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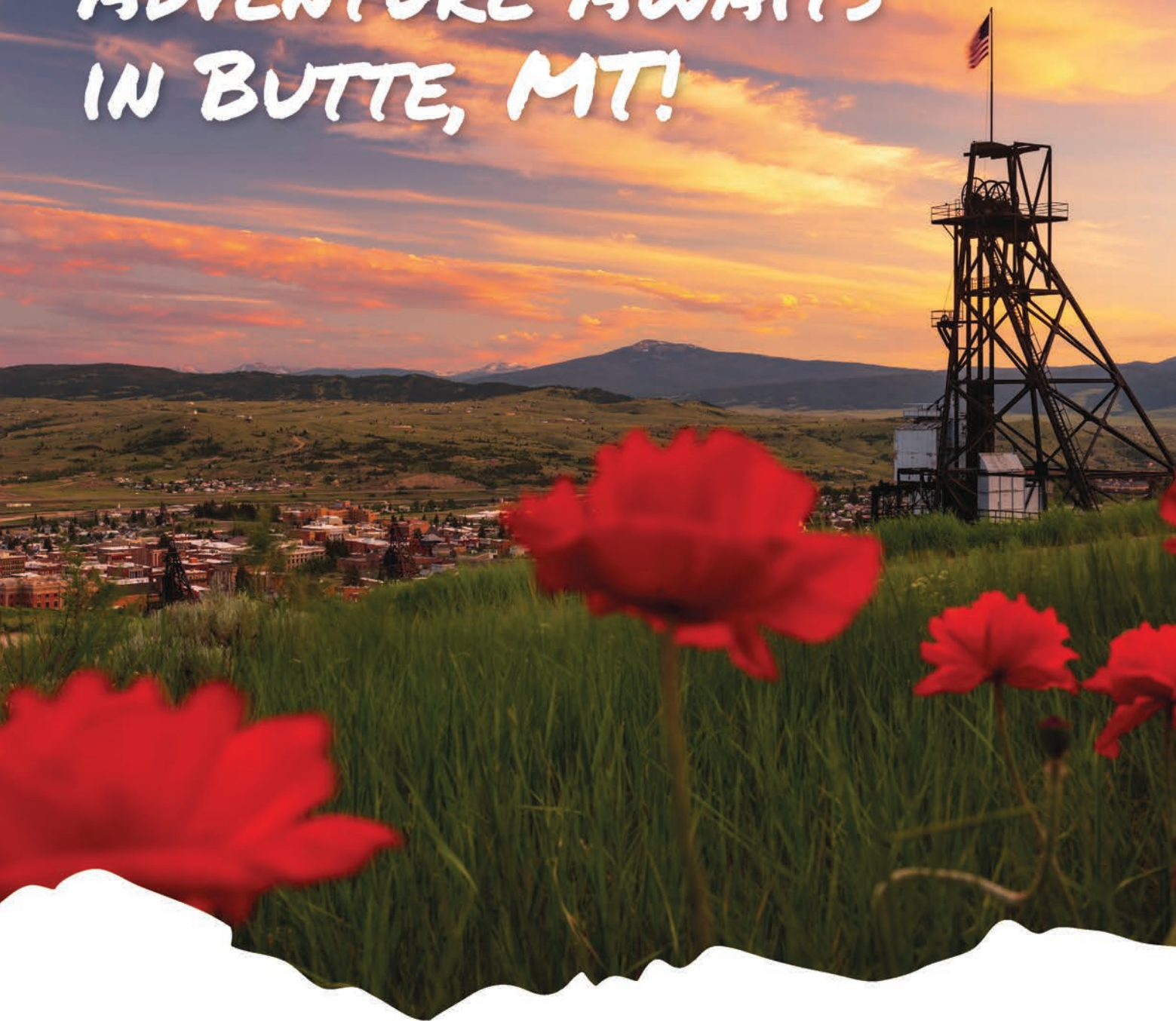
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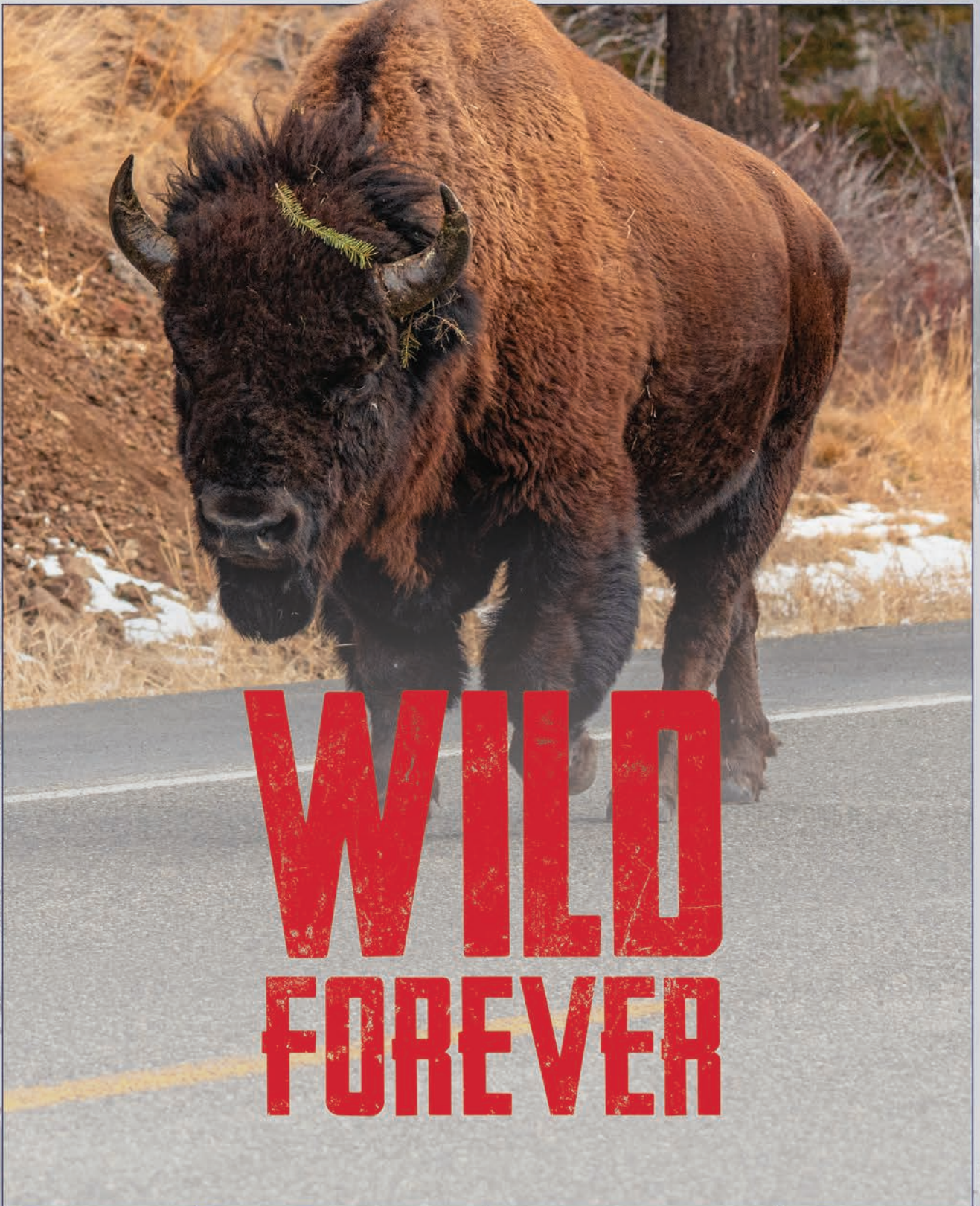
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OPENING SHOT

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DUDE, WHERE'S MY SHOT?

Legendary photographer Scott Baxter shot more than 200,000 images for the book *100 Years of Dude Ranching*, and 150 made the final cut. This is one of them. Riding at Needle Rock near the historic Trapper Creek Lodge & Guest Ranch outside Shell, Wyoming.

Courtesy Scott Baxter



True West captures the spirit of the West with authenticity, personality and humor by providing a necessary link from our history to our present.

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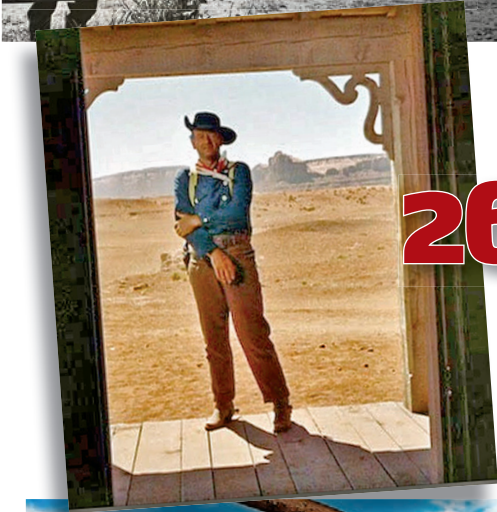


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A review of the first hundred years of the Dude Ranchers' Association and the enduring Western spirit that turned simple ranch stays into iconic American adventures

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Cover Design by Dan Harshberger
Photo by Scott Baxter

BY BOB BOZE BELL

It's True that True is a True Westerner

True that and all crazy true.

Not long after the Covid trainwreck, we here at the magazine were stressed to the gills in a challenging media landscape, and our editor, Stuart Rosebrook, recommended we go to an Arizona dude ranch and recharge. Long story short, our stay at the White Stallion Guest Ranch north of Tucson was a revelation and a wonderful getaway in our own backyard. Ever since, I have been a fan of, and a believer in, the “simplicity of living” you get from the dude ranch experience. Full disclosure: I wrote the foreword in the Dude Ranchers’ Association’s spectacular new book, *100 Years of Dude Ranching*, and that led to our cover story featuring an excerpt from that book. And, coming full circle, we have chosen as our recipient for the True Westerner Award this year a guy named True. I know. It doesn’t get much more wonderful or weird than that! Like I said, so far, it’s been a crazy, double crazy decade.

As you probably know by now, our great pard Marshall Trimble has retired (he’s 86), and he gave us his blessing to continue the column with the stipulation that we assign it to someone who loves the Old West and knows what they are talking about. That’s why we have tapped Erik J. Wright to lead the charge going forward (page 94).



For a behind-the-scenes look at running this magazine, check out BBB’s daily blog at TWMag.com



Courtesy White Stallion Ranch

Russell True is one of the leading lights in the Dude Ranchers’ Association, and he is the proud owner of several. He now has our top award to add to the list of his accomplishments.

Lynn Downy is the author of the history of the Dude Ranch book, and we are featuring her wonderful take on the backstory.

Courtesy Lynn Downy



Our new Ask the Marshal is Erik J. Wright, who is also the assistant editor of *The Tombstone Epitaph*. He works as the grants and outreach coordinator for his local library and lives in northeast Arkansas with his family.

Courtesy Erik J. Wright



Legendary photographer Scott Baxter and his wife and partner Barbara Denney Baxter, who was a crack designer at *Arizona Highways*, brought their skills to the book as well.

Courtesy Bridget Brussels

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OUR READERS REMIND US OF THE VARIABLES AND VAGARIES OF HISTORIC TRUTHS, "WELL-ESTABLISHED" FACTS, HEADLINES AND HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS.

FOR ALL YOU DO

I just spent a couple of hours reading the latest edition of *True West* magazine. I particularly liked "In His Own Words: Val Kilmer" and the articles on Wyatt Earp's women. By the same token, I am reminded how much I enjoy some of your regular features. I always learn some wisdom from "Truth Be Known." Marshall Trimble's answers to readers' inquiries are special. Finally, you should put out a collection of the greatest "What History Has Taught Me" pieces. I believe you have featured some of the most interesting people that most readers were never aware of.

Thanks for all you do.

—Al Harper, owner of the Durango–Silverton Railroad
Durango, Colorado



THE PRETENDIANS

I thoroughly enjoyed "The Pretendians" by Henry C. Parke in the September-October 2025 issue. Growing up in Oklahoma among the Five Civilized Tribes, I thought I was thoroughly embellished about all Indians (and the Smithsonian says American Indian is the correct term), but Mr. Parke's thorough research informed me. As a young man, five decades ago, I used to supply security at the American Indian Movement meetings in Oklahoma City. The tribesmen would get quite vitriolic in their language toward the "white eyes."

Being blond-haired and blue-eyed, and back then with only a six shooter, when they started speaking in Native tongues and eyeing my hair—well, I decided to "save the last bullet for myself."

I later lived for years in Llano, Texas, near the site of the Loyal Valley Massacre and the spot which inspired the film *The Searchers*. I read *Indian Depredations in Texas* by J.W. Wilbarger and T.R. Fehrenbach's *The Comanches*.

I found two sides to the coin. There were over 400 tribes in America, all different languages and cultures, all slowing up modern progress. You had folks who lived in teepees holding up railroads, telegraphs and steamboats. The United States government had its hands full and did the best it could with a complex issue—after a war, how much do you owe the defeated?

The tribes have had their revenge with the explosion of Indian casinos.

When I saw the money pouring in, I told my 1/8th Cherokee bride, "Why don't you get on the rolls?" Well, turns out, she was a Pretendian! Having only a family bible with Winding Wind written in it didn't pass the mustard. I recently saw a Choctaw chief heading for his Lear jet, and thoroughly cussed him out while doing MY native dance, an Irish jig!

—Coy Prather
Montalba, Texas

BROTHERS OF THE GUN

Wow! What a fantastic issue the November/December *True West* edition is! A highlight is the excerpt from Mark Lee Gardner's new book, *Brothers of the Gun: Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, and a Reckoning in Tombstone*.

From the reading, it's clear that the Earps and Holliday showed exceptional patience in dealing with the Cowboy gang; Ike Clanton was incessantly egging a fight with the lawmen's faction, even going so far as to stalk Doc Holliday at his own house.

The Earps and Holliday could have easily gunned down Ike Clanton and his partner Tom McLauray.

The tension in Tombstone was long simmering, but finally came to a boil when Ike Clanton and the McLaurays were overheard saying "Be sure and get Earp, the marshal," followed by "We will kill them all."

The result was the legendary gunfight at the O.K. Corral, a shootout that lasted only 30 seconds, but continues for eternity in Western lore.

—Paul Hoylen
Deming, NM

GET 'EM HOOKED YOUNG!

Way back in 1962 we visited the Old West Movie town of Corrigan in Simi Valley, California, and the founder of the feast, Ray "Crash" Corrigan, asked if we wanted him to pose with our son Michael, aged two. So we took this photo of our young son Michael getting the drop on Ray. Our son grew up and joined the 82nd Airborne out of Fort Bragg, and we think his love of Old West history had a lot to do with that. Thanks, *True West* for keeping that spirit alive!

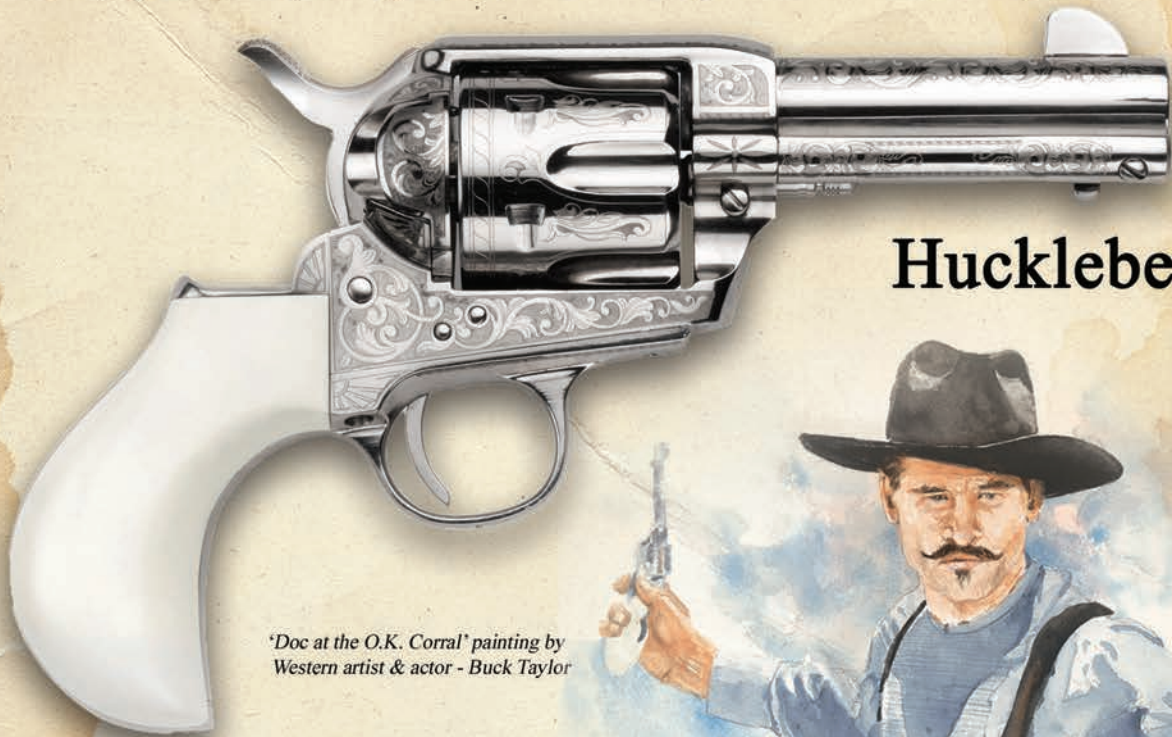
—Thomas Kolsbun
Prescott, Arizona



Michael Kolsbun, age 2,
gets the drop on Crash Corrigan
Courtesy Thomas Kolsbun



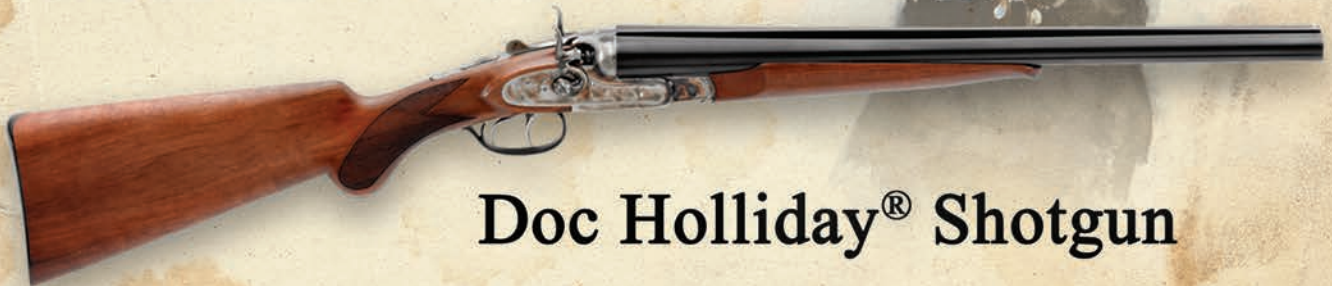
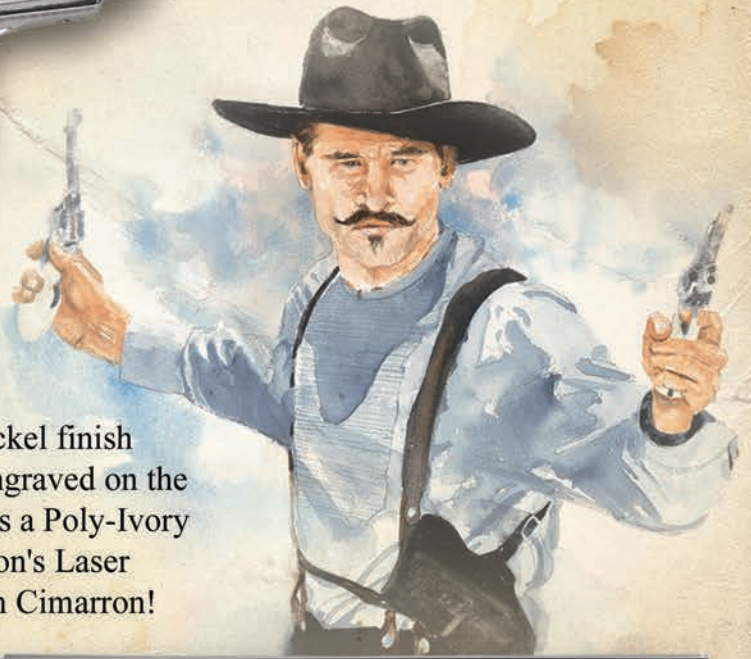
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*'Doc at the O.K. Corral' painting by
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Old Vaquero Sayings



Illustration by Bob Bore Bell

*"Don't worry if people like you.
They don't."*

QUOTES

"Writers are a little below clowns and a little above trained seals."

