

# Where the West was Filmed

On location in  
Lone Pine, Calif.

// BY AUDREY T. HINGLEY  
PHOTOS BY DAVID BECKER

## LEGENDARY HOLLYWOOD

stuntman Loren Janes, 79, stands atop a steep hillside in California's Alabama Hills, recalling how he tumbled down the boulder-strewn granite landscape inside of a Conestoga wagon in the 1962 epic *How the West Was Won*.

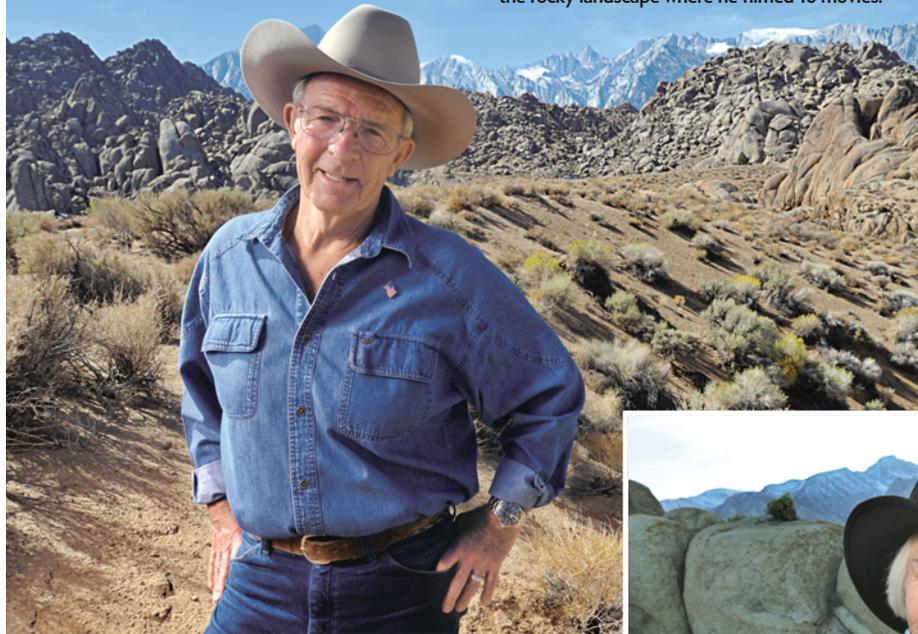
In that dramatic scene, which was shot three times, Janes and another stuntman were battered by cargo as they bounced around the wagon rolling "end over end" for 75 feet. "It took all day to do," Janes explains. "We had bruises, but I am very proud of how it turned out. People applauded that scene at the film's world premiere."

During his 50-year rough-and-tumble career, Janes has appeared in more than 500 movies and 2,200 TV shows and was Steve McQueen's stunt double from 1959 until the actor's death in 1980. But the rocky hills that surround Lone Pine, Calif. (pop. 2,035), at the foot of the eastern Sierra Nevada and snow-capped Mount Whitney, hold a special place in his heart as a paradise for filming the Old West.

"The town really looked after us. They were great," says Janes, who appeared in 16 movies filmed around Lone Pine, including *Thunder in the Sun* (1959) and *Nevada Smith* (1966).

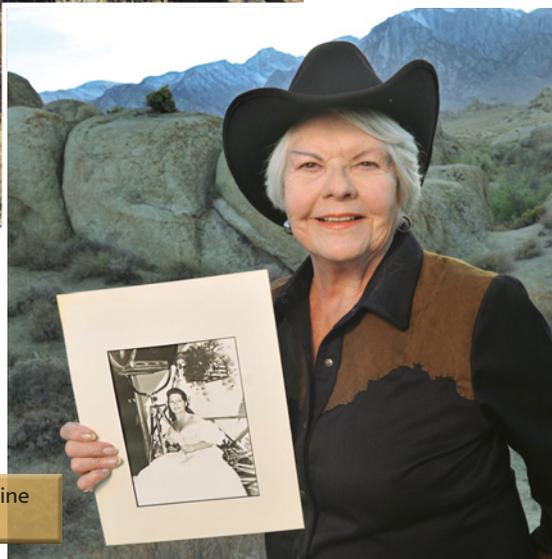
// Moviemakers film Roy Rogers in 1938 in Lone Pine, Calif., for *Under Western Stars*, his starring debut.

// Retired Hollywood stuntman Loren Janes revisits the rocky landscape where he filmed 16 movies.



## Movie set magic

With Hollywood only 170 miles away, moviemakers have embraced Lone Pine as a rugged backdrop since actor-director Fatty Arbuckle showed up with a crew to film the 1920 silent movie *The Round Up*. Since then,



nearly 400 movies have been filmed or partially filmed in and around the town, particularly Westerns created during the genre's heyday from the 1920s to the 1970s.

Among the silver screen luminaries to ride through the nearby hills were Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, John Wayne and William Boyd, who portrayed Hopalong Cassidy in 66 films.

