Great Western Bank. He was everything you hear about him—so kind and generous with his time, and so handsome!

"Robert Downey Jr. stayed here [when he was filming 2008's *Iron Man*]...he stayed pretty much to himself, riding his bike all over town. He left his bike behind, and when we called about it, it wound up being donated to a local auction."

In addition to hikers and travelers coming from nearby Death Valley or passing through on their way to Yosemite National Park, guests at the Dow often visit Lone Pine's Museum of Western Film History just down the road. The museum houses set pieces from *Star Trek* and Roscoe Arbuckle's belt from *The Round-Up*. And yes, you'll even find an original monster sandworm used to film *Tremors* displayed prominently inside. Have a good look at the hideous thing. Then go back to the Dow Hotel and Dow Villa Motel and try to get some sleep. ♥



Dow Hotel & Dow Villa Motel • 310 South Main Street • Lone Pine, California 93545 • (760) 876-5521 • dowvillamotel.com

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