—John Steinbeck

"There is but one thing of real value—to cultivate truth and justice, and to live without anger in the midst of lying and unjust men."

—Marcus Aurelius

"Movies are history's gateway drug."

—Mary Doria Russell



Courtesy Penguin Random House; Photo: © Dina Rossi

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

—Tennessee Williams

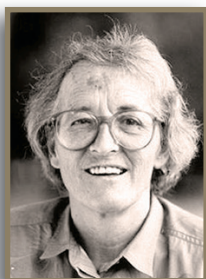


Photo credit - Wikipedia

"The opinion which other people have of you is their problem, not yours."

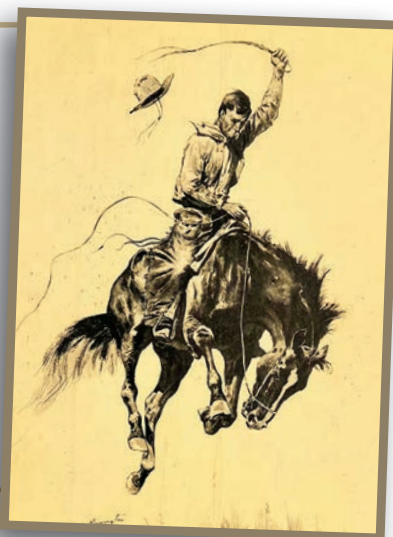
—Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

"Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it."

—Henry David Thoreau

"There never was a horse that couldn't be rode; there never was a cowboy who couldn't be thrown."

—Old Cowboy Saying



"Bucking Bronco" by Frederic Remington, 1895, courtesy of BBB



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An excerpt from *100 Years of Dude Ranching: Celebrating the Centennial of the Dude Ranchers' Association*

BY LYNN DOWNEY

NO ONE IS EVER A STRANGER FOR LONG

The History of Dude Ranching and the First 100 Years of the Dude Ranchers' Association

The Bozeman Hotel on East Main Street in Bozeman, Montana, opened in 1891 and citizens took great pride in its electric elevator, hot and cold running water, fire escapes and spacious lobby. In late September 1926, nearly 100 men and women congregated in that lobby for a meeting. They were dude ranchers and railroad executives, and they'd come to form a new organization.

They all knew the dude ranch had moved beyond its origins as informal cabins for hunters. Dude ranching was now a business that drew families, and owners believed that by creating standards—meals, accommodations, marketing—their places would grow and thrive. More than that, they knew dude ranching tapped into a yearning for the Western way of life. Larry Larom, owner of the Valley Ranch outside Cody,

Wyoming, said he opened his ranch to give Eastern friends “a chance to get away from the social cocktail party group and come out here and enjoy the simplicity of living.”

On September 28 the gathered ranchers chose Larom as president of their newly named group: the Dude Ranchers' Association. The term “dude” had a complicated history, but Dick Randall of the O.T.O. Ranch said people knew it simply meant a visitor from the East and wasn't derogatory. It was, he said, “a trademark of inestimable value,” and 26 ranches signed up as charter members.

In the early 20th century, some cattle operations started offering holidays for dudes or turned exclusively to dude

Triangle X riders depart the ranch with the Tetons in the background

Courtesy Triangle X Ranch







Brothers Alden, Bill and Willis Eaton were all instrumental in the creation of Eatons' Ranch.

Courtesy Eatons' Ranch

Fog lifts around a rider at Nine Quarter Circle Ranch in Gallatin Gateway, Montana.

Scott T. Baxer, *100 Years of Dude Ranching*



ranching. By World War I, entrepreneurs in states such as Arizona opened ranches for winter guests who moved north again in summer. People looked to dude ranches for recreation because of the cowboy, now an icon of popular culture. Ranches offered visitors a chance to ride with real cowboys, learn their

The Elliot cabin at Eatons' Ranch in Wolf, Wyoming

Scott T. Baxer,
100 Years of Dude Ranching



ways and gain an appreciation for conservation. Some ranches held dude rodeos.

Most dude ranches were husband-and-wife operations; some women operated

ranches on their own. Helen Herford and Helen Underwood Wellington opened the Swinging H near Nye around 1929. Dr. Caroline McGill bought the Buffalo Horn Creek

Larry Laron, founder of the Valley Ranch outside Cody, Wyoming, poses with six children on a fence rail at the ranch.

Courtesy American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Charles Belden photographs

Resort in 1936 and renamed it the 320 Ranch. Lillian Shaw took over Shaw's Camp and was honored with a director position at the first DRA meeting.

The DRA grew through the 1930s, adding ranches in Idaho, Colorado, Texas, California, Oregon, Nevada and British Columbia. Movies and books



The lodge at Cherokee Park Ranch

Courtesy Cherokee Park Ranch

introduced dude ranching to audiences nationwide, including the films *Dude Ranch* and *In Old Santa Fe* and novels like Caroline Lockhart's *The Dude Wrangler* and Zane Grey's *The Dude Ranger*. Nevada's 1931 divorce laws brought new clientele to ranches near Reno.

Railroads promoted ranches with colorful brochures, and ranchers mailed newsletters titled *Wranglin' Notes* and *Corral Notes*.

Larom, one of the industry's biggest boosters, often traveled East to speak about dude ranching. In 1936 he told a reporter that the DRA required members not to serve alcohol because ranches were not resorts. "If we try to compete with the deluxe accommodations of the East," he said, "we won't have what the dudes want—novelty."

A ranch could not call itself a dude ranch unless it offered horseback riding. Early visitors were often wealthy and experienced equestrians but accustomed to English saddles; wranglers helped them adapt.



Two wranglers look toward the main patio of White Stallion Ranch in Tucson, Arizona in the early 1960s.

Courtesy of White Stallion Ranch



Scott T. Baxter photographed wranglers at Rimrock Ranch in Cody, Wyoming, for *100 Years of Dude Ranching*.

Cowboys and cooks were essential, and many ranches grew their own produce and meat.

Some ranches went under during the Great Depression, but many survived with DRA support. World War II hit hard: railroad travel declined, rationing affected supplies, and wranglers enlisted. Guests helped with chores, rounded up livestock, worked gardens and cleaned cabins, aiding both ranches and the war effort.

After the war ranchers were optimistic and by the 1950s they hosted 12,000 to 15,000 dudes each season. Western films and television brought more guests, but Americans were now traveling by car and

staying at motels. Ranchers adapted by adding family amenities, relaxing the alcohol rule, shortening trail rides and offering motorized trips. Square dancing was popular and ranches held hoedowns.

Celebrities visited dude ranches, and by the 1960s, places such as the White Stallion Ranch in Tucson were filming locations. *Spencer's Mountain* was shot at Triangle X Ranch in 1962. TV shows in the 1970s set episodes on dude ranches and films like *Urban Cowboy*, *City Slickers* and *Dances with Wolves* revived interest in the West. The popularity of *Yellowstone* in the 2020s surprised many—but not ranchers.

Dude ranching has evolved, and today visitors can help with livestock or sit by a pool. Many wranglers are women. Activities range from classic trail rides to electric bike adventures. Ranches offer themed weeks, retreats, reunions and conferences.

One thing hasn't changed: great meals. Early visitors were introduced to chili and cornbread, and some places





Dudes pose in front of the corrals at the Ox Yoke Ranch, which later became Mountain Sky Guest Ranch.

Courtesy Mountain Sky Guest Ranch

still serve from a cowboy chuck wagon. Today's "farm to table" menus were pioneered by dude ranches more than a century ago.

The Dude Ranchers' Association maintains its longstanding work to preserve parks, forests, deserts and wildlife. Many ranches are still owned by descendants of their founding families, offering guests a unique vacation to

relax in nature and disconnect.

The core of the DRA's work can be summed up in six words: horses, hats, hospitality, heritage, honesty and heart. These have always been the values of the dude ranch, and of the men and women who open their doors to anyone seeking the magic and majesty of the West. ❖

Riding in the shadow of the Absaroka Range at sunset at Absaroka Ranch in Dubois, Wyoming.

Scott T. Baxter, *100 Years of Dude Ranching*

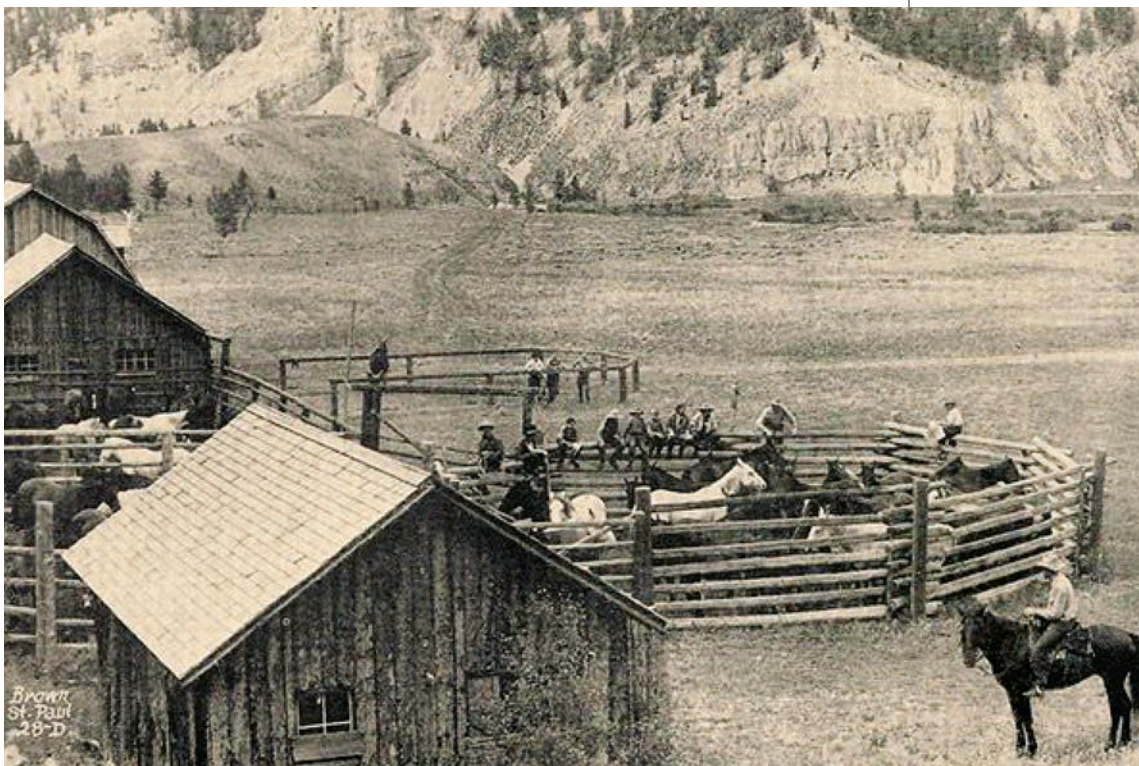


A CM Ranch camping party. Founder Charles Moore started his business out West taking teenage boys on trips through Yellowstone National Park. When their parents went to tag along, the dude ranch was born.

Courtesy CM Ranch



CM Ranch Camping Party
at the west. District of Cl



The barns and corrals at Elkhorn Ranch in Gallatin Gateway, Montana

Courtesy Elkhorn Ranch



Riders stand in front of the hacienda at Rancho de la Osa, constructed for its cattle operations. La Osa later became a dude ranch in 1924.

Courtesy Rancho de la Osa



Riding near Rimrock Ranch in Cody, Wyoming, with views of the Shoshone River and Absaroka Range

Scott T. Baxter, *100 Years of Dude Ranching*

Lynn Downey is an award-winning historian and novelist. She was the company historian for Levi Strauss & Co. in San Francisco and authored the biography *Levi Strauss: The Man Who Gave Blue Jeans to the World*. She's a big fan of the dude ranch and published *American Dude Ranch: A Touch of the Cowboy and the Thrill of the West* in 2022. Lynn lives in Sonoma, California, collects dude-related memorabilia, and grows wine grapes in her backyard.



Excerpted from the new book, *100 Years of Dude Ranching: Celebrating the Centennial of the Dude Ranchers' Association*. A project by the Dude Ranch Foundation, Dude Ranchers'

Association and Ranch Preservation Foundation. Photographs by Scott T. Baxter. Available December 2025.

BY GLENN FRANKEL

THE SEARCHERS

THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN LEGEND



Just as every storyteller needs characters and a plot, he also needs a setting. Dickens has London, Raymond Chandler's detective works out of Los Angeles, and Anne Tyler's moody introverts haunt Baltimore. John Ford's greatest Westerns purportedly took place all over the Southwest, but they were all filmed in one place. Like Shakespeare and the Globe Theatre, Ford used one mythic setting for his stage. Tucked into the continental crease where southeast Utah rubs shoulders with northwest Arizona, Monument Valley is one of America's most dramatic and remote locales. Its sandstone buttes and mesas soar like cathedral spires into the vacant desert sky. It was ninety miles from the nearest paved road and reputed to be the farthest point in the continental United States from a

railroad line. There was nothing cheap about this kind of location work. Film crews had to cart in their own generators, gasoline, groceries, and water tanks. But Ford was keen. He believed that Westerns filmed on a soundstage or in the near suburbs of Hollywood looked drab and artificial. He wanted to capture on film the dust, grit, and sweat of the real thing, and he wanted a dramatic backdrop that would thrill and entertain audiences. Monument Valley was a virtual no-man's-land of little water and hot, reluctant sand, and no one outside of a handful of hardy Navajos lived there. Even livestock shunned it. But Ford loved it. His crews built towns, forts, ranch houses, and Indian villages. He made the valley his personal film set.

The Searchers was Ford's fifth Monument Valley production. He used the scenery like some modern directors use special effects—to create drama

The Searchers was John Ford's 114th Western and his fifth at Monument Valley. Many believe it is his masterpiece.

Courtesy Warner Bros.

and stun the audience. In a letter to James Warner Bellah, Ford made clear just how handy the Indians were for his Westerns: "At Monument Valley I have my own personal tribe of Navajo Indians who are great riders, swell actors...have long hair and best of all they believe in me. We can braid their long hair in the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche or whatever hair-dress we desire....They are tall, sinewy and as the poor bastards never get enough to eat unless we make a picture there, they have no excess fat on them..." Once the actors and film crew arrived in the valley, Ford wasted no time. On Thursday, June 16, the first day of shooting, he filmed eleven setups from eight different scenes in less than

"Wayne is plainly Ahab {from *Moby Dick*}. He is the good American hero driving himself past all known limits into madness, his commitment to honor and decency burned down to a core of vengeance!"

—Greil Marcus



John Wayne in *The Searchers*

Courtesy Warner Bros.



The Searchers, 1956, John Wayne and Ward Bond

Courtesy Warner Bros.

four hours on a blistering hot afternoon, finishing up at 5:59 p.m. The first ones were the opening shots of the film, with John Wayne as Ethan Edwards riding along a ridge and slowly making his way through an arid sea of sagebrush to his brother Aaron's farmhouse for a bitter-sweet homecoming. Ford also shot scenes of Ethan and Mose, a fellow settler, galloping past a horseless Martin Pawley, played by actor Jeffrey Hunter, on their way back to the burning ranch house, and shots of Ethan and Martin escaping the Comanches after first seeing Debbie many years later. From the beginning Ford was forced to improvise. The original shooting scheme was laid out before he and Pat (John Ford's son who worked as a producer and writer on the film) knew that Jeff Hunter would be delayed a week to finish a previous film. Instead, Ford shot around him, using the stuntman Chuck Hayward

dressed in Martin Pawley's outfit. The fact that he had to tear up his original shooting plan for *The Searchers* didn't seem to bother Ford. He simply did what he had always done when commanding a film set: he plowed ahead. "He never shot in continuity, it didn't mean a damn thing to him," recalled Bill Clothier, a longtime colleague who served as director of photography on several of Ford's later films. "He could shoot a close-up here and put it in a scene that was shot three weeks later." *The Searchers* was Ford's 115th film, and his daily routine was almost as immutable as the mesas themselves. It began each morning with Danny Borzage, his personal accordion player for more than thirty years, warming up the set with a selection of tunes. During the silent era, Borzage would play during the shooting itself, varying his tunes to the mood of each scene. Now Ford used him to establish

an emotional climate on the set that might be called Early Americana: old folk tunes, dirges, and ditties.

Everyone stood silently, awaiting his or her turn. "It was a feeling of reverence on every set," recalled Harry Carey Jr. "...You felt almost like you were in a church. It was something sacred, something beautiful going on."

After arriving on the set, Ford usually headed straight to Winton Hoch, his Oscar-winning director of photography, to discuss where best to place the camera for the morning shot. *The Searchers* was a particularly trying project for Hoch, who was using for the first time a complex new technique known as VistaVision. It produced a film image of extra depth and clarity, and enabled Ford to capture Monument Valley's stunning beauty in long and medium shots while allowing for action to unfold within the frame. The result, wrote one observer, was "images that are so detailed that they seem to be painted on screen." But the technique required more cameras and a larger crew, and while Hoch was intrigued with its possibilities, he was also distracted and chagrined by the intricate and costly details. For all their quarreling, Hoch and Ford shared a visual sensibility about Monument Valley. Hoch appreciated Ford's restraint. "In Monument Valley he avoided the temptation to shoot nothing but breathtakers," Hoch recalled. "He had only an occasional beauty shot. It's like diamonds. They are very valuable because they are rare. If the street was paved with them, they would be worthless."

Ford believed that actors needed to be spontaneous. He didn't give the actors line readings, and he seldom verbalized

what he wanted. He just gave clues, opening bits, a word or two, relying upon chemistry and intuition. “He didn’t want any rehearsing” until the morning that a scene was ready to be shot, Pippa Scott recalled. “I was new, but it was fine for me. I just blithely stepped off the plank and went with whatever he wanted.” The last thing Ford wanted was for the actors to act like actors. He didn’t mind mistakes, but he despised dramatic gestures and studied line readings.

Lunch would be served promptly at noon and Earl Grey tea at 4:00 p.m., usually marking the close of shooting, although sometimes Ford would shoot as late as 6:00. At dinner later in the evening no one was allowed to discuss work at the risk of banishment from the table. It was one of Pappy’s many rules. After dinner there would be poker, gin rummy, and a coin-toss game known as pitch. “Oh God, how the man would cheat,” recalled Ace Holmes, the property man. “But they would never call him.”

John Ford had allotted himself just four weeks for the Monument Valley film shoot, and he quickly fell behind due to high winds and overcast skies. He knew he had to speed things up, and he started driving his crew hard, shooting anywhere between twelve and nineteen scenes each day, including Sundays. He took full advantage of Monument Valley’s infinite facets. As sprawling as it appears on film, the valley is actually fairly compact—just 144 square miles in total, with its most recognizable features stuffed into an area less than half that size. Ford could pivot the camera and be rewarded with a series of differentiated and breathtaking vistas. Within a five-mile radius he was able to film scenes at the Jorgensen and Edwards ranch houses, the long “forty-mile” ride of the Texas Ranger posse into Indian Territory, two dramatic horse chases in which the searchers are pursued by Comanches, and the standoff in a cave between the searchers and Scar’s men.

He didn’t bother writing down personal notes about how a scene would

look or what the characters would say. He kept it all in his head, cutting bits of dialogue and scenes from the final shooting script as he went.

For many directors it was all about coverage: the more film you shot, the more choices your editor had in assembling the final cut. Over-shooting was an insurance policy for the weak willed and super cautious. Ford couldn’t abide the process. Whenever possible, he shot only one take. Ford never relied on storyboards to outline a scene before the actual shoot, yet he knew exactly what he wanted on the first take. “John Ford shoots a picture in his mind before he ever turns on a camera,” said Wingate Smith, the assistant director. Part of it was about keeping the actors fresh and spontaneous. And part of it was about control. The less film he shot, Ford knew, the less material there would be for the studio bosses to cut or reshape. “If you give them a lot of film ‘the committee’ takes over,” he told the author Tag Gallagher. “They start juggling scenes around and taking out this and putting in that. They can’t do it with my pictures. I cut in the camera and that’s it. There’s not a lot of film left on the floor when I’m finished.”