The stunning landscape also served as the scenery of India for 1939's *Gunga Din* starring Cary Grant; Africa for two *Tarzan* films with Johnny Weismuller and Lex Barker; and the site of a car chase and shootout for Humphrey Bogart's fugitive character in *High Sierra* (1941). Today, the gleaming 1937 Plymouth coupe that Bogart drove in the film is on display in the town's Beverly and Jim Rogers Museum of Lone Pine Film History.

"You can get so many different scenes here," explains Dorothy Bonnefin, 81, a museum volunteer and Lone Pine resident who enjoyed a bit part in 1953's *King of the Khyber Rifles*, starring Tyrone Power.

Still, most visitors are drawn to Lone Pine by a love of Westerns—particularly movies from the 1930s and '40s and TV Westerns that surged in popularity from the 1950s to the '70s. Western films showcasing the local scenery include *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943) starring Henry Fonda; *Yellow Sky* (1948) with Gregory Peck, for which a 150-man construction crew built a ghost town near Lone Pine; *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955) with Spencer (Continued on page 8)

// Lone Pine resident Dorothy Bonnefin recalls her bit acting part in a 1953 film.



Watch Hopalong Cassidy on location in Lone Pine at [americanprofile.com/hopalong](http://americanprofile.com/hopalong)

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Tracy and Robert Ryan; *The Hallelujah Trail* (1965) featuring Burt Lancaster and Lee Remick; and *Joe Kidd* (1972) with Clint Eastwood.

Whenever Hollywood arrived, cast and crew filled local motels and, in the days before production companies brought their own caterers, Lone Pine restaurants provided on-set meals. “Locals built sets, supplied cattle and horses, and many local cowboys and local people were asked to be extras,” recalls Lone Pine resident Kerry Powell, 77, whose family-owned motel hosted guests that included Peck, Richard Widmark, Randolph Scott, Chill Wills and Mel Gibson.

## Fan festival

Powell grew up around moviemaking and fondly recalls as a child seeing elephants lumbering through the Alabama Hills as part of the filming of *Gunga Din*. “I thought Lone Pine should remember that history and capitalize on it somehow,” says the retired



See photographs from Lone Pine movies at [americanprofile.com/lonepine](http://americanprofile.com/lonepine)

businesswoman and artist whose murals, many depicting Lone Pine’s movie connections, dot the town.

While scouring Hollywood stores in the 1980s for movie-related art to decorate her family’s Best Western Frontier Motel, she came upon numerous photographs of “our hills and our mountains,” strengthening her conviction that Lone Pine should celebrate its film heritage. Powell teamed with Dave Holland, a Los Angeles-based film historian and location scout, to organize the first Lone Pine Film Festival in 1990, featuring actors Roy Rogers and Richard Farnsworth and *Lone Ranger* director William Witney as celebrity guests.

To Powell’s surprise, 800 people, many from other nations, showed up for the inaugural festival. Now America’s largest Western film festival, the Lone Pine Film Festival draws as many as 5,000 people each October for a three-day weekend including guest speakers, movie screenings and bus tours.

“What makes us different is



// Artist and retired motel owner Kerry Powell co-founded the Lone Pine Film Festival in 1990.

we actually are where the movies [were filmed],” says Robert Barron, 48, museum director. “We show the movies and actually take people to the locations where the films were shot.”