Wherever in the valley Ford and his actors roamed, an elaborate convoy of men and machines followed. Technicolor and VistaVision required massive setups and a far larger crew than Ford had used in previous Monument Valley film shoots. There were thirty-three drivers, five five-ton trucks, a three-ton truck, two horse trucks, one truck equipped with a camera crane, a large van specially designed to hold wardrobe, two medium-size trucks, a generator truck, a camera car, a sanitary truck, a radio jeep, three large tourist buses, three station wagons, three twelve-passenger vans, five jeeps, a water wagon,

a hay truck, and a hot meals wagon. The traveling crew consisted of two 35mm cameramen, two camera operators, two technicians, three assistant cameramen, one mechanic, one 16mm cameraman, one assistant 16mm cameraman, one stills man, and a sound crew of one sound mixer, one recorder, one cable man, two boom men, and three radio-men. On any given day, the shooting of action scenes needed a minimum of 65 horses. Lunch was served to 150 people. Ford liked to use the wind and dust as tempestuous backdrops to add an extra layer of sweat and grit to the outdoor scenes. “Two things make Western pictures—horse manure and dust,” Ford told Bill Clothier, who recalled how Ford almost fired a crew member who innocently sprayed water on the ground one day. He was only trying to tamp down the dust, the man explained. “Hell, that’s why I came out here,” Ford replied. “I want the dust.”

By Sunday, July 3, Ford was ready to shoot the final scene of Debbie’s homecoming. The script ended with Ethan and Martin riding home toward the Jorgensen ranch with Debbie nestled



Dust made the day and John Ford happy.

Courtesy Warner Brothers



asleep in Ethan's arms, but Ford threw it away. Instead, he chose to end with Lars and Mrs. Jorgensen and their daughter Laurie standing in front of the house as the two searchers ride up with Debbie. Ethan dismounts, carries Debbie up to the porch, and hands her over to the Jorgensens. Then—echoing the opening shot in the film—Ford once again shoots from inside the house, looking out through the front door, as the Jorgensens escort a wary Debbie inside, followed by a reunited Martin and Laurie, who race in together hand in hand. As Ethan watches from outside, he grasps his right arm with his left hand—a gesture that Wayne's idol, Harry Carey Sr., used in many Westerns. Then Ethan turns, pivots, and walks away alone. "When I crossed my arm, I did it the way Harry Carey used to do

it, because his widow was on the other side of the door," Wayne later recalled. "And he was the man, Pappy said, who taught him his trade." Wayne, in other words, was honoring two men—Ford's mentor and Ford himself—and Olive Carey as well.

All of this was improvised on the set that afternoon. As Olive watched Wayne's gesture from off camera, she burst into tears. "Everybody thinks I'm crazy, but I think Duke has the grace of Nureyev," she said later. "He really is the most graceful man I've ever seen." But Olive saved her most lavish praise for her old friend and nemesis John Ford. "He just moved you so that you could just turn it on," she recalled. "...Even if it was only a shot of opening the door and going through the door and shutting the door, he made you feel it was

The cast and crew of *The Searchers* posed at the end of filming for the day.

Courtesy Warner Bros.

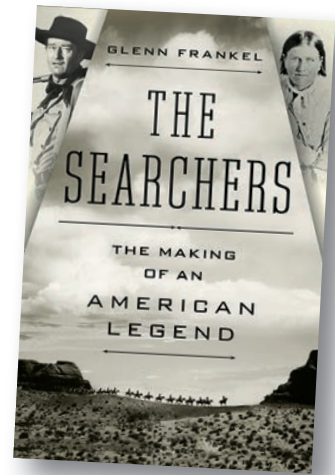
one of the high spots of the movie, and I think he did that with everybody. I think that's why he got such performances. You didn't do it for yourself, you did it for him. It was almost hypnotic, the thing that he had."



The Greatest Shot in Cinema History?



During the early days of filming Westerns with John Ford, Harry Carey developed his iconic arm pose where he grabbed his right arm with his left hand at the elbow. The gesture would permeate throughout Ford's films by other actors.



Glenn Frankel worked for many years for *The Washington Post*, serving as bureau chief in London, Southern Africa and Jerusalem, where he won the 1989 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting. He has taught journalism at Stanford University and the University of Texas at Austin, and is the author of five books, including three that explore the making of an iconic American movie and the historical era it reflects. *The Searchers: The Making of an American Legend* was a *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* bestseller and one of Library Journal's Top Ten Books of 2013.



Though the brief gesture might have been inspired by Carey's widow (she had just walked by him into the house), it was felt far beyond the Carey family. After Wayne, as Ethan, grabs his elbow, he turns to walk back out into the wastelands. He has no home.

"John Wayne walking through the door in silhouette out onto the desert [is the best shot in cinema]. I think the film is still one of the best Westerns ever made."

—Ridley Scott

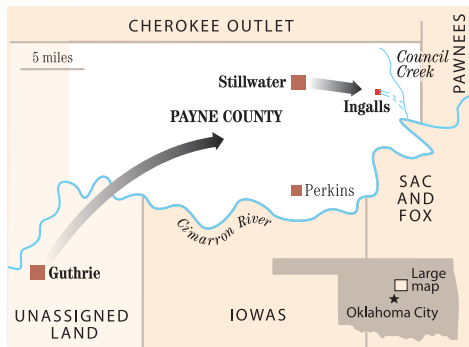
TRUE WEST EXCLUSIVE

CLASSIC GUNFIGHTS

INGALLS ONSLAUGHT TURNS BLOODY!

DOOLIN-DALTON GANG VS STILLWATER MARSHALS

"THEY CAME OUT OF THE
GULLY ON THE JUMP."



August 31: At nightfall, one wagon leaves Stillwater and another Guthrie to rendezvous near Ingalls. Both wagons are loaded with arms, ammunition and 13 federal officers. The Guthrie wagon is delayed and does not join the group until shortly after 11 p.m.

BY BOB BOZE BELL

Maps & Graphics by Gus Walker

Based on the research of Glenn Shirley

SEPTEMBER 1, 1893



U.S. Marshal Dick Speed steps out from the doorway of Light's Blacksmith shop and asks a local kid, "Who is that rider?" The boy replies, "Why, that's Bitter Creek!" Seeing the outlaw fill his hands, Speed jerks his Winchester to his shoulder and fires.

All illustrations by Bob Boze Bell

Three covered wagons full of federal marshals approach the outlaw village of Ingalls, Oklahoma Territory. Nobody in town pays much attention because, as Doc Pickering later says, "hundreds of Boomers [are] moving the same way."

One of the wagons stops in Pickering's Grove. Bitter Creek Newcomb spots a second wagon while mounting his horse at Wagner's blacksmith shop, where he had just had a horseshoe tightened.

Newcomb heads up Ash Street to investigate. As he rides past the town's water well, he sees a man with a Winchester step from the doorway of Light's blacksmith shop. Newcomb overhears the man ask a local kid, "Who is that rider?" As Newcomb puts his hand on the butt of his saddle gun, the boy replies, "Why, that's Bitter Creek!"

Out of the corner of his eye, lawman Dick Speed sees the outlaw "fill his hands." The lawman immediately jerks his Winchester to his shoulder and fires. Speed's bullet "bursts the magazine" of Bitter Creek's rifle and ricochets into the outlaw's right thigh and groin. The outlaw reels in the saddle and his return shot at the marshal

misses. Newcomb wheels his horse and spurs him south, as Speed steps clear of the doorway to try and finish him off.

On the upper floor of the O.K. Hotel, Roy "Arkansas Tom" Daugherty snatches his Winchester and, taking in the scene at a glance, levers a round and fires from the north gable window. The shot hits Speed in the shoulder. The wounded officer stumbles toward cover near the wagon, but Arkansas Tom fires again, hitting the marshal in the chest and dropping him in his tracks.

Bill Dalton and Tulsa Jack Blake run to the stables and fire at the officers until they can make a break and escape, which they manage to do. Arkansas Tom kills two more U.S. marshals then surrenders with the promise he will not be lynched. Incredibly he is not. A young bystander on the street, Del Simmons, ducks into Vaughn's saloon and hurtles through the building and out the back door, only to be spotted in the rifle sights of Arkansas Tom's Winchester. Perhaps thinking the boy is another lawman charging his position, the outlaw fires, nailing the innocent youth with a fatal shot.





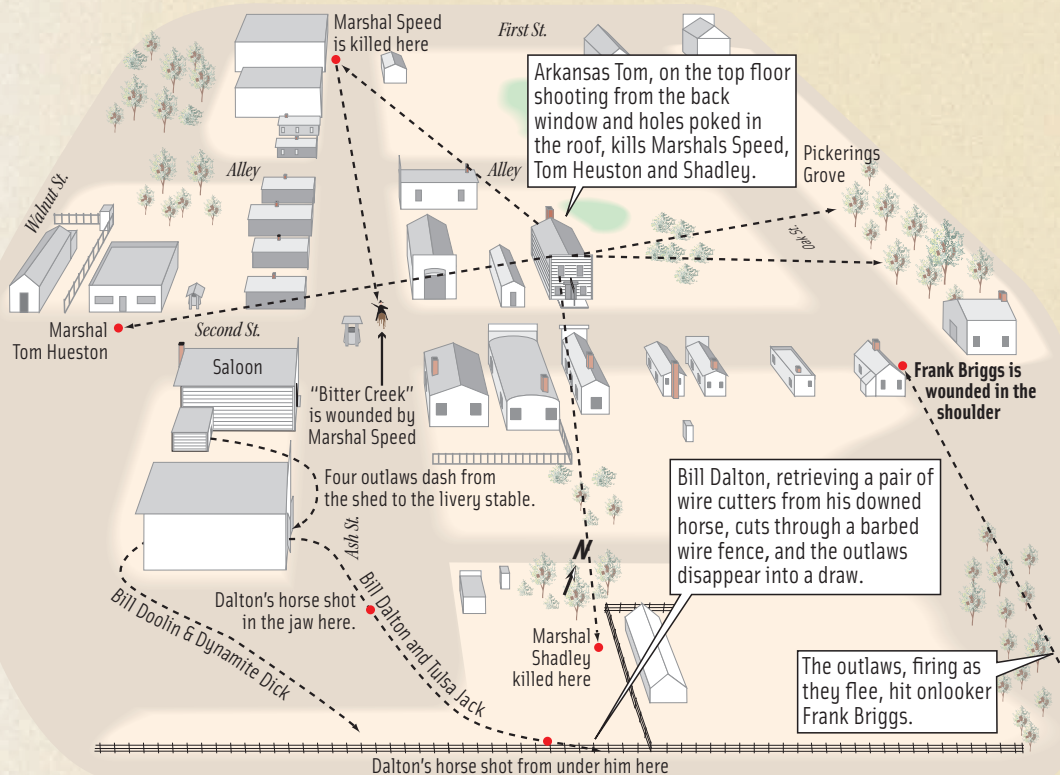
Ingalls, Oklahoma Territory

Courtesy Glenn Shirley

Ingalls, Oklahoma Territory

“The townsite is well located and will admit to the building of a beautiful town,” writes a Stillwater reporter, extolling the virtues of Ingalls, Oklahoma Territory (above, looking southeast). Others are not so complimentary. “A tidal wave of criminality is sweeping the territory,” writes another Stillwater reporter. “There is scarcely a county that is not the scene of bloodshed, rape and robbery.”

With outlawry overwhelming local law enforcement, one U.S. marshal intends to do something about the “nest of vipers” who are using Ingalls as a “pop-off valve” between robberies. Informants have told Deputy Marshal John Hixon, in late August 1893, that Bill Doolin and five of his gang are hiding out in Ingalls. Hixon raids Ingalls to capture Doolin’s “Wild Bunch” (a common moniker for several outlaw gangs in the 1890s, most notably Butch Cassidy and friends). It turns out to be the deadliest battle ever fought between organized banditry and U.S. deputy marshals. Legendary lawman Heck Thomas refuses to go on the raid, calling it a “fool’s errand.”



Lawmen duck and cover as Arkansas Tom lays down deadly fire from the O.K. Hotel.

Illustrations by Bob Boze Bell

Aftermath: Odds & Ends

At the stream south of town, Bitter Creek Newcomb met a family en route to Ingalls and paused to shout, “Tell my pals I can do them no good—I’m bad hurt and have only a farmer’s gun.” (Evidently he meant he could load his damaged rifle with only one cartridge at a time.)

Arkansas Tom Daugherty could not believe his outlaw comrades had deserted him. When Doc Pickering went up to his hotel room to talk with Arkansas Tom about surrendering, Pickering related that the outlaw “had his coat & vest off, also his boots, [he] had his Winchester in his hands & revolvers lying on the bed. I said Tom come down and Surrender. He says I can’t do it for I won’t get justice. He says I don’t want to hurt anyone but I won’t be taken alive. He says where is the boys [meaning the outlaws]. I told him they had gone. He said he did not think they would leave him. It hurt him bad. I never seen a man wilt so in my life.”



Courtesy Glenn Shirley

Three lawmen lost their lives as a result of the gunfight: Dick Speed, 26, died almost instantly; Tom Hueston, age unknown, died the same afternoon; and Lafe Shadley, age unknown, died two days later. After serving his time, Arkansas Tom went on the celebrity circuit, resumed robbing banks and was eventually shot dead by police while baby sitting.

Recommended: *Gunfight at Ingalls* by Glenn Shirley, published by Barbed Wire Press.



CLASSIC TRUE WEST

FROM THE TRUE WEST ARCHIVES

Editor's Note: This article originally ran in the October 1959 issue. For full access to 72 years' worth of exciting issues of *True West*, please go to TrueWestMagazine.com and subscribe.

Lost Spanish Mines of the Burro Mountains

BY LESLIE J. REAGAN

My favorite hobby, keenly shared by my wife Joan, was prospecting the hills and valleys of East Texas. Then our son Russel was born and our mineral hunting had to stop for a time. We missed our trips, for each had been rugged but wonderful adventure. Finally, three years ago, when Russ was only four months old, we decided to shoot the works and really go prospecting.

After careful planning, packing and repacking, we headed West with Russ safely tucked in his crib behind the front seat of our station wagon, well surrounded by suitcases, bedding, Geiger counters and prospecting equipment of all kinds. In a two-wheel cargo trailer behind the wagon we lugged clothes, dishes and other essentials.

We had previously picked Arizona as our final destination, but kept an open eye and an open mind for any likely locations along the way. Since there are no

Federal lands for mineral filing in Texas, we really began looking the country over after we had crossed the New Mexico state line.

Approaching Lordsburg, New Mexico, the Pyramid Mountains to our left and the Burro Mountains to our right caught our fancy and we decided to stay for a few days and look over the mineral possibilities.

Our first move was to find a good motel and an approved baby sitter. For these necessary items we dropped by the Hidalgo County Chamber of Commerce and met their very charming manager, Mrs. Marguerite Coddling. She not only gave us the needed information but offered her assistance in any way possible in our search for minerals.

After proceeding to the motel, we found that Russ was out of boiled water and now started a series of events that provided us with our biggest laugh, my

Here's one for your cynics who think all lost mines are pure figments of disordered imaginations

wife's greatest embarrassment, a new partner and a co-ownership of seven lost Spanish gold mines!

Since the weather was wet and cold, I left Joan and Russ in the motel room and made a dash to the cafe for the water. At about the time Joan figured I'd return, a knock came at her door. Thinking it was me kidding her, since we didn't know anybody in Lordsburg, she piped, "If you haven't got sense to come in out of the rain, just drown!"

A moment's silence followed, then again the knock. "Stand out there and freeze, you dope!" cried Joan. The third time the knock sounded, she dashed to the door, pulled it open with a "Les, you nut ..."

That's as far as she got before going speechless. A neatly uniformed police officer stood on the threshold. At this interesting moment I drove up and, for the first time in my life, found Joan red of face and at an utter loss for words.

Grinning, the officer introduced himself as John Bailey of the Lordsburg Police Department,



The old Spanish tailing dumps—tangible evidence of the painstaking work done by miners who lived centuries ago.

All images courtesy True West Archives

explaining further that Mrs. Coddling had called him since he too was interested in prospecting. We, or rather I, since Joan was still too embarrassed to talk, invited him in. He showed us various samples of lead, gold and silver ore, and some thorium samples that set our Geiger counter into spasms.

Fortunately John had some time off coming to him, so early next morning we took off in his pickup and headed out across the desert to the Burro Mountains.. Day after day we knocked on rocks, listened to our Geigers click with radioactivity, and prowled the ledges, canyons and peaks.

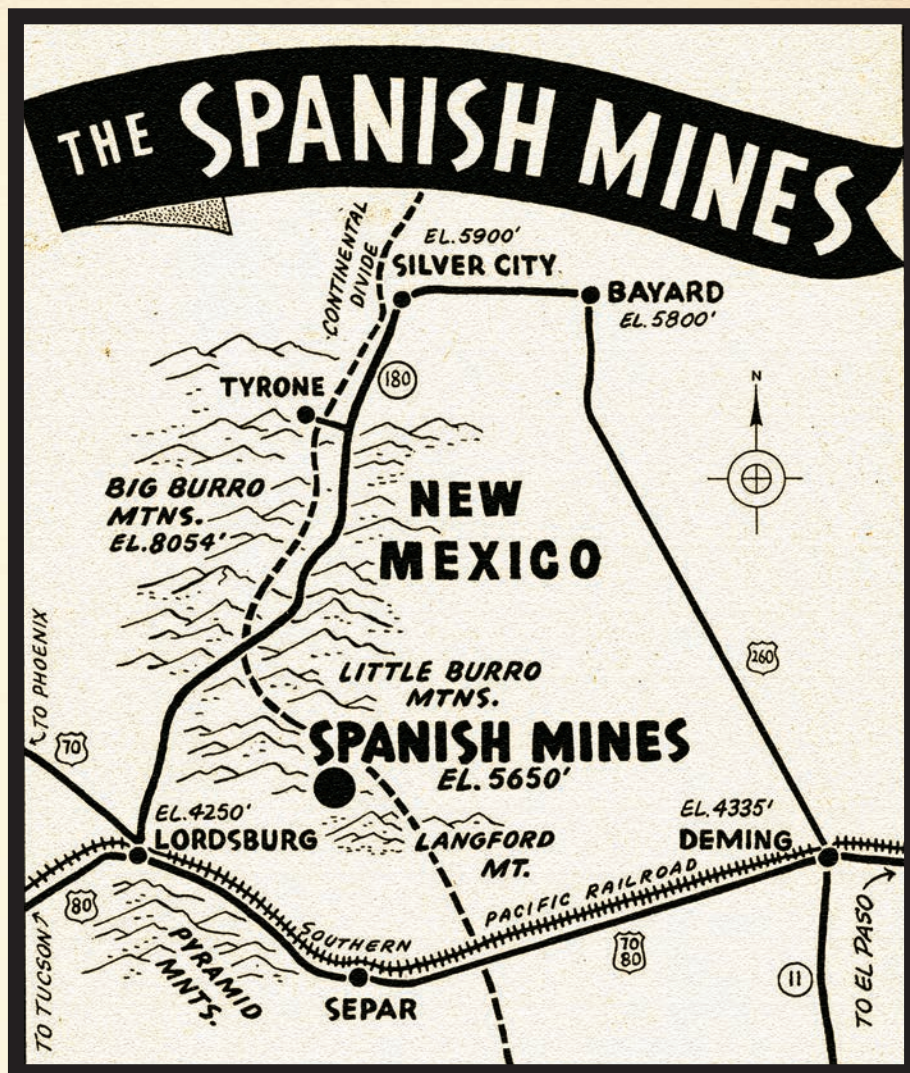
After a week of this we were convinced that we need go no further in our search for minerals. This area offered plenty of minerals for the filing and taking.

Then John pulled his big surprise. We were heading across the desert one morning when John, with his now familiar dry grin, asked us if we would be interested in seven old Spanish mines he had found.

"You kidding?" Joan and I asked in unison.

"Nope," he said, pulling off the road into a very steep and sandy arroyo. Shifting into low gear, we began a long slow climb. I expected the truck to bog down any minute, but John is the best desert and mountain driver I have ever seen. After about thirty minutes, he pulled out of the arroyo onto a high desert saddle between the Langford Mountains and the Burro Mountains and there, almost hidden by the desert's myriad growths, were great tailing piles. Before us lay the tangible evidence of the painstaking work done by miners who had lived long before our time.

We fired questions at John and he admitted that he knew little about the mines' history. No one seems to know just when the Spanish operated the mines, but they, or perhaps the Apaches later, had taken great pains to conceal the shafts. It is known that about the turn of the century an old Swede discovered the existence of the mines and was able to locate and open one of the shafts. From all reports, he took several thousand dollars' worth of gold from them. It is known that the Swede carried his ore to a gold stamp mill in the famous old Gold Hill area of the Burros, operated



by a Mr. Cline. Mr. Cline stamped out some fourteen thousand dollars in gold for the old man. Not wanting to keep such a large amount, he turned it over to the old man, who carried it back across the mountains to his rock-lined dugout near the mines. The next day the Swede stopped by the stamp mill on his way into Lordsburg for supplies and was questioned as to whether he was carrying his gold. He informed Mr. Cline that it was well hidden and that he was only carrying enough for his supplies. That evening the old Swede was killed in a knife brawl in Lordsburg, and the location of his mines died with him.

John had located the mines about a year previous to our arrival, while attempting to cross the desert from the Langford Mountains to the Burros in company with a friend and had filed on them.

The seven shafts are located directly beneath the tailing dumps and the open

shafts were timbered over some fifteen feet beneath the surface and the tailings poured in on top of them and smoothed out. Slight depressions from erosion and settling over the years were probed by long steel probes and the timbers located. Two inch pipes driven down to the timbers and charged with dynamite blew the old timbers out and, although many tons of tailings poured into the now open shafts, there lay exposed the old lost Spanish mines. It was a thrilling moment!

Our next move was to explore the old shaft, which was on a forty-one percent incline. While Joan remained on the surface securing the safety rope, John and I slipped into the mine opening. As we went deeper into the shaft and explored the various old stopes and drifts as we came to them, we could not help but marvel at the immense amount of work those old-time miners had done with their primitive hand steels and tools.

As we moved along we cut samples from each stope and drift, so that we might have an overall picture of the value of the ore through assays.

For several days we repeated this process until one day curiosity got the better of us as to what might lie behind six well-sealed-off stopes that angled off the main shaft and were sealed by large rocks in brick wall fashion.

Deciding to open the one nearest the surface, I tied the safety rope around my waist and descended into the shaft while John, for safety reasons, stayed at the mouth. I was able to dislodge enough of the rocks so that several tons of ore rushed out, along with so much dust that I was compelled to return to the surface.

After the dust had settled, John and I changed places and he was able to open the whole stope wall. As the ore out of the stope poured down the old shaft, a clear and beautifully toned bell began to ring deep down in the old mine. Three times during the day we heard the bell tones. From this eerie experience came the name of our present operating company, Three Bells Mining and Milling Company. Although we have cleaned out most of the old mine, we still have not found the source of the mysterious sound. At night our

security officers have heard the old bell ringing deep in the shaft from time to time. From this it appears evident that there are as yet undiscovered openings which allows the wind—when from a certain direction—to move the old bell and thus produce the sounds. This theory is confirmed by the fact that the air at the bottom of the shaft is pure and sweet.

Numerous relics of the old Spanish miners have been found from time to time in our cleaning-out procedure. Of special interest to us are the old candle holders which held the Spaniards' only source of light for their operations underground. Many small pieces of the candles have been found as well as an old pick and some hand steel.

On the surface are the crumbling ruins of what appeared to be guard houses that surrounded the mine area. Directly in front of our present working shaft was the old Spanish arrastre, where they crushed the ore. Time has not erased the well trodden path of the burros as they went round and round, pulling the crushing stone. These things, along with the old-style step-type mining of the shaft, left no doubt that John had found seven old lost Spanish mines.

It was then that John offered us a partnership; an offer immediately

accepted. The cost of developing the properties would be more than the two of us could swing, so at once we began incorporation proceedings, making the organization a closed corporation with only 100 shares of working interest. A few Texas friends readily purchased the twenty-five shares we offered for sale. The company then was on its way.

We located a complete mill for sale some forty-five miles away and bought it for a song. Then began the laborious operation of dismantling and moving it to our properties.

During the construction period of the mill, one of our Mexican employees came to us with a new piece of information about the mines. His grandfather had told him of the existence of seven lost mines in the Burros, that the original owners were the Incas, and that they called their mines "The Seven Cities." We have been unable, of course, to verify this, but from a purely romantic viewpoint and to add color to the old diggings, one can easily imagine Coronado searching for seven fabulous cities of gold when actually the Incas were referring to seven mines.

To date we have opened, explored, timbered and are operating only one of the mines, with the remaining six still to be cleared out. Our modern mill is grinding out the concentrates that centuries ago were so laboriously done by manpower and burros. Where only hand tools were used in the past, powerful air hammers, stoping machines and explosives are chewing away the ore while the back-breaking work of bringing it to the surface has been replaced by modern methods.

Thrilling evidence of the old days show up regularly in a bit of candle, an old candle holder, an old tool or pick to remind us that another civilization worked these same mines centuries ago.

Our surveys indicate a possibility that behind the sealed stopes and drifts may be passages to the other mines but since they are so closely located in distance, it is our plan to drift from the 100 foot level in each direction and attempt to contact and open them from below, using the Present Number Five working shaft as a focal point.

We have proved that lost Spanish mines do exist, although neither John



Three Bells' hoist house, office, warehouse and water tank. The trio's 39 claims contain gold, silver, lead, thorium as well as copper and molybdenum.

nor ourselves were looking for lost mines. We had no old parchment maps to follow, no words of a dying prospector to lead us to the mine. A simple short cut across the desert by Jeep from one range of mountains to another just happened to be directly in line with the mines that the desert had hidden long ago with vegetation. Had that line extended a hundred yards in either direction, the mines today would probably still lie undisturbed as an unknown monument to its owners of yesteryear.

To you folks at home with an irreplaceable urge to prowl the hills, the deserts, the mountains and the canyons; to knock rocks, to pan the creek beds, to listen for the exciting buzz of an activated Geiger counter, we do not advocate taking the same bold gamble that we did. We can only say we did it and are mighty happy that we did.

We would, however, like to give a few tips to you who may someday follow that urge to hit for the rough back country and seek your fortune in the earth.

First: It is absolutely essential that you have at least a working knowledge of minerals and their occurrence and appearance in the field. Many helpful books have been written for the layman on this subject.

Second: Check on possible locations and the availability of filing mineral claims.

Third (and possibly the most important): Remember that prospecting is no picnic. You are subject to heat prostration on the desert, pneumonia in the mountains, the ever present danger of snake bite in either locality, the danger of broken bones far from medical aid, the chance of mechanical breakdown of your vehicle far from help. These things must be kept in mind and plans laid in advance to take care of them.

Fourth: If you intend to rough it by setting up a camp, the altitude and location have to be carefully considered and all supplies carefully checked. It's a long way to the supermarket or corner drugstore!

Fifth (This is extremely important.): ALWAYS let someone know the vicinity you'll be prospecting in, and set an estimated time of arrival back in town or camp so that in case of an accident or sudden illness, a search party will be able to find you promptly.

Sixth: If you are prospecting on a day basis from a town or city, always have your vehicle in top mechanical condition and equipped with blankets, water, flashlight, extra gasoline, oil, an extra set of spark plugs and points, and be sure your spare tire is aired and serviceable.

Seventh: Essential equipment includes a snake bite kit, a canteen, a small first aid kit, several cloth bags for samples, a notebook and pencils, a compass and prospecting pick. I would also suggest a light side arm.

A trip to the local chamber of commerce is the best way to begin a prospecting trip, as they usually have reliable data on the local mineralization and can put you in touch with local prospectors. At the county clerk's office, you can find out all the locations open for filing. But heed this word of warning: There are many local characters in every mineral area just waiting for a new prospector to arrive. These gents will have samples from their claims beautiful to behold; samples they'll be willing to peddle to you. If such a character takes you out to his claim, the samples he picks from his tailing piles will turn out to be high grade ore. (I have even seen pieces of high grade ore lying on the floor of the shaft.)

The trick to fool such sharpshooters is this. Take your own samples directly from the exposed vein material (if any) and have your own assays run. Remember, if his claim was as rich as he says it is, he could get financial backing himself to mine it. Even in these modern times there are crafty operators not averse to "salting" their holdings. Beware of the loudmouthed individual who spouts profusely about his holdings. It's usually hot air that he has. Much valuable time can be lost fooling with these fellows.

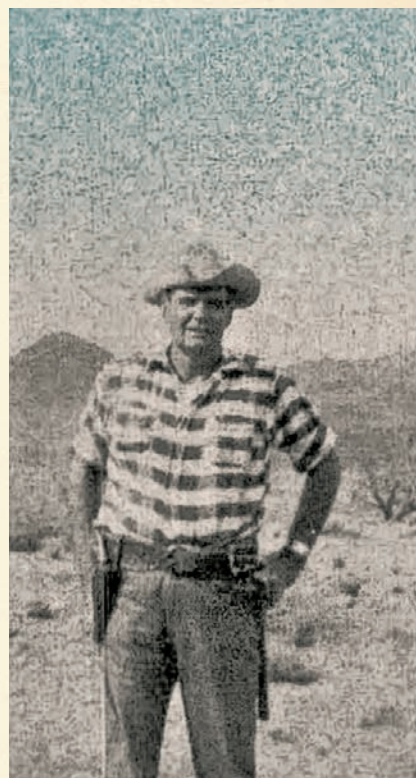
Don't misunderstand or allow these facts of life to unduly discourage you. There are still thousands of acres of land laying open for prospecting and claiming, and a lot of it contains good commercial minerals. It's there for you to find and take. Even in our locality there are still many open claims. Our thirty-nine claims stretch out across the south end of the Burros and contain in commercial quantities

gold, silver, lead, thorium and other rare earths, as well as copper and molybdenum.

Prospecting is rugged work but also fun. You may not find paying mineral in a few weeks or months as we did, for there are not many John Baileys and few people have the blind luck we did.

But to all you folks who yearn to follow in the steps of the old forty-niners, I'll say this:

"Back your ears, podner, and start prospecting!"



The author Leslie J. Reagan

TRUE WEST ARCHIVES

For the first time ever, every issue of *True West* magazine is now online, including Reagan's original, unabridged article as it appeared in a past issue. To learn more about how you can read all of our original articles and subscribe to *True West* Archives, go to TrueWestMagazine.com.

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FRONTIER FARE

BY SHERRY MONAHAN

The Dubious and Popular Rock and Rye

Was it liquor or a health tonic?



This popular 1880s drink got its name because rock candy syrup was used to rectify rye whiskey that became Rock and Rye. It was a controversial beverage because it was offered as a cocktail in saloons but was also sold as a health tonic. Some mixologists recommended it to soothe a sore throat, but some just liked the way it tasted. The Tolu brand of Rock and Rye was a popular health tonic in the late 1870s and early 1880s, and the company claimed it cured coughs, colds, sore throats, debilitated constitutions, weakness of the lungs or consumption. The high alcohol content and lack of other active ingredients, of course, meant that the elixir wasn't actually effective, and it was banned in some areas.

Despite its banishment from some locales, advertisements appeared all over the West for both the cocktail and the elixir under different brand names. The *Territorial Enterprise* in Virginia City, Nevada, reported, "Rock and Rye. Thomas Taylor & Co. have on sale in case or bulk Chelsey's celebrated 'Rock and Rye' whisky, which is having a great run

Rock and rye was advertised as a health tonic.

Library of Congress

in the Eastern states as a pleasant and efficacious remedy for coughs and colds. Those who have tried it say it is by no means bad to take, and make no 'wry' faces over it." The *New North-West* paper in Deer Lodge, Montana, wrote, "A favorite beverage of many Deer Lodgers is a compound known as 'Rock and Rye,' and, although a 'tanker,' we acknowledge at present a quantity of this liquid. It looks tempting, and should our cold continue—Bye and bye, Rock and Rye."

Rectifiers, including those who made the concoction known as Rock and Rye, claimed they took poorly made whiskey and made it more palatable—or claimed the health benefits of their products—though sometimes they might add things that were dangerous. In fact, a lack of real regulations meant that much of the whiskey consumed in the late 1800s was downright dangerous. Coffin varnish, snake poison, tarantula juice, red liquor and a whole host of other euphemisms were used to describe

knockoff whiskey, but rot-gut is the most well-known term.

In July 20, 1881, the commissioner of the Internal Revenue addressed the sales of Rock and Rye, as either a tonic or liquor. He noted, "In view of the numerous preparations of the article generally known as 'Rock and Rye,' put up for sale throughout the United States, the following is issued for your guidance...." The IRS stated that Rock and Rye, either sold as whiskey, distilled spirits of any kind, or rock candy, was now considered a compound liquor by the federal government. Anyone selling these products was now required to pay a special tax as a rectifier, which was twenty cents per bottle instead four or five cents per bottle. Even if an apothecary sold the mixture and labeled it as medicine, it now had to pay the tax.

Mr. W. Sampson, who had been a sober man for two years, got drunk trying to cure himself from "the grip" in Montana. It seems a friend of his advised that there was nothing better for the grip than Rock and Rye. Sampson trusted his friend and headed to the store and got himself a bottle. He felt so good after consuming the first bottle that he proceeded to get a second. In the midst of his second bottle, Sampson "kicked up quite a fuss" and was arrested. He was brought before Judge Kennedy's court in Anaconda for disturbing the peace. The judge asked him if he could restrain himself and not go back to drinking. He told the judge he wasn't sure, so the judge said, "Wouldn't it be better for you if you went to jail for 30 days, so as to give you an opportunity to thoroughly sober up again?"

Sampson replied, "I haven't the slightest objection in the world."

Try this top ten Western cocktail, but don't be a Sampson...

ROCK AND RYE COCKTAIL

1 cup water

3 cups white, brown or maple sugar

1 tablespoon rock candy syrup

1 wine glass Rye whiskey

Bring the water to a boil over high heat. Remove and stir in sugar. Allow sugar to dissolve.



Source: The Bartender's Guide, Jerry Thomas, 1887.

Sherry Monahan kicked off her journey into Old West cuisine, spirits and places by authoring *Taste of Tombstone*. Visit SherryMonahan.com to learn more about her books, awards and TV appearances.

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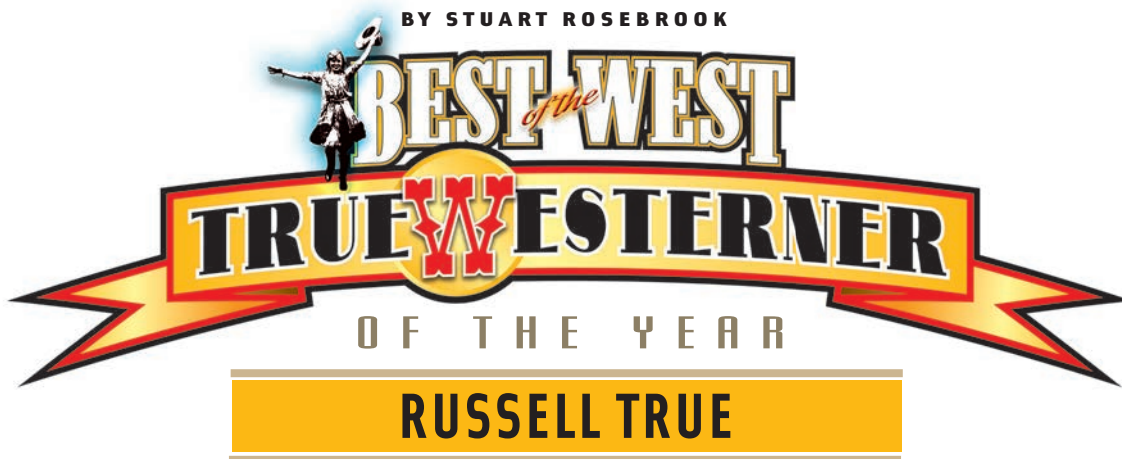
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SADDLE UP!

***True West's* editors' top picks for 2026 inspire travelers to experience firsthand the culture and heritage of the American West.**

The American West inspires more travelers than any other region in the United States. For over 20 years, *True West's* editors have diligently chronicled and shared with readers their favorite Western places and people, museums and historic sites, artisans and merchants, small towns and outdoor adventures.

One man, Russell True, and one organization, the Dude Ranchers' Association in Cody, Wyoming, have been part of *True West's* "Best of the West" every year for two decades. But long before *True West* began acknowledging Russell True's contributions and leadership to Western travel and guest ranching, he and his family welcomed guests to their White Stallion Ranch in

Tucson, Arizona. For six decades, True and his family have been active leaders in the Dude Ranchers' Association, which celebrates its centennial in 2026.

The editors of *True West* are honored to name Russell True the "True Westerner of the Year" for his lifetime of service and dedication to Western travel, hospitality and the dude ranch experience. As an owner-operator of guest ranches in Arizona, Wyoming and Montana, and a visionary leader in the Dude Ranchers' Association, he has helped to keep guest ranching one of the quintessential American vacation experiences for thousands of travelers. His personal philosophy of hospitality says it all: "We aim to

preserve the historic tradition of dude ranching, from its celebration of Western heritage to its history as an early destination vacation in the United States."

We hope that you will find *True West's* 2026 Best of the West inspiring and that it leads you to make plans to saddle up and enjoy a true Western experience from the back of a horse. Even if you don't find yourself on a trail ride, our Western favorites in this issue are also ready to get you duded-up to motor the West and get your kicks on the byways and highways we love the best.



Stuart Rosebrook is the executive director of Sharlot Hall Museum in Prescott, Arizona, and an editor-at-large for *True West*. He suggests everyone take a trail ride at a Western ranch at least once in their life.

The True Westerner of 2026 has an ironic name to go with his iconic prize: Russell True-True Westerner.

Courtesy Mark Bedor



BY STEVE FRIESEN

ART AND COLLECTIBLES

AND THINGS THAT MAKE US WESTERN

Collectors love the Old West, and Western art, firearms and collectibles remain popular coast to coast.

The year 2025 began with its challenges: tariffs and rumors of tariffs, rising inflation, a volatile stock market and expensive eggs. Despite the financial problems, the demand for art, firearms and other artifacts from the West remained steady.

A rare sword cane that was presented to Buffalo Bill by his business associate Nate Salisbury was one of the highlights at the Old West Show and Auction in Las Vegas, which began the auction year in January. The most expensive item at that auction was a ledger book created by White Bull, a nephew of Sitting Bull. The Old West Show and Auction returned later in the year in June in Santa Fe with 85 American Indian artifacts, including a highly decorated Lakota vest made in the early 20th century. The names of both the Las Vegas and Santa Fe auctions will be changed in 2026 to Old West and Native American Art Show and Auction, reflecting the increasing number of American Indian items being sold at them.

Another Buffalo Bill-related item, Annie Oakley's Smith and Wesson, brought a hefty sum at the Rock Island Premiere Firearms Auction in August. So did McQueen's "Mares Leg" Winchester Model 1892 rifle from *Wanted*

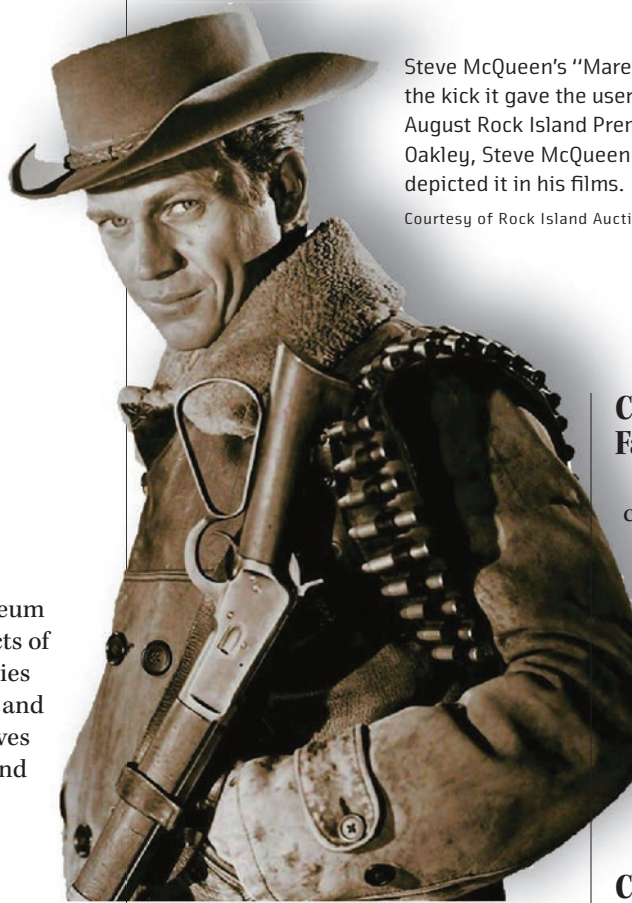
Dead or Alive. Neither was actually used in the historic West but are part of the mythic West portrayed in show business. In recent years, that mythic West has attracted a great deal of attention from collectors.