## Breathtaking backdrop

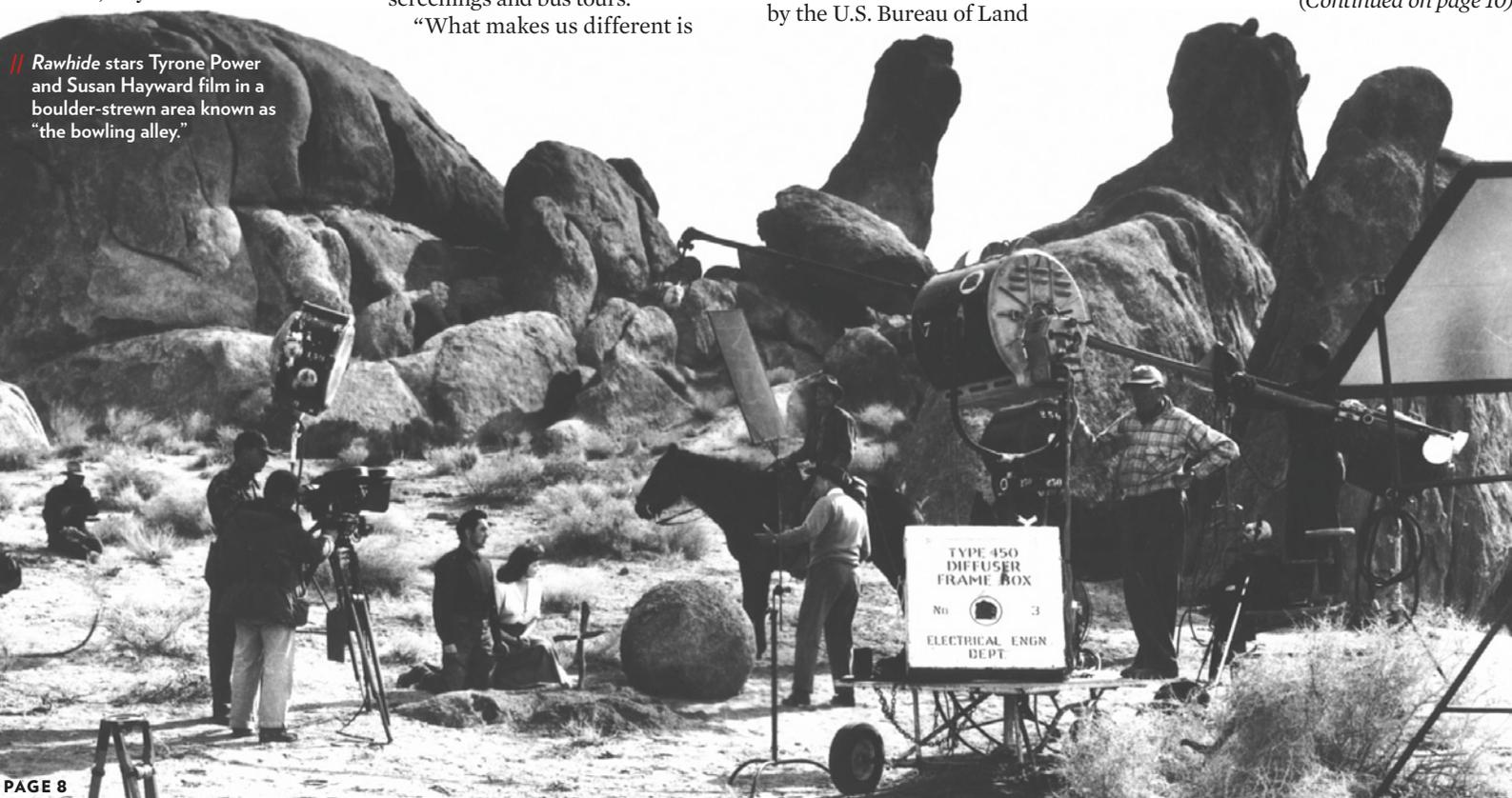
Most parts of the Alabama Hills are public property administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land

Management, which issues 30 to 40 film permits a year for movies, TV shows, commercials and still photo shoots, and monitors the land to preserve its rugged beauty.

In some ways, the desolate landscape has helped shape the world’s romanticized perception of America’s Old West through the lens of Hollywood.

(Continued on page 10)

// *Rawhide* stars Tyrone Power and Susan Hayward film in a boulder-strewn area known as “the bowling alley.”



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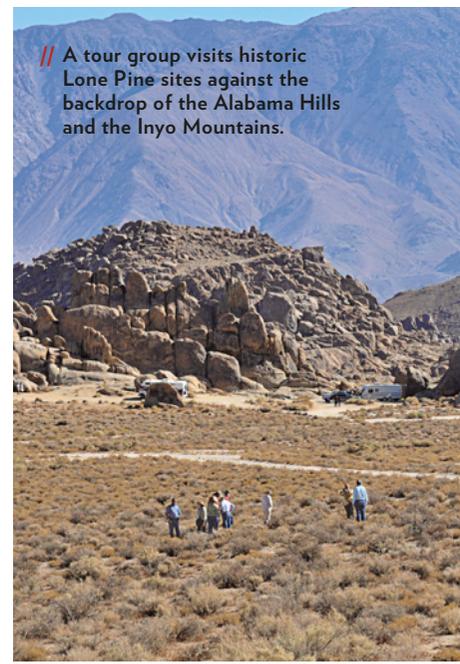
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// A tour group visits historic Lone Pine sites against the backdrop of the Alabama Hills and the Inyo Mountains.



(Continued from page 8)

Film historians say early Westerns depicted a sense of morality, freedom and rugged individualism that

resonated with fans across the world. "Good versus evil, one guy making a difference, the individual can have a large impact on his world," says Jonathan Kuntz, a professor in UCLA's School of Theatre, Film & Television.

Powell is more succinct. "[Fans] get to imagine they are Roy Rogers riding their horse through the rocks," she says.

While production of Westerns has slowed in recent decades, Lone Pine has provided the setting for other movies, including *Tremors* (1990), two *Star Trek* movies (1989, 1994), *Iron Man* (2008) and *Transformers 2* (2009). Numerous automobile commercials are filmed locally as well.

For most residents, however, the area's panoramic scenery forever is associated with the cowboys, American Indians, gunfights and

**The 2011  
Lone Pine  
Film Festival,  
scheduled  
Oct. 7-9,  
will celebrate  
the 100th  
birthday of  
Roy Rogers.**



cattle drives captured on film when Hollywood first came to town. "I never tire of the opportunity to visit where the cowboys I idolized actually stood as they made cinematic history," Barron says. ★

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