Representations of the West by contemporary artists also sold well at auction this past year. Some got respectable prices, but there were still bargains, like Donna Howell-Sickles' mixed media *It's the Little Things That Make You Laugh*, which sold at the Jackson Hole Art Auction in February. Phil Epp's *Looking Back* and *Colt Idol's Prairie Stories* each sold for more than twice their estimated price at the Scottsdale Art Auction in April.

Both featured luminescent representations of nighttime skies. One of the last art auctions of the year was the Buffalo Bill Art Show and Sale, which featured contemporary art. Among the most unusual was Maeve Eichelberger's clear acrylic *Crystal Road*, a very modern sculpture of a traditional saddle.

Amid the uncertainties of 2025, both the real and mythical West continued to draw hefty bids at auctions. And, by the end of the year, while the tariffs didn't end, eggs were more affordable.





Steve McQueen's "Mares Leg" rifle, so-called because of the kick it gave the user when fired, sold for \$211,500 at the August Rock Island Premier Firearms Auction. Like Annie Oakley, Steve McQueen never experienced the Old West but depicted it in his films.

Courtesy of Rock Island Auctions

Best Western Art Collection

Museum of Western Art, Kerrville, TX:

Founded in 1983, this museum honors the artists and subjects of the American West. Its galleries feature paintings, sculptures and artifacts that celebrate the lives of cowboys, Native peoples and pioneers.

museumofwesternart.com

Booth Western Art Museum, Cartersville, GA:

Though located in Georgia, this renowned museum houses the nation's largest permanent exhibition of Western art. Paintings, sculptures and artifacts honor cowboys, Native peoples and the American frontier's enduring influence on art and culture.

boothmuseum.org

Best American Indian Collection

Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, WY:

This renowned museum complex preserves one of the nation's finest Native American collections. Exhibits explore Plains Indian cultures, artists, and traditions, offering a powerful tribute to Indigenous history within the broader story of the American West.

centerofthewest.org

Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis, IN:

Founded in 1989, this distinguished museum holds one of the nation's finest collections of Native American art and artifacts. Its exhibitions celebrate Indigenous cultures, traditions and artists who continue to shape the story of the West.

eiteljorg.org

Best Western History Collector

Richard Fike (Museum of the Mountain West) Montrose, CO:

Historian Richard Fike founded the Museum of the Mountain West to preserve frontier life through authentic artifacts and buildings. His vast collection captures the everyday history and spirit of the 19th-century American West.

museumofthemountainwest.org

C.M. Russell Museum, Great Falls, MT:

Dedicated to the life and legacy of cowboy artist Charles M. Russell, this museum preserves an extraordinary collection of his paintings, sculptures and personal artifacts, capturing the authentic spirit and history of the American West.

cmrussell.org

Best Pioneer History Collection

Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, Colorado Springs, CO:

Housed in a restored 1903 courthouse, this museum preserves Colorado's pioneer heritage through exhibits on settlement, mining and Native cultures, celebrating the people and events that shaped the state's frontier history.

cspm.org

Sharlot Hall, Prescott, AZ:

Founded in 1928 by historian Sharlot M. Hall, this museum preserves Arizona's pioneer heritage through historic buildings, artifacts and exhibits that tell the story of frontier life, territorial politics and early settlement in Prescott.

sharlothallmuseum.org

Maeve Eichelberger makes unique use of acrylic in her sculptures.

Crystal Road, a very modern sculpture of a traditional saddle, received a high bid of \$17,000 at the Buffalo Bill Art Show and Sale.

Courtesy the Buffalo Bill Art Show and Sale

Best Old West Collectibles Auction

Richmond Auctions, Greenville, SC:

Celebrated for its exceptional Americana and Old West sales, this auction house features rare firearms, advertising art, and frontier memorabilia, attracting collectors nationwide who value authentic pieces of Western history.

richmondauctions.com

Morphy's Auctions, Denver, PA:

Renowned for its exceptional Old West sales, this auction house features historic firearms, cowboy gear, and frontier memorabilia. Collectors worldwide trust its expertise in preserving and presenting the artifacts that define America's Western legacy.

morphyauctions.com

Best Old West Art Auction

Heritage Auctions, Dallas, TX:

Esteemed as a leader in Western art sales, this Dallas-based auction house showcases masterworks by artists like Russell and Remington, connecting collectors with iconic pieces that define the artistic legacy of the American West.

ha.com



Coeur d'Alene Art Auction, Hayden, ID:

Recognized as the nation's premier Western art auction, this annual event features masterworks by artists like Russell and Remington. Collectors gather in Hayden to celebrate and preserve the artistic legacy of the American West.

cdaartauction.com



The moon dominates a scene of five horses moving toward town in Phil Epp's *Looking Back*. At \$38,025, a lucky bidder dominated the sale of this piece at the Scottsdale Art Auction.

Courtesy Scottsdale Art Auction

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Dodge City



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Annie Oakley experienced the Old West in the same way as most audiences at Buffalo Bill's Wild West; she only saw it depicted in the shows. Since she was one of the most famous marksmen of all time, any firearm that belonged to her is desirable. Her Smith and Wesson sold for \$323,125 at the Rock Island Premiere Firearms Auction in August.

Courtesy of Rock Island Auctions

Best Old West Firearms Auction

Burley Auction Group, New Braunfels, TX:

Founded in 2005, this New Braunfels auction house specializes in Western firearms, cowboy gear and frontier artifacts. Its expertly curated sales preserve the craftsmanship, history and spirit of the Old West.
burleyauction.com

Poulin Antiques & Auctions, Inc., Fairfield, ME:

Specializing in antique and collectible firearms, this respected auction house is renowned for Old West weaponry. Its expertly curated sales feature revolvers, rifles and frontier arms that defined America's pioneering era and legendary gunslingers.
poulinauctions.com

Best Historic Firearms Museum

Cody Firearms Museum (Buffalo Bill Center of the West), Cody, WY:

Home to one of the world's largest collections of firearms, this museum traces the evolution of weaponry

100 YEARS OF DUDE RANCHING
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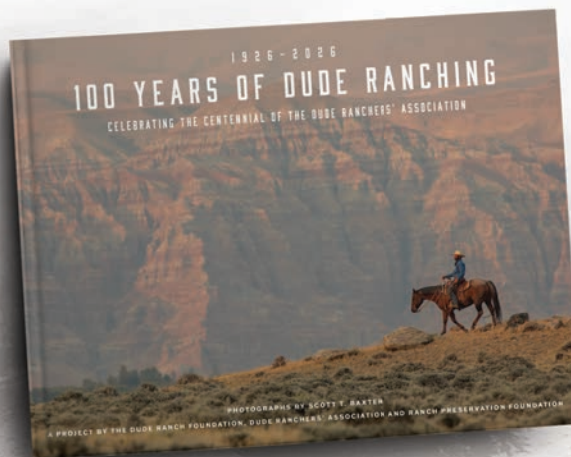
Dude ranching found its official start in 1926, when a group of ranchers decided to create a governing organization for the industry that had begun to blossom in the late 1800s. In celebration of the centennial of the Dude Ranchers' Association, this book explores modern and historic dude ranching at 26 DRA member ranches that were at the forefront of the industry, hosting dudes and giving them a taste of the West by 1926.

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ranchpreservationfoundation.org/100-years-of-dude-ranching



PHOTOGRAPY BY SCOTT T. BAXTER
HISTORY BY LYNN DOWNEY
FOREWORD BY BOB BOZE BELL

In *Prairie Stories*, Colt Idol uses tepees to add illumination and depth to a sunset. At \$38,025, it sold for twice its anticipated high bid at the Scottsdale Art Auction.

Courtesy Scottsdale Art Auction



from the frontier era to modern times, preserving the craftsmanship and history of the American West.

centerofthewest.org/explore/firearms

**Boot Hill Museum,
Dodge City, KS:**

Home to one of the finest collections of frontier firearms, this museum preserves the weapons that shaped Dodge City's lawmen and outlaws. Authentic revolvers, rifles and exhibits tell the story of the West's gunfighting legacy.

boothill.org

Best Western Art Gallery

**Briscoe Western Art Museum,
San Antonio, TX:**

Located on San Antonio's River Walk, this museum showcases

Western art that captures the landscapes, people and legends of the frontier, celebrating the artistic spirit and heritage of the American West.

briscoemuseum.org

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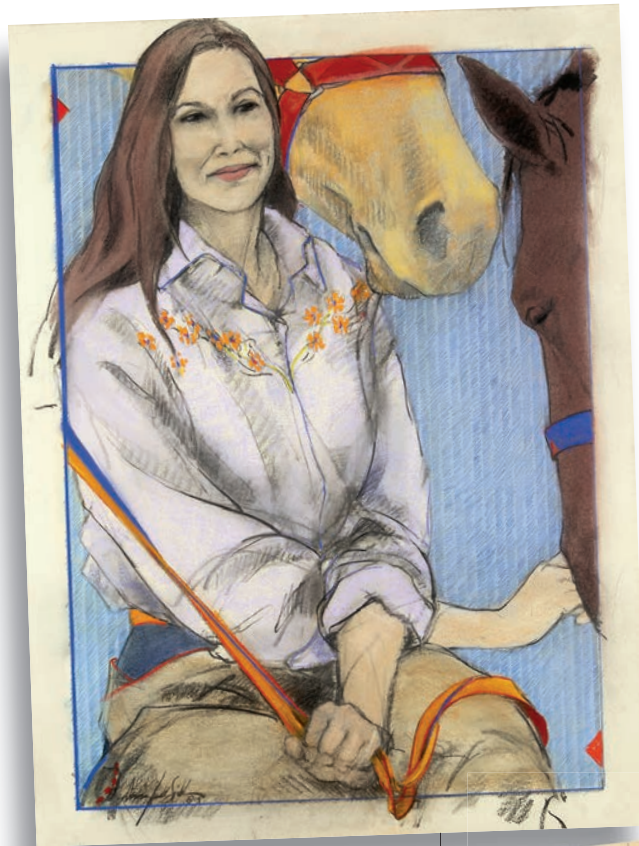

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Donna Howell-Sickles is known for creating images of the everyday life of a cowgirl. Her mixed media *It's the Little Things That Make You Laugh* sold for \$2,250 at the Jackson Hole Art Auction.

Courtesy Jackson Hole Art Auction

Legacy Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ:

Established in 1988, this premier Scottsdale gallery represents leading Western artists whose work captures the landscapes, wildlife and spirit of the frontier. Its exhibitions celebrate both traditional and contemporary visions of the American West.
legacygallery.com

Best Western Art Museum Gallery

Museum of Western Art, Kerrville, TX:

Dedicated to preserving the legacy of Western artists, this museum features paintings, sculptures and exhibits that honor cowboys, Native peoples, and pioneers celebrating the history and artistry of the American frontier.
museumofwesternart.com



White Bull's ledger book, with drawings illustrating battles and other scenes, went to the highest bid of \$270,600 at the Old West Show and Auction in Las Vegas.

Courtesy of Morphy Auctions

Western Spirit: Scottsdale Museum of the West, Scottsdale, AZ:

This acclaimed museum celebrates the art, history and culture of the American West through world-class exhibitions. Its galleries feature masterworks, artifacts and stories that honor the diverse peoples and enduring spirit of the frontier.
westernspirit.org



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OKLAHOMA CITY



BY JIM DICKSON

FIREARMS

DANIEL BOONE AND OL' TICK LICKER

While Daniel Boone is most famous for the opening of Kentucky for settlement, his exploits extend West of the Mississippi River as well. In 1799 he took his family and other settlers into Spanish territory in what is now Missouri. Even though this land was claimed by Spain, it was populated by people from the 13 Colonies.

When the Lewis and Clark expedition was formed in 1804, Daniel was rejected as a member because of his age; he was 70 years old. This riled Daniel and in 1810, when he was 76, he and a group of men made a 2,000-mile trip up the Missouri River and west on the Yellowstone River which begins in what is now Yellowstone National Park. Thus he ranks as one of the first Western explorers as well. Since John Colter had first explored what is now Yellowstone Park during the winter of 1807-08 and spread the word of the wonders he had seen there, it is almost guaranteed that Daniel would have had to go to the

headwaters of the Yellowstone River to see them for himself.

Daniel was a blacksmith, like his father, and could make guns. His favorite was Ol' Tick Licker, a .45 caliber flintlock long rifle, 63.5 inches long with double set triggers weighing 12 pounds. Boone was a famous deer hunter bringing their hides to market along with the pelts of smaller game that he had trapped. This gun was the ideal tool for a long hunter, as it had the weight and balance for steady holding and the caliber was optimized for the best balance of economy of ammunition and adequate killing power for deer. Daniel was about 5 foot 8 or 9 inches tall, and the proportions of this rifle are perfect for a man of this size.

Like many famous guns of the past, subsequent owners carved up the stock to identify it in an age when Pennsylvania/Kentucky rifles were common, something the original owners never did. In this case the elegant rifle suffered crude carvings of "BOONS best FREN" on one side and DB, a tree, an Indian, a deer and a rising sun on the other.

The rifle was acquired by the Kentucky Historical Society in 1904 along with the documentation of its chain of ownership for the sum of \$50, the equivalent of \$2,000 in today's money. They had to be absolutely sure of its authenticity before asking for donations to cover that cost.

Boone had owned multiple rifles in his lifetime, and of course there were

the ones falsely attributed to him as well. Thus the authenticity of this rifle was sometimes questioned. Perhaps its greatest validation came from a later director of the Kentucky Historical Society, Colonel George Chinn. America's greatest authority on the different mechanisms used in machine guns, he had put this down in his epic four-volume set "The Machinegun" for the Bureau of Naval Ordnance. He was also the most thorough and relentless researcher and historian that I have ever known. Colonel Chinn was absolutely certain that this was Ol' Tick Licker, and that is good enough for me and for anyone who knew him well. This man was a giant in his fields of expertise, and there are always those who want to try to elevate themselves to the giant's level by arguing with him instead of earning their own fame honestly.

Together Daniel Boone and Ol' Tick Licker helped open up the American frontier from East to West. It was the long hunters from the East who became the first mountain men in the West, and Daniel Boone was at the forefront of them always hunting and exploring new lands of the West. He remains just as much a Western hero as an Eastern one.



Jim Dickson is an internationally recognized authority on weapons and has written for gun magazines in 13 countries since 1979. The former blacksmith makes his home in Clayton, Georgia.

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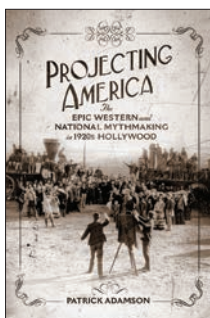
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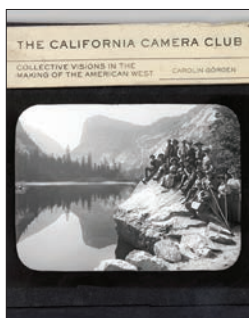
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Cimarron Thunderer (.45 LC/.45 ACP dual cylinder, 3½") —

Old-Model Peacemaker silhouette with a bird's-head grip, compact barrel options and dual-cylinder versatility for collectors and carry shooters. cimarron-firearms.com



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Walker-frame-inspired Dragoon with case-hardened frame, roll-engraved cylinder, large walnut grip and traditional steel/brass appointments. taylorsfirearms.com



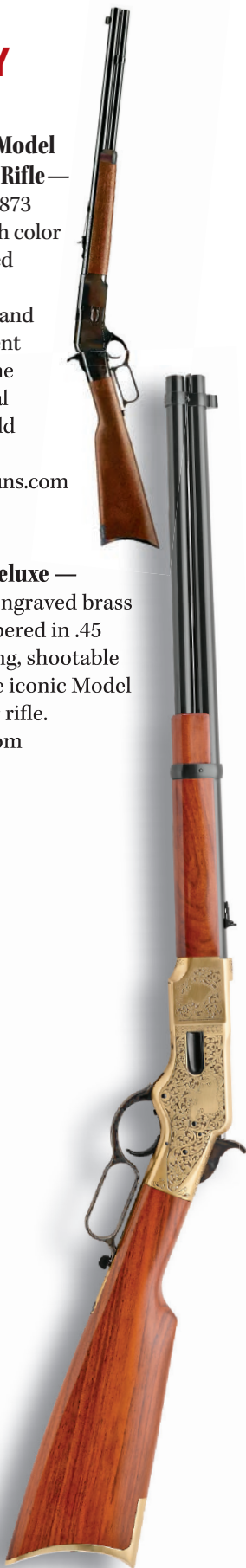
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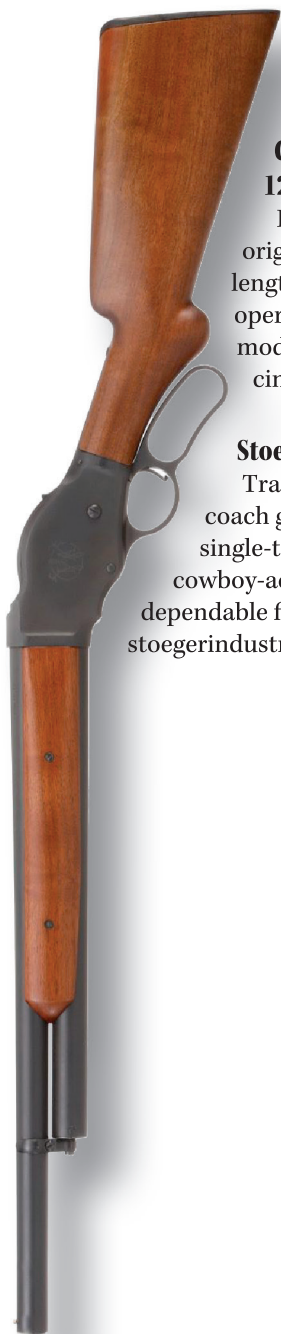
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taylorfirearms.com

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shilohrifle.com



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dixiegunworks.com

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thehawkenshop.com



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EDITED BY STUART ROSEBROOK

WESTERN BOOKS

HOW THE WEST WAS WON

PUBLISHERS IN 2025 PLAY TO WIN WITH A FULL HOUSE OF WESTERN HISTORY ROYALTY.

Just when you believe the Western history genre is on life-support, publishers across the country, including those big houses of publishing on Madison Avenue, went back to the future and delivered fans of the mythic era a set of the most important books produced on the topic in over a decade.

On the fiction side of the West, we are seeing a major shift in publishing. More and more authors are self-publishing as the genre has nearly disappeared from New York imprints, while university publishers are adding more fiction to their catalogs, a shift for many academic houses that were known strictly for nonfiction.

Dedicated fans of Western history and fiction should find solace in the strong set of big Western history books published by New York imprints, but scholars, researchers and aficionados of the genre should continue to support the smaller independent and university imprints who are bringing voice to a new generation of authors.

I believe the greatest challenge publishers of Western history and fiction are facing is the age-old question: how to keep the genre relevant at a time when the Old West continues to fade further and further into the past, and the most popular era of Western culture in film, television and novels is 1970 to the present. Craig Johnson, C.J. Box, Anne Hillerman and Taylor Sheridan prove that again and again every day. I believe we must embrace a broader perspective on what we define as a Western, and *True West*, in partnership with

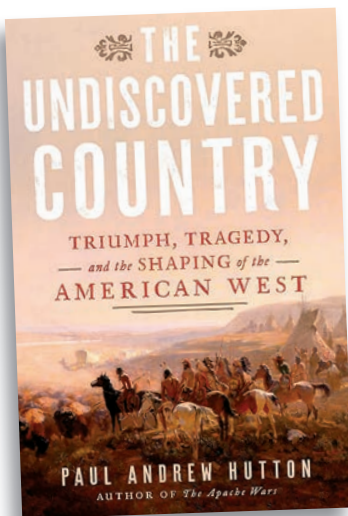
Western Writers of America, is where that conversation should begin.

For the past 15 years, we have chosen an editor's and a readers' choice book of the year. In a new tradition in 2026, *True West's* editors have selected the two best in seven categories. Enjoy our choices and keep supporting the Western genre of publishing. Without your interest and support, imprints will continue to find it more difficult to economically justify investing in the history, biography and fiction of the American West.

BEST AUTHORS AND HISTORICAL NONFICTION BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Paul Hutton's *The Undiscovered Country: Triumph, Tragedy and the Shaping of the American West*
(Dutton, \$35)

For followers of Paul Andrew Hutton's career as an American

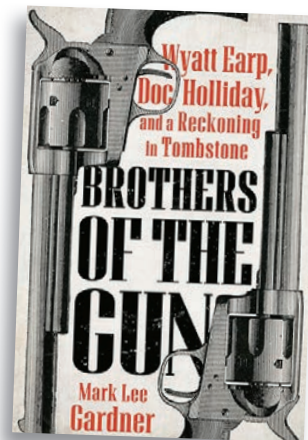


scholar of history, his latest book, *The Undiscovered Country: Triumph, Tragedy, and the Shaping of the American West* will undoubtedly be considered his finest work, a true capstone on his academic and professional journey from his undergraduate studies at the University of Indiana to his most recent post as interim curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming.

Mark Lee Gardner's *Brothers of the Gun: Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, and a Reckoning in Tombstone*

(Dutton, \$35)

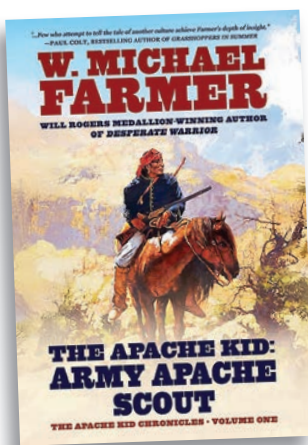
Brothers of the Gun: Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, and a Reckoning in Tombstone, hits you with both barrels of facts and literary style. Gardner brings his charismatic, fact-filled prose to the forefront, providing the reader with a deeper understanding of these complicated characters and the significance of their lives to American Western history.



BEST HISTORICAL WESTERN NOVELISTS AND NOVELS

W. Michael Farmer's *The Apache Kid: Army Apache Scout, "The Apache Kid Chronicles," Volume 1*
(Hat Creek, \$32.50)

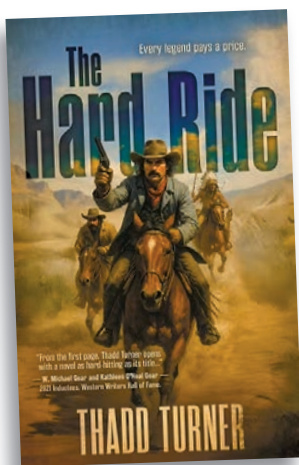
For the past 15 years, W. Michael Farmer has been one of the most lauded and respected novelists of the American West and the Apache Wars. This first volume of his



"Apache Kid Chronicles" series reflects both his well-honed research and literary style. Readers will be eager for Volume 2.

Thadd Turner's *The Hard Ride*
(Wolfpack Publishing, \$17.99)

Multitalented Western filmmaker Thadd Turner brings all his creative skills to the table in his latest novel, *The Hard Ride*. Based on the life and legend of James Butler "Wild Bill"



Hickok, Turner's fast-paced prose and screenwriting flair bring one of his favorite legendary characters to life in a classic Western style.

THE STATE OF WESTERN PUBLISHING: INSIGHTS FROM THE BEST

I recently spoke with Johnny D. Boggs and Paul Andrew Hutton, two of the West's most prestigious, award-winning authors about the current state of Western fiction and nonfiction publishing. Here is what they shared:

JOHNNY D. BOGGS

As a writer of Western fiction, how would you summarize today's market compared to 15 years ago?

If you mean publishing outlets, Western fiction has taken a massive hit. More imprints have closed or moved away from Westerns, especially when it comes to traditional Western novels. Even contemporary Western mysteries don't seem to have as many new titles on the shelves, except those by Anne Hillerman, C.J. Box and Craig Johnson. And, of course, Western romances. We still see an occasional historical Western here and there, but even 15 years ago Western fiction was a hard sell compared to thrillers, mysteries, etc.

Do you believe the growing market in university Western fiction publishing will counter the loss of mass market/general market Western fiction publishing?

University presses still, for the most part, focus on nonfiction, and those that do accept fiction publish only a few titles a year. Granted, a lot of those novels are exceptional, but few reach a wide audience. We're talking about small print runs, which is a long way from the "mass" in mass market. But...those publishers that are publishing Westerns and university presses tend to keep their titles in print a lot longer than commercial houses.

It will be interesting to see how the removal of Western mass-market paperbacks plays out. Mass-markets were for the masses, and reached a lot of mystery, thriller, romance, fantasy, science fiction, horror, historical fiction and Western readers. This termination seems to be more about profit margins than a lack of readers. So: Will that reader pay \$15 for a novel that he or she used to buy for half that much, when those extra dollars could put supper on the table? And if that reader won't, how will publishers, distributors and booksellers react?

If you were starting out today as a Western fiction author, or fiction author in any genre, what would recommend?

The same thing I was told when I started out more than 25 years ago: Write the best fiction you can...edit, edit, edit, tighten, tighten, tighten, polish, polish, polish. Send it to a publisher. And don't take rejection personally. Keep sending it out. As long as it takes. Because most wannabe writers give up. Don't give up. It's not always about talent, but perseverance. You just have to put your manuscript before the right editor at the right publishing house at the right time on the right day of the week.

PAUL ANDREW HUTTON

As a historian and author of Western history, how would you summarize today's market compared to 15 years ago?

We are presently experiencing a delightful boomlet in Western publishing. This year has seen more high-quality major publishing houses release Western titles (certainly in nonfiction) than in the last 20 years. This is generally ascribed to the success of *Yellowstone* and other Taylor Sheridan shows on television, although there are probably several social factors at work as well. Several films and TV shows are in the works, including Sheridan's adaption of SC Gwynne's *Empire of the Summer Moon*.

What is the future of Western history publishing?

How long will this last? Who knows? We experienced similar booms after the success of Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* and its many spinoffs as well as John Fusco's Young Guns films. Certainly, the short-term picture is bright.

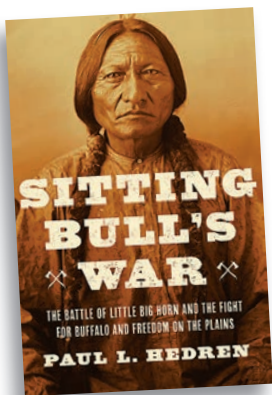
As a Western historian, what would you recommend to young historians/Western history authors today?

Of course there is the university press/academic side of publishing—mostly narrowly focused trendy (race, class gender) books. Native American studies have always been a strong market and remains so. It is tougher in the popular market, but strong stories that connect with the reader are always popular—especially biographies. Spend time on a strong written proposal that you can pitch. Both of my recent proposals (*Apache Wars* and *Undiscovered Country*) were over 60 pages long. An agent is invaluable.

—Stuart Rosebrook

BEST BIOGRAPHIES

Paul Hedren's *Sitting Bull's War: The Battle of Little Big Horn and the Fight for Buffalo and Freedom on the Plains*



(Pegasus Books, \$35)
This is Hedren's 14th book, and many will consider it the greatest chronicle of Sitting Bull, the Lakota people, the war with the

United States, and the significance of how the war changed the direction of American history—and the fate of the great bison herds—forever.

John Boessenecker's *Bring Me the Head of Joaquin Murrieta: The Bandit Chief Who Terrorized California and Launched the Legend of Zorro*

(Hanover Square Press, \$32)
California author Boessenecker is one of the best American authors publishing today. His most recent history should be considered one of the finest biographies of the Old West, an instant classic. His research is impeccable, revealing and groundbreaking.



BEST WESTERN HISTORY BOOK PUBLISHERS

Dutton, New York, NY

A storied imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, Dutton is one of the premier houses in New York publishing Western American history. In 2025, two of its most significant books are Paul Andrew Hutton's *The Undiscovered Country* and Mark Lee Gardner's *Brothers of the Gun*.

University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK

Since 1929, the University of Oklahoma Press has been a recognized standard-bearer in publishing the history of the American West. In 2025, the editors continued to publish a broad range of American Western history with a keen eye on new authors, traditional Western topics, environmental history and the 20th- and 21st-century West.



Sean Michael Chavez
Rebeldes Look (Noche), 2025, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches
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BEST WESTERN HISTORY UNIVERSITY PRESSES

University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE

Founded in 1941, the University of Nebraska Press and its Western history imprint, Bison Books, is one of the great legacy publishers of the American West in the United States. The editors continue to keep our Western past relevant with cutting-edge history, biography, classic reprints and, most recently, fiction.

University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, NM

While not as prolific a publishing house as Nebraska or Oklahoma, the University of New Mexico Press is year after year a frontrunner among the mid-size university houses publishing academic and trade Western history and fiction. In recent years, New Mexico has reestablished itself as one

of the leaders in publishing Western film history through its Reel West series.

BEST WESTERN FICTION PRESSES

TCU Press, Fort Worth, TX

Founded six decades ago, TCU Press has consistently published academic fiction. In the past decade, the Fort Worth-based publishing house has emerged as a pacesetter in Westerns, Hispanic and Latino, 20th century, post-World War II and Native American historical fiction.

Wolfpack Publishing, Las Vegas, NV

Currently, traditional Western novelists have the narrowest field of imprints willing to publish this original American artform. Wolfpack Publishing, led by Mike Bray, has defied the odds the last decade, and emerged as the largest and most successful traditional Western fiction publishing house in the world.

BEST WESTERN HISTORY BOOKSTORES

Hole in the Wall Bookstore, Wall, SD

If you ever drive across South Dakota on your way to the Badlands and the Black Hills, you must stop at Wall Drug in Wall. But don't be fooled by all the trinkets and roadside food for sale. In the heart of the tourist stop is one of the finest Western bookstores in the West. You'd better have extra room in the car for the load of books you'll buy at Hole in the Wall Bookstore.

Cactus Book Shop, San Angelo, TX

For Western book collectors, Cactus Book Shop remains one of the best sources of Western Americana, Texiana and West Texas history books in the country. Elmer Kelton fans pilgrimage to the store, knowing it has the largest selection of the Texas author's books.

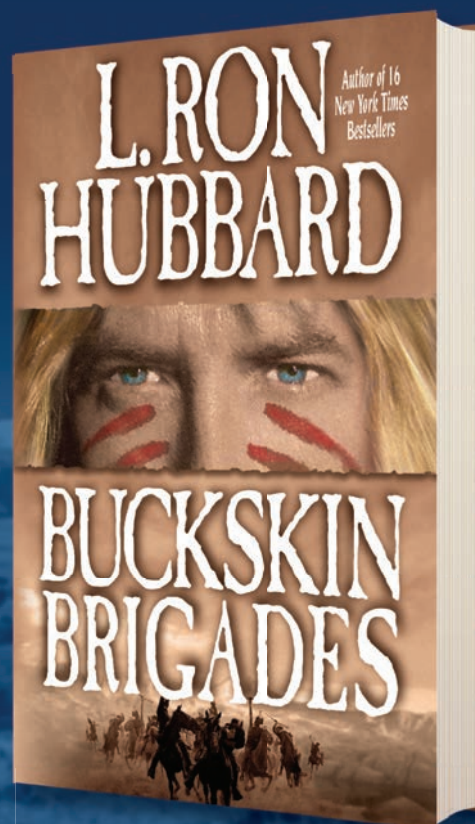


An Epic Tale of the Fur Trade, the Blackfeet, and the First Frontier

"A thriller . . . [which has] an enthusiasm, even a freshness and a sparkle, decidedly rare in this type of romance."
—*New York Times Book Review*

When Captain Lewis kills a Blackfoot warrior, the West ignites. Raised by the Blackfeet, Yellow Hair is thrust into a rising conflict—sent to spy on white traders and defend his homeland. *Buckskin Brigades* is a sweeping saga of American history—a story of courage, endurance, and one man's stand on the edge of a nation's violent transformation.

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BY HENRY C. PARKE

WESTERN MOVIES

DVDs & TV SHOWS

A YEAR OF WESTERNS ON HOLD

The year 2025 was a placeholder for Westerns. The most anticipated Western of the year, Kevin Costner's *Horizon: An American Saga, Chapter 2*, has yet to arrive. Prior to *Chapter 1*'s disastrous release, it was to premiere in August of '24, and although it played the Venice and Santa Barbara Film Festivals, there is no release date for theaters or streaming.

Horizon's woes certainly haven't helped the Western resurgence we've been enjoying. "I went at 10 a.m. on opening day, I was so excited to see it," recalls Dallas Sonnier, producer of *Bone Tomahawk* and this year's *Frontier Crucible*. "I was just devastated.

Costner had all the resources, but that movie is truly awful. It ultimately damages any momentum that *Yellowstone* has made in terms of getting bigger budgets for Westerns."

2024's theatrical disappointments, *Horizon 1* and *The Thicket*, have become streaming powerhouses, but for the first year in recent memory, no Western

has played in theaters, except the one-week releases required for Oscar eligibility. A few years ago, this annual survey of the year's top Westerns added the category "Best Movie to Stream" because an increasing number of Westerns were going direct-to-streaming. Now, every movie

discussed here can be seen in that light. And it's hard to tell which movies are doing well, as streamers are notoriously stingy with their viewership numbers. But as of this writing, Amazon's #1 Western Action Film is Cynthia Rothrock's martial arts Western, *Black Creek*. Maybe that's why the new martial arts Western, *The Wide West*, is catching on. Director Joe Cornet is a bit bemused that his seventh Western should be his most successful to date, "because it's my least serious work. Who in the hell ever heard of sumo wrestlers in a

Western? Even Toshiro Mifune's *Red Sun* didn't go that far."

There's been a good deal of Western production. In the newest from legendary cult filmmaker Alex Cox is *Dead Souls*, he also stars as the mysterious Mr. Strindler, traveling from town to town, "buying" the names of dead Mexicans. "We filmed one week in Spain, and two in Mes-

cala, in Southern Arizona. I wanted to shoot it all in Spain, but they were all full. There was this enormous quantity of production: a Dutch, German, a French Western, all being shot in Almeria. So we were very lucky to get Mini-Hollywood, which was built for Leone's *For a Few Dollars More*."



2025's one massive Western success was Netflix's miniseries *American Primeval*. The controversial six-part telling of the infamous Mountain Meadows Massacre painted a very black picture of Brigham Young (Kim Coates) and the Mormons,

and renewed Jim Bridger (Shea Whigham) as a folk hero. Produced on an epic scale, its drama and jarring violence launched a million arguments, and created what the genre needs most: new, young Western fans.

INSP's second season of its popular *Elkhorn* series continues the saga of young Teddy Roosevelt (Mason Beals). At 26, following the tragic same-day deaths of his wife and mother, he abandoned his Manhattan political career, and became a Dakota cattle rancher, along the way developing into the man who would become president.

Tom Blyth is effective as Billy in the third and final season of MGM+'s *Billy the Kid*. Stretching the life of a 22-year-old over 22 episodes called for more invention than history, and anachronistic dialogue—Pat Garrett telling Governor Lew Wallace, "You screwed me over!"—induces the occasional spit-take, but it was elegantly acted and produced.

Several noteworthy independent Westerns are available for streaming. *Frontier Crucible*, from a 1961 Harry



All photos courtesy Henry C. Parke

Wittington novel, reached the screen without a screenwriter. Sonnier explains, “We converted [the book] to a Final Draft file and made the movie from it.” A man who knows his way through Apache country (Miles Clohessy) agrees to bring much-needed medicine to a town, but enroute encounters survivors of an Apache attack, some of whom—Thomas Jane, Armie Hammer—cannot be trusted. Director Travis Mills first drew attention “because I directed 12 Westerns in 12 months in 2020. The book was one of the best Westerns I’ve read: a newer, violent version of *The Tall T*. We shot 120 pages in 18 days.” There’s not a single interior in the film, Sonnier notes. “In the book, William H. Macy’s scene takes place in an office, but we moved it to Monument Valley.”

By contrast, *Eastern Western*’s story evolved gradually. “Our screenplay,” says Marina Grozdanova, co-writing and directing with her sister Biliana, “was an outline. Our non-actors, Igor and his real-life son, were the protagonists. So we allowed the story,” about a widowed father making a life for himself and his son against tremendous odds, “to mold around them.” The Bulgarian-born, Brooklyn-based sisters “immigrated when we were very young,” says Biliana. “A Western story of coming to America is as old as cinema. But the Eastern European journey to America was something that we wanted to tell. So our main character’s from Bosnia.” It’s a naturalistic, moving story, told chronologically, with some sudden jumps. Biliana says, “The first day of filming was the grizzly bear. We thought, if we can get this top of the list, we’ll be good to go.”

Bury ‘Em Deep is an unexpectedly entertaining film about a legendary bounty hunter who gets in a world of trouble repaying the kindness of a nun who saved his life. Star Robert Bronzi, a Hungarian-born actor, has built a leading-man career on his uncanny resemblance to Charles

Bronson. Impressively directed, photographed and edited by Michael Fredianelli, the ending shoot-out in the pumpkin patch is worth the price of admission.

The best foreign-made Westerns this year are comedies. The Italian *Django Undisputed* is not a Django film, but an homage to the wonderful Terence Hill/Bud Spencer comedies like *They Call Me Trinity*. It’s dedicated to *Trinity*-director Enzo Barboni, with Claudio Del Falco perfectly recreating Hill’s astonishing comic stunts and shtick.

The first successful Euro-Westerns were not Italian but German: Karl May’s *Winnetou, the Apache Prince* novels spawned hugely popular Croatia-lensed Westerns in the early 1960s, pairing American Lex Barker with French actor Pierre Brice as Winnetou. The new German Western *Manitou’s Canoe*, a hysterical, affectionate send-up of those films, is the funniest Western spoof since *Blazing Saddles*! Rather than avoid “Whites playing Indians” issues, they flew to America for a scene with *actual* Apaches! Jicarilla Apache actor Alan Tefoya was delighted to play the medicine man. “They sent me the script, and I woke up my wife because I was laughing so hard. I told her, ‘It’s my chance to bring two of the most misunderstood peoples and cultures together!’ Because when you look at Germans, everybody thinks Nazis. When you look at Apaches, they think killers. I gotta do this.” And the perfect follow-up: when Alan went to the Munich premiere, he escorted Pierre Brice’s widow, Hella.

And there’s plenty to look forward to in the New Year! The first new Louis L’Amour film in 25 years, *Flint*, directed by Ryan Whittaker, stars *Yellowstone*’s Josh Hollaway. And while John Fusco, who wrote *Young Guns 1* and *2*, isn’t prepared to go

on record about the much-rumored *Young Guns 3*, he told us a bit about *The Rescue*, his new movie in pre-production at Paramount, starring *1923*’s Brandon Sklenar. “Although set in modern day, it’s a Western at its core, a spare thriller driven by an American cowboy on his horse as he searches for his missing daughter in a vast wilderness area.”

MOVIES

Best Western Movie

Editors’ Choice:
Frontier Crucible

— Well GO USA
Entertainment

A former soldier (Miles Clohessy) is enroute through Apache country to deliver medicine to a desperate town when he comes upon survivors of an Apache attack, including a beautiful woman (Mary Stickley), her wounded



husband, and men he can neither abandon nor trust.

Readers’ Choice:
Dead Souls
Exterminating Angel



Best Western Documentary

Editors’ Choice:
You’re No Indian

— Indi Rijghts and Brick and Chrome Productions

Ryan Flynn’s shocking up-to-the-moment exposé of the scandal of casino-running tribal leaders disenrolling members for spurious reasons, in order to keep a bigger cut of the profits.

Readers’ Choice:
Butch Cassidy’s Forgotten Outlaw—
Tizaster Productios

Best TV Western Miniseries



Editors' Choice:
American Primeval
— Netflix
The Mountain Meadows Massacre is the backdrop of this tale of a woman

(Betty Gilpin) and her young son (Preston Mota) seeking his father through a brutal, terrifying frontier, with the reluctant help of a guide (Taylor Kitsch).

Best TV Western Series

Editors' Choice:
Elkhorn
— The INSP Channel

A 20-something Theodore Roosevelt leaves personal tragedy to become a cowboy and a cattle rancher, learning the skills and life-lessons which will make him a leader of men and a nation.



Readers' Choice:
Billy the Kid—MGM+

Best Blu-Ray Western Movie

Editors' Choice:
Shane
— Kino Lorber
The classic story of the drifter (Alan Ladd) who helps



nesters (Jean Arthur, Van Heflin) stand up against a powerful rancher is made new again by commentary from the director's son, George Stevens Jr., who was on set every day.



Readers' Choice:
The Searchers— Warner Archive

Best Western Movie Collection

Editors' Choice:
Audie Murphy Collection V
— Kino Lorber
Thanks to TV, a whole new audience is discovering Audie Murphy, and this volume, including *Bullet for a Badman*, *Seven Ways from Sundown* and *Walk the Proud Land*, is an



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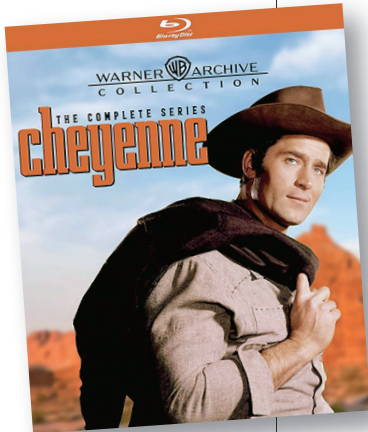
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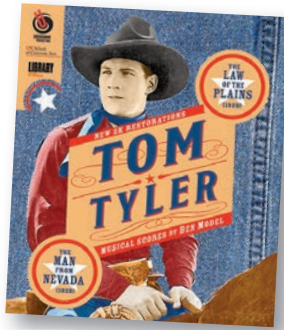


Best TV Blu-ray

Cheyenne
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 Archive Collection
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 terrific
 series that
 began the
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 Empire star
 Clint Walker
 as lonely
 cowboy
 Cheyenne
 Bodie.



Best Silent



Western

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 Collection**

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 Productions
 Most remembered today
 in character roles in John
 Ford Westerns, here he is
 as the hero of two 1929
 Westerns, *Law of the Plains*
 and *Man From Nevada*.

Best Foreign Western



bestows immortality!

Readers' Choice

Django Undisputed—
 Minerva Pictures

Editors' Choice:
Manitou's Canoe
 — Constantin
 Film Vertrieb
 In this wonder-
 fully ridiculous
 parody of the
 1960s Winnetou
 films, Manitou
 and Ranger are on
 the hunt for a
 fabled canoe that



Henry C. Parke, Western Film and TV Editor for *True West*, is a screenwriter, and blogs for the INSP Channel, and at HenrysWesternRoundup.blogspot.com. A book based on his *True West* columns, *The Greatest Westerns Ever Made*, was recently published by TwoDot.

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From rugged trails that reverberate with history to small towns that never lost their frontier soul, the American West remains a place where the past and present ride side by side. Whether your journey takes you through canyon country, gold rush ghost towns or wide-open rangeland, the call of the West is always the same, come see for yourself.

Why does the West still pull at our hearts? Maybe it's the light on the red rocks at dusk, the solitude of a desert sunrise or the stories that live in the land itself. Whatever it is, the feeling is unmistakable; you know when you're in the West.

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Murray Neon-Livingston, MT

Courtesy Explore Livingston





Courtesy Buffalo Bill Center of the West

Best Places to Live Like an Old West Cowboy (Winter)

Cody, WY:

Founded by Buffalo Bill Cody in 1896, this Wyoming town embodies the true cowboy way of life. With ranches, rodeos and the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, it preserves frontier traditions year-round.

codywy.gov

Western Museum celebrates the art and heritage of the Old West.

wickenburgchamber.com



By Carol Highsmith Courtesy Library of Congress

Best Places to Live Like an Old West Cowboy (Summer)

Bandera, TX:

Known as the Cowboy Capital of the World, this Texas Hill Country town honors frontier traditions with dude ranches, trail rides and summer rodeos that celebrate the enduring spirit of the American cowboy.

banderacowboycapital.com

Livingston, MT:

Framed by the Absaroka Mountains, Livingston captures the Old West spirit with rodeos, trail rides, historic saloons, the Yellowstone Gateway Museum and nearby guest ranches that keep Montana's cowboy traditions and frontier freedom alive.

explorelivingstonMT.com



Courtesy Livingston CVB

Best Old West Gunfighter Towns

Sheridan, WY:

Rooted in frontier history, this northern Wyoming town once echoed with outlaws and lawmen. Today, Sheridan preserves its gunfighter past through historic saloons, museums and Old West architecture.

sheridanwy.gov



Courtesy Desert Caballeros Western Museum

Wickenburg, AZ:

Known as the Team Roping Capital of the World, Wickenburg keeps the cowboy spirit alive with trail rides, roping events and a historic downtown. The Desert Caballeros



Courtesy Sheridan Inn

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By Carol Highsmith Courtesy Library of Congress



Tombstone, AZ:

No town captures Old West legend like Tombstone, where the stories about the shootout near the O.K. Corral echo through dusty streets. Big Nose Kate's, the Crystal Palace and the Bird Cage Theatre preserve its gunfighter spirit and frontier history. discovertombstone.com

Best Preserved Pioneer Towns Recreated

Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, Grand Island, NE:

Founded in 1961, this renowned living history museum recreates an 1890s prairie town with original buildings, costumed interpreters and working exhibits that bring Nebraska's pioneer and railroad heritage vividly to life.

stuhrmuseum.org



By Carol Highsmith Courtesy Library of Congress



Courtesy Wiki Commons

Pioneer Living History Museum, Phoenix, AZ:

Founded in the 1960s to preserve



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Arizona's pioneer past, this village features 30 historic buildings relocated from around the state. The structures, reflecting everyday frontier life and the state's rugged pioneer spirit, include cabins, a ranch house and a sheriff's office.

pioneeraz.org



San Antonio's Mission Concepcion Courtesy Library of Congress

Best Towns for Historic Entertainment

San Antonio, TX:

Steeped in history, this vibrant Texas city blends Old West and frontier heritage with lively entertainment. From the Alamo to the River Walk, San Antonio celebrates its storied past through music, culture and festivals.

visitsanantonio.com



Courtesy Dodge City CVB

Dodge City, KS:

Once the wildest cow town on the frontier, Dodge City thrived with

saloons, gamblers and lawmen. Today, Boot Hill Museum recreates its raucous Old West past with gunfights, can-can shows and cowboy lore.

visitdodgecity.org

Best Living History Farm Museums

Heritage Farmstead Museum, Plano, TX:

Established in 1973, this museum preserves North Texas's agricultural



By Carol Highsmith Courtesy Library of Congress

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heritage through a restored 1891 farmstead. Authentic buildings, heirloom animals and demonstrations of pioneer farm life bring the region's rural past vividly to life.

heritagefarmstead.org

Old Cowtown Museum, Wichita, KS:

Founded in the 1950s, Old Cowtown Museum in Wichita preserves life on the 1870s Kansas frontier with more than 50 historic buildings, costumed interpreters, gunfight reenactments and lively demonstrations of early ranching, trade and pioneer traditions.

ldcowtown.org

Best Old West Towns to Live In

Pendleton, OR: Home of the legendary Pendleton Round-Up, this Oregon town blends frontier heritage with vibrant cowboy culture. Historic brick buildings, classic saloons and a thriving Western arts scene make Pendleton a true Old West hometown.

pendletonor.gov



Pendleton royalty courtesy the Duke Joseph Agency

Virginia City, NV: Once the richest boomtown of the Comstock Lode, Virginia City blends historic charm with frontier spirit. Its preserved



Courtesy Virginia City Convention & Tourism Authority



Courtesy Wichita Convention and Visitors Bureau



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boardwalks, saloons, museums and restored Victorians make it one of the best Old West towns to live in today.
 visitvirginiacitynv.com

Best Historic Railroads of the West

Georgetown Loop Railroad, Georgetown, CO: Completed in 1884, this engineering marvel winds through Colorado's Rocky Mountains



Courtesy Georgetown Loop Railroad

on narrow-gauge track. Restored steam locomotives and towering trestles carry passengers through the



Courtesy Cumbres & Toltec Railroad

state's mining past and breathtaking Western scenery.

georgetownlooprr.com

Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, Chama, NM: Completed in 1880, this historic narrow-gauge line winds through the Rockies on original track with steam locomotives, high trestles and mountain passes that preserve the golden age and adventure of Western railroading.

cumbrestoltec.com

Best "Who Slept Here" Hotels

The Occidental Hotel, Buffalo,



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WY: Established in 1880, this historic Wyoming hotel hosted legends like Buffalo Bill, Teddy Roosevelt and Calamity Jane. Restored to its frontier grandeur, it preserves the charm and spirit of the Old West.

Occidentalwyoming.com

Bullock Hotel, Deadwood, SD: Built in 1895 by Sheriff Seth Bullock, this grand hotel embodies Deadwood's



Courtesy South Dakota Dept. of Tourism

Wild West legacy. Restored Victorian details, frontier lore and Bullock's enduring presence make it a legendary place where Old West history still lingers.

historicbullock.com

Best Heritage Hotels

The Strater Hotel, Durango, CO: Built in 1887, this grand Victorian



Smith Photography Courtesy The Strater Hotel

hotel showcases Durango's mining boom elegance. Filled with period furnishings and frontier charm, it

offers guests an authentic taste of Colorado's rich Western heritage and hospitality.

strater.com



Courtesy New Mexico Tourism Dept

St. James Hotel, Cimarron, NM: Built in 1872 during Cimarron's rowdy frontier days, this historic hotel hosted Western legends and outlaws alike. Original bullet holes and ghostly tales still echo the untamed spirit of New Mexico's Old West.

mvacationproperties.com

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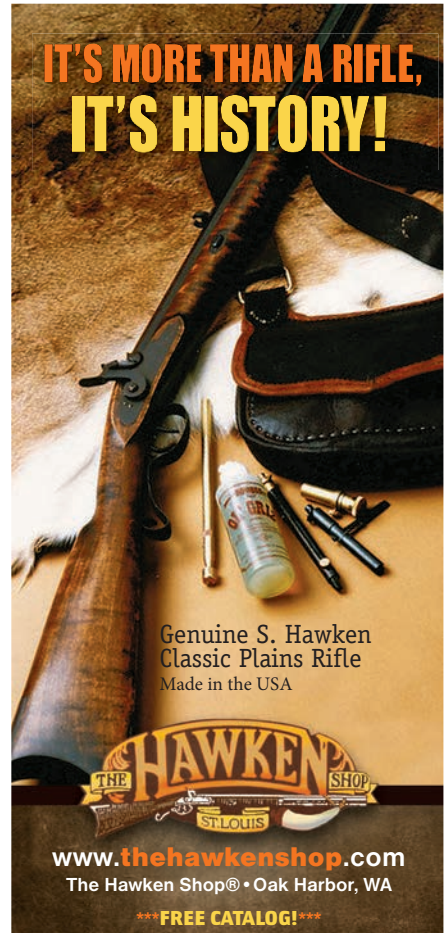
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Best Dude Ranches of the West

Dixie Dude Ranch, Bandera, TX: Founded in 1901, this historic Bandera ranch welcomes guests to experience real cowboy life with horseback riding, campfire cookouts and warm hospitality that reflect the enduring traditions of the American West.

dixieduderanch.com

White Stallion Ranch, Tucson, AZ: Established in the 1940s, this family-run ranch captures the spirit of the Old West with horseback rides, rodeos, cookouts and warm Southwestern hospitality offering guests an authentic Arizona cowboy



Courtesy White Stallion Ranch

experience near Tucson's desert mountains.

whitestallion.com

Best Historic Saloons of the West

The Buckhorn Saloon & Museum, San Antonio, TX: Established in

1881, this legendary saloon began as a whiskey-and-antler trade. Today, it houses an extraordinary wildlife collection and museum preserving the colorful spirit of San Antonio's Old West heritage.

buckhornmuseum.com

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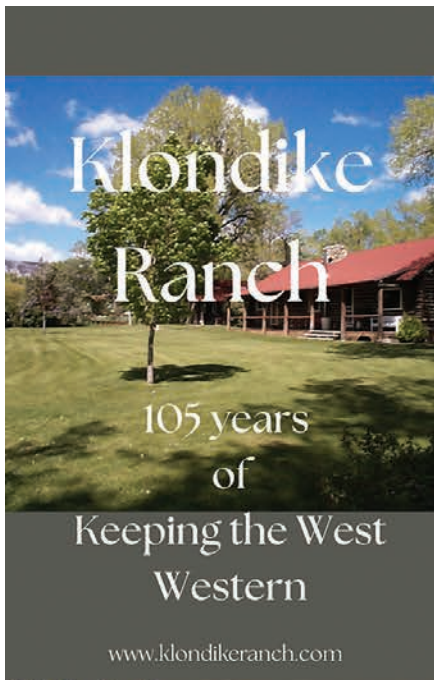
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The Buckhorn Saloon by Kenny Braun Courtesy Texas Tourism

Historic Montana Bar, Miles City, MT: Opened in 1908, this storied saloon embodies Montana's frontier grit with its original backbar, taxidermy mounts and vintage décor. Once a cowboy hangout, it remains a living monument to the state's Old West spirit.

themontanabar.com

through Prescott's frontier days. Rebuilt after the 1900 fire, it remains Arizona's oldest frontier bar and a centerpiece of Whiskey Row history.

thepalacerestaurantandsaloon.com

Best Historic Restaurants

Hamley's Steakhouse & Saloon, Pendleton, OR: Dating to the early 1900s, this historic steakhouse and saloon carries on Pendleton's cowboy legacy. With handcrafted leather décor and frontier charm, it remains a centerpiece of Oregon's enduring Old West tradition.

hamley.com

The Palace Saloon, Prescott, AZ: Opened in 1877, this iconic saloon and restaurant served lawmen, miners and gamblers



Courtesy The Palace Saloon

Best Chuckwagon Cook-Offs

Llano Chuckwagon Cook-Off, Llano, TX: This annual event celebrates Texas ranching heritage with authentic chuckwagon meals



Courtesy LlanoChuckwagonCookoff.com

cooked over open fires. Competing teams recreate 1800s trail cuisine serving up history, flavor and cowboy camaraderie in the heart of Llano.

llanochuckwagoncookoff.com

Santa Fe Trail Days, Larned,

KS: Celebrating the frontier spirit, this annual cook-off showcases authentic 1800s chuckwagon meals prepared over open fires. Teams compete in traditional trail cooking bringing the taste and camaraderie of the Santa Fe Trail to life.

santafetraildays.org

Best Chuckwagon Shows & Suppers

Flying L Ranch Resort, Bandera,

TX: At this historic Bandera resort, guests enjoy hearty chuckwagon



Courtesy Flying L Ranch Resort

dinners served with live Western music and cowboy entertainment capturing the flavor, humor and hospitality of Texas's Old West tradition.

flyingl.com

Blazin' M Ranch, Cottonwood,

AZ: This lively Western experience serves up an authentic chuckwagon dinner with toe-tapping music, cowboy comedy and frontier fun. Guests enjoy authentic Old West entertainment in a recreated frontier

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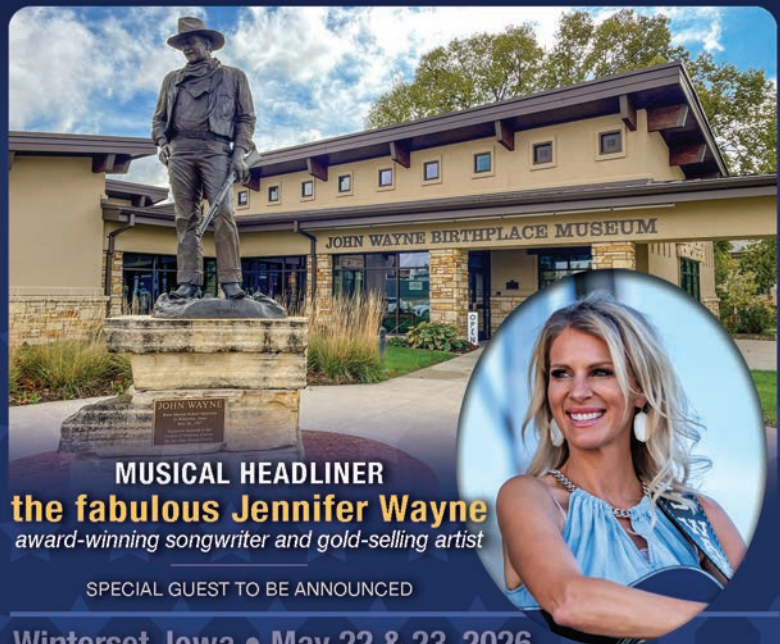
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blazinm.com

Best Heritage Guest Ranches

Mayan Dude Ranch, Bandera, TX: Family-owned since the 1950s, this iconic Bandera ranch offers genuine cowboy hospitality with trail



Courtesy Mayan Dude Ranch

rides, campfire cookouts and country music, preserving Texas's proud dude ranch traditions in the heart of the Hill Country.

mayanranch.com



Courtesy New Mexico Tourism Department

Concho Hills Guest Ranch, Magdalena, NM: Set in the mountains near Magdalena, this working cattle ranch offers an authentic Western escape. Guests ride, herd cattle and explore historic trails while experiencing the rugged

beauty and timeless traditions of New Mexico's ranching heritage.

Conchohillsranch.com

Best Cowboy Poetry Gatherings

Durango Cowboy Poetry Gathering, Durango, CO: Since 1989, this celebrated event has brought poets, musicians and storytellers together to honor the cowboy way of life. Durango's rich Western heritage inspires heartfelt



Courtesy Durango Cowboy Poetry Gathering

performances that keep ranching traditions and frontier values alive.

durangocowboygathering.org

National Cowboy Poetry Gathering, Elko, NV: Since 1985, this renowned gathering has celebrated the voices of the American West. Poets, musicians and storytellers come together in Elko each winter to honor cowboy culture, ranching traditions and the enduring spirit of the range.



Charlie Ekburg

nationalcowboypoetrygathering.org

Courtesy MFG/Red Steagall Cowboy Gathering



Best Cowboy Music Gatherings

Red Steagall Cowboy Gathering & Western Swing Festival, Fort Worth, TX: Founded by cowboy poet Red Steagall, this Fort Worth festival celebrates Western music, poetry, and cowboy traditions. Featuring top performers and rodeo events, it honors Texas's ranching heritage and frontier spirit.

redsteagallcowboygathering.com

Santa Clarita Cowboy Festival, Santa Clarita, CA: Since 1994, this annual festival has celebrated the music, poetry and culture of the American cowboy. Set in Santa Clarita's rugged canyons, it brings together top Western performers and storytellers for a true frontier celebration.

cowboyleft.org



Courtesy City of Santa Clarita

Best Old West Mounted Reenactments

Defeat of Jesse James Days, Northfield, MN: Each September, this Minnesota tradition reenacts the 1876 James-Younger Gang's failed bank raid with riders, gunfire and period costumes vividly bringing one of the Old West's most daring outlaw stories to life.

djjd.org

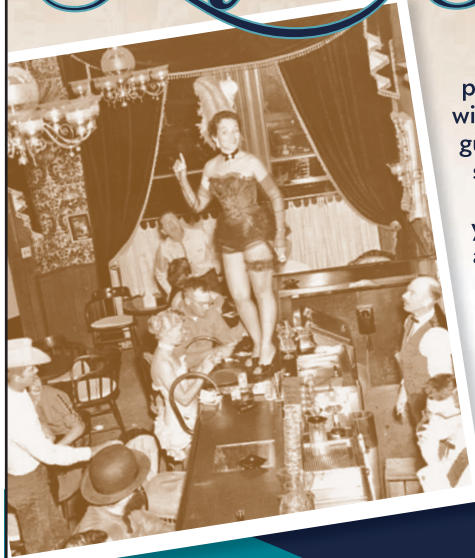


Courtesy Defeat of Jesse James Days Committee/Bridgette Hallcock Photography

Battle of the Bighorn Reenactment, Hardin, MT: Held each June near the original battlefield, this dramatic reenactment brings the 1876 clash between the U.S. Cavalry and

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We look forward to your visit! • For more information visit: LaramieMuseum.org



Courtesy Wiki Commons

Lakota and Cheyenne warriors to life honoring history through authentic costumes, horses and storytelling.

littlebighornreenactment.com

Best Wild West Shows

Buffalo Bill's Wild West

Spectacular, Cody, WY: This lively musical reenacts the life of Buffalo Bill through song, humor and frontier action. Performed each summer in Cody, it celebrates the showmanship, legends and larger-than-life spirit of the American West.

codywildwestshow.com

Dodge City Days, Dodge City,

KS: This ten-day celebration captures the spirit of the frontier with rodeos, parades, reenactments and live entertainment. Honoring its legendary past, Dodge City transforms into a living Wild West show every summer.

dodgecitydays.org



Courtesy Prescott Frontier Days

Prescott Frontier Days, Prescott, AZ: Founded in 1888, this legendary event is recognized as the world's oldest rodeo. Prescott Frontier Days celebrates true cowboy tradition



By Carol Highsmith Courtesy Library of Congress

Best Historic Western Rodeos

Cheyenne Frontier Days, Cheyenne, WY: Founded in 1897, this world-famous event is the "Daddy of 'em All." Combining top rodeo competition, parades and concerts, it honors Wyoming's cowboy heritage and the enduring excitement of the Old West.

cfdrodeo.com

with bronc riding, roping and parades that honor Arizona's proud Western heritage.

worldsoldestrodeo.com



Courtesy National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum

Best Western Museums

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, OK: Founded in 1955, this premier institution preserves the art, history and culture of the American West. Its extensive collections honor cowboys, Native peoples and pioneers who shaped the nation's frontier heritage. nationalcowboymuseum.org

Autry Museum of the American West, Los Angeles, CA: Founded by Gene Autry in 1988, this world-class



Courtesy Autry Museum

museum explores the art, history and culture of the American West. Its collections celebrate cowboys, Native peoples and Hollywood's role in shaping Western legend. theautry.org

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BY THE HERITAGE TRAVEL WRITERS AT *TRUE WEST*

THE FRONTIER SPIRIT LIVES ON

Across the vast, storied landscapes of the American West, there are towns that don't just honor their pasts, they live them. These are places where sounds of cowboy boots still echo down wooden boardwalks, where the frontier spirit never faded and where history breathes through every saloon door and dusty street.

From San Angelo, Texas, where Fort Concho still stands guard over the frontier, to Abilene, Kansas, where Wild Bill Hickok once kept order on the cattle trail and Cody, Wyoming, born of Buffalo Bill's dream, the West rides strong. In Deadwood, South Dakota, the gold rush never truly ended, and in Sheridan, Wyoming, the legacy of ranchers and lawmen still shapes life beneath the Bighorns.

Head farther down the trail and you'll find the timeless swagger of Dodge City, Kansas, the rodeo

pride of Pendleton, Oregon, and the mountain majesty of Rapid City, South Dakota. In San Antonio, Texas, the echoes of the Alamo remind us where freedom took its stand, while Billings, Montana, keeps the wide-open promise of the frontier alive beneath the Big Sky.

These ten remarkable towns haven't just preserved their heritage, they've kept it working, breathing and riding into the future. They are the heart of Western history and the soul of the West's enduring story.

Walk the same streets where legends were made, meet the locals who keep the West alive and experience the stories, music and landscapes that still define the frontier today. The spirit of the West is waiting, and it's never been more alive.





San Angelo Texas

San Angelo doesn't just honor its Western roots, it lives them. Founded in 1867 beside Fort Concho, the town rose from a frontier trading post to one of Texas's toughest and most colorful cowtowns. Soldiers, buffalo hunters and cattlemen once filled its dusty streets and from the parade grounds of Fort Concho, the U.S. Cavalry rode out to tame the rugged Concho Valley. Today, that National Historic Landmark, with 23 original and restored buildings, remains the soul of the city, where reenactments, chuck-wagon cook-offs and living-history events keep the frontier alive.

But San Angelo never stopped evolving. The town that once outfitted trail drivers now draws travelers with a vibrant arts and music scene, Western-themed murals and bootmakers whose craft rivals any in the West. The San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts celebrates regional and Western artists, while Heritage Park and Miss Hattie's Bordello Museum tell stories of grit, glamour and reinvention.

Each spring, the San Angelo Stock Show & Rodeo thunders into town, one of the oldest and largest rodeos in America, while downtown buzzes with live music, food festivals and a creative energy that keeps the spirit of the West fresh and thriving.



San Angelo Stock Show & Rodeo Bull Ride

Courtesy San Angelo, Texas



From its frontier fort to its modern flair, San Angelo stands as proof that the West isn't something you reenact, it's something you live. That's why *True West* proudly names it the #1 Top Western Town for 2026.

discoversanangelo.com

After Col. Ranald Mackenzie and the Army defeated the Comanches, the railroad arrived in San Angelo in 1888 and transformed the West Texas town into an economic hub for the region. Today, the Santa Fe Depot and Railway Museum is housed in the historic station.

Courtesy Library of Congress

Abilene
Kansas



Few towns can claim to have launched the legend of the American cowboy, but Abilene, Kansas, wears that badge with pride. Born on the windswept plains in



Abilene's annual Trails, Rails and Tales celebration

Paul Lord, Courtesy Abilene CVB

1860, Abilene roared to life when Joseph McCoy drove the first longhorn cattle up the Chisholm Trail in 1867 and shipped them east by rail. Overnight, this quiet frontier settlement became the rowdiest cowtown on the plains, filled with saloons, gambling halls and the sharp crack of six-shooters echoing down Texas Street.

Lawmen like Wild Bill Hickok rode in to keep order and their stories still echo through Abilene's historic district. Today, visitors can step straight into that Wild West past at Old Abilene Town, where gunfighters, can-can dancers and steam trains recreate the cattle drive era. The Dickinson County Heritage Center, Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad and Eisenhower Presidential Library tie together Abilene's pioneer, railroad and presidential legacy, proof this Kansas town helped shape the West and the nation itself.

Abilene invites travelers to hit the

Gunsmoke Trail, follow the Cowboy Art Trail and stand beside the World's Largest Belt Buckle, a shining symbol of its cowboy pride. Each September, the town celebrates Chisholm Trail Day, honoring the trail that made Abilene famous with living-history events, music and Western fun.

In Abilene, the cattle still drive the story, the rails still sing and the spirit of the West rides on. That's why *True West* honors it as the #2 Top Western Town for 2026.

abilenekan-sas.org

Cody
Wyoming



No Western town wears its legend more proudly than Cody, Wyoming, a place founded by a man who was the



Cody Night Rodeo

Courtesy Park County Travel Council

legend. In 1896, Colonel William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody carved his dream town out of the Shoshone Canyon frontier, creating a community that celebrated the spirit of the Old West while welcoming travelers to Yellowstone's doorstep. More than a century later, his vision still reigns supreme.

At the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, five world-class museums tell the story of the frontier in all its glory, Buffalo Bill's showmanship, Plains Indian artistry, Western art, firearms and natural history, all housed under one sprawling roof. Nearby, Old Trail Town recreates a true 19th-century settlement with authentic cabins and gravesites, including those tied to Butch Cassidy's Wild Bunch.

Cody doesn't just preserve history, it lives it. The Cody Nite Rodeo, the longest-running nightly rodeo in America, keeps the cowboy tradition alive every summer evening. Downtown, the Irma Hotel, built by Buffalo Bill himself in 1902, still welcomes travelers with frontier flavor and a show-stopping gunfight out front.

Add in Western art galleries, trail rides, ranch stays and live music echoing through mountain air and Cody stands as the beating heart of Wyoming's cowboy country.

In Cody, the Wild West never took its last bow, it just keeps thundering down the arena. That's why *True West* proudly names it the #3 Top Western Town for 2026.

codyyellowstone.org

Deadwood
South Dakota



If ever there was a town where the Old West still walks the streets, it's Deadwood. Born in the Black Hills gold rush of 1876, Deadwood was wild from the start, a boomtown where miners, gamblers and gun-slingers chased fortune and fame beneath the shadow of the pines. Legends like Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane etched their names



Days Of '76 Rodeo

Courtesy South Dakota Tourism

into frontier history here and their stories still echo through these storied canyons.

Today, Deadwood's entire downtown is a National Historic Landmark District, lovingly restored

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Sheridan



COUNTY, WYOMING, USA.

to its 19th-century glory. Visitors can stroll past weathered brick facades, saddle up for a drink at the Buffalo Bodega Saloon, or watch gunfighters reenact Wild Bill's last hand. At the Adams Museum and Days of '76 Museum, the past is preserved in all its grit and glory, from mining relics to vintage stagecoaches.

But Deadwood isn't trapped in time. The Deadwood Jam and Wild Bill Days keep the town rocking year-round, while gaming halls, Western art and historic hotels like the Bullock and Franklin offer a taste of frontier luxury.

Surrounded by the beauty of the Black Hills and steeped in Western lore, Deadwood stands as a living monument to America's most colorful era.

In Deadwood, history isn't just remembered, it's performed, toasted and celebrated. That's why *True West* tips its hat to Deadwood as the #4 Top Western Town for 2026.

deadwood.com

Sheridan Wyoming



Tucked between the rolling plains and the rugged Bighorn Mountains, Sheridan, Wyoming, is where the authentic West still rides high. Founded in the 1880s as a railroad and ranching hub, Sheridan grew up alongside cowboys, homesteaders and soldiers from nearby Fort Phil Kearny, whose Powder River history reads like a who's-who of frontier warfare and survival. The echoes of Red Cloud's War and the Bozeman Trail still whisper across these prairies, grounding Sheridan in the heart of Western legend.

Downtown Sheridan feels like a frontier town that simply never stopped thriving. The Historic Sheridan Inn, once co-owned by

Buffalo Bill Cody, remains the grand dame of Main Street, where Cody himself once auditioned performers for his Wild West show. Nearby,



The Mint Bar

Courtesy Park County Travel Council

Western boutiques, bootmakers and art galleries line streets lit by old-fashioned lamps, while the Trail End State Historic Site preserves the legacy of Wyoming's early cattle barons.

Today, Sheridan celebrates its cowboy roots with Rodeo Week, the WYO Rodeo Parade and the Sheridan

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County Fair, where bucking broncs and bluegrass music keep the spirit of the West alive. The town's craft breweries, art walks and culinary scene blend perfectly with its timeless hospitality, making it a modern Western destination that still smells of saddle leather and sage.

In Sheridan, the frontier never faded, it just put on its Sunday best. That's why *True West* proudly ranks it as the #5 Top Western Town for 2026. sheridanwyoming.org

Dodge City Kansas

When people think of the Wild West, they picture Dodge City, and for good reason. Born in 1872 as a frontier outpost along the Santa Fe Trail, Dodge City exploded into fame when the railroad met the cattle drives. Longhorns poured in from Texas and with them came



Dodge City's Boot Hill Museum
Courtesy Boot Hill Museum

drovers, gamblers and gunslingers who made Dodge City the most notorious cowtown on the plains. Lawmen like Bat Masterson, Wyatt Earp and Bill Tilghman patrolled Front Street, keeping the peace in a town that defined the phrase "Get outta Dodge."

Today, Dodge City honors that legacy with museums, reenactments and Western flair that make the Old West come alive. At Boot Hill

Museum, visitors can walk the boardwalks, watch gunfights and belly up to the Long Branch Saloon, where legends once toasted their luck. The Santa Fe Trail Remains and El Capitan Monument pay tribute to the traders and cattlemen who built the town's fortune, while the Historic Santa Fe Depot and Depot Theater recall the days when the railroad ruled the prairie.

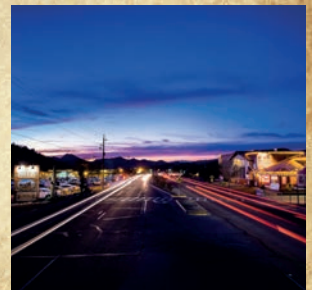
Modern Dodge City still celebrates its cowboy roots with the Dodge City Days rodeo, longhorn cattle drives down Wyatt Earp Boulevard and an easy Western hospitality that feels as real as ever. The town has grown, but it hasn't lost its swagger.

In Dodge City, the dust never really settled, it just turned into gold. That's why *True West* rides tall with Dodge City as the #6 Top Western Town for 2026.

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Pendleton Oregon

Pendleton, Oregon, was built on grit, trade and the enduring spirit of the frontier. Founded along the Umatilla River in the 1860s, it began as a trading post serving pioneers, ranchers and Native American tribes of the Columbia Plateau. The railroad brought prosperity and before long, Pendleton was a booming cowtown where cattle, whiskey and wool shaped its destiny. It's also where one of the West's greatest traditions was born, the world-famous Pendleton Round-Up.

Since 1910, the Round-Up has been a defining celebration of rodeo and Western pride, where bucking broncs, parades and pageantry unite locals, cowboys and Tribal Nations in a four-day spectacle of skill and spirit. The nearby Pendleton Underground



Pendleton Round-Up oxen wagon pull
Courtesy Pendleton COC

Tours reveal the wilder side of the Old West, leading visitors through tunnels that once housed card rooms, saloons and opium dens beneath the streets of downtown.

Pendleton's ties to the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla Tribes are honored at the Tamástsiłkt Cultural Institute, where exhibits tell a deeper story of resilience and heritage. And no Western town blends past and present quite like Pendleton, home to the world-renowned Pendleton Woolen Mills, where blankets and

clothing have been woven for over a century.

From its saddle shops and murals to its rodeo arena and heritage museums, Pendleton keeps the pulse of the West beating strong.

In Pendleton, tradition isn't preserved, it's performed. That's why *True West* proudly names it the #7 Top Western Town for 2026.

pendletonchamber.com

Rapid City South Dakota



Gateway to the Black Hills and the mighty Mount Rushmore, Rapid City stands where frontier spirit and modern Western pride meet. Founded in 1876, the same year nearby Deadwood struck gold, Rapid City quickly became the crossroads of

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Mount Rushmore National Memorial

By Chad Coppess,
Courtesy South Dakota Office of Tourism

Center ties together Lakota, pioneer and mining history, while the Museum of Geology preserves the story of the Black Hills in stone and fossil.

Just beyond town, the story of the frontier deepens at sites like Fort Meade, the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site and the Crazy Horse Memorial, a living tribute to the region's Native heritage.

Yet Rapid City is no relic. Its revitalized downtown buzzes with art walks, music and craft breweries that embrace Western hospitality. The Black Hills Stock Show and Rodeo draws thousands every winter, keeping the cowboy tradition alive beneath snow-dusted peaks.

In Rapid City, the Old West never rides off into the sunset, it just keeps heading for higher ground. That's why *True West* names it the #8 Top Western Town for 2026.

visitrapidcity.com

San Antonio Texas

Few cities capture the full sweep of Western history like San Antonio. Long before cowboys and cattle trails, this was the edge of empire, a Spanish outpost where missions, soldiers and settlers carved civilization into the Texas wilderness. Founded in 1718, San Antonio is home to the most hallowed ground in Texas history, the Alamo, where in 1836, Bowie, Crockett, Travis and their outnumbered defenders made their legendary last stand for freedom.

From those stone walls, the story of the West expanded outward. The cattle trade, railroads and the rise of the Texas Rangers all left their mark on this proud city. At the Buckhorn



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Saloon and Texas Ranger Museum, visitors can raise a glass beneath mounted longhorns and revolvers that once tamed the frontier. The Briscoe Western Art Museum brings the story forward with sculpture, saddles and paintings that celebrate



The Buckhorn Saloon
Courtesy Buckhorn Saloon & Museum

the cowboy legacy and the diverse cultures that built the West.

But San Antonio isn't just a museum to its past, it's a living Western city. The River Walk winds

through downtown lined with restaurants, music and color, while Market Square and Mission Trail keep the city's Hispanic and frontier roots intertwined. Each February, the San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo reminds everyone that this is still ranch country at heart.

In San Antonio, history isn't confined to monuments, it's in the air, the food and the people. That's why *True West* proudly names it the #9 Top Western Town for 2026.

visitsanantonio.com



Billings Montana

Rising from the sandstone cliffs of the Yellowstone Valley, Billings, Montana, stands as a true crossroads of Western history and frontier endurance. Founded in 1882 as a railroad hub for the Northern Pacific, Billings earned the nickname "The Magic



The Moss Mansion
By Carole M. Highsmith,
Courtesy Library of Congress

City" for how fast it grew, springing to life almost overnight along the tracks that carried cattle, coal and dreams across Big Sky Country.

The region's history runs deep here. Nearby, the Little Bighorn Battlefield echoes with the courage and tragedy of 1876, while Pompeys Pillar still bears the carved signature of William Clark, marking his passage west during the Lewis and Clark

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Expedition. The Yellowstone County Museum and Western Heritage Center tell stories of the ranchers, homesteaders and Native peoples who shaped this land long before skyscrapers rose on the plains.

Yet Billings remains as Western as it gets. The town's rodeos, cattle auctions and ranching roots are alive and well, while the vibrant downtown honors both its cowboy and rail-town heritage with Western art galleries, boot shops and live music echoing through historic brick buildings.

Each summer, the Montana Fair and NILE Stock Show & Rodeo keep the arena dust flying, and visitors can still follow the old trails that once carried buffalo hunters and cattle drives.

In Billings, the West isn't a memory, it's a living landscape of grit and grandeur. That's why *True West* proudly names Billings, Montana, the #10 Top Western Town for 2026.

visitbillings.com

Top Towns to Experience Cowboy Culture

Bandera, TX:

Ride into the Cowboy Capital of the World, where dude ranches, trail rides and dancehall music keep Western traditions alive. Nestled in the Texas Hill Country, Bandera invites visitors to slow down, saddle up and experience real cowboy life.

Casper, WY:

Once a vital stop on the Oregon, California and Pony Express trails, Casper blends frontier grit with Western charm. Explore historic forts, rodeos and wide-open prairies where pioneers, outlaws and dreamers once carved their path through the West.

Cave Creek, AZ:

Just north of Phoenix, Cave Creek keeps the spirit of the Old West alive with rugged desert trails, lively saloons and cowboy festivals. Ride the foothills, browse Western shops and experience Arizona's frontier soul with an Arizona cowboy flair.

Heber Valley, UT:

Surrounded by the Wasatch Mountains, Heber Valley blends frontier heritage with alpine beauty. Ride the historic Heber Valley Railroad, explore charming Western towns and unwind where cowboy history meets the crisp, clear air of Utah's mountain West.

Jackson Hole, WY:

Where the Tetons touch the sky, Jackson Hole pairs rugged Western heritage with breathtaking beauty. Once a fur-trading outpost, it's now a haven for cowboys, artists and adventurers drawn to the true spirit of the mountain West.

Laramie, WY:

Born on the Union Pacific Railroad line, Laramie grew from a rough-and-tumble frontier town into a proud Western community. Explore historic downtown, visit the Territorial Prison and feel the enduring spirit of Wyoming's Wild West heritage.

Douglas

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Livingston, MT:

Gateway to Yellowstone and steeped in frontier lore, Livingston grew from a 19th-century railroad town into a haven for artists, writers and cowboys. Historic saloons, mountain vistas and Old West charm make it pure Big Sky country.

Stephenville, TX:

Deep in the heart of ranch country, Stephenville embodies real Texas grit. Rodeo traditions, friendly small-town charm and wide-open landscapes make it a place where the Western way of life still feels honest, hardworking and unmistakably alive.

Wickenburg, AZ:

Where the desert meets the frontier, Wickenburg captures the true spirit of the Old West. Ride through cactus-studded trails, explore dude ranches and stroll historic streets where prospectors, cowboys and travelers once struck gold and stayed for the charm.

Top Towns Where History is Happening Now

Bishop, CA:

Cradled between the Sierra Nevada and the White Mountains, Bishop is where frontier heritage meets outdoor adventure. Once a ranching and mining hub, today it blends small-town Western charm with art festivals, pack stations and trails that lead straight into history.

Buffalo, WY:

Nestled below the Bighorn Mountains, Buffalo's historic Occidental Hotel once hosted Butch Cassidy and Calamity Jane. Stroll Main Street, explore frontier museums and experience a town where the legends of the Old West still live on.

Cheyenne, WY:

Born with the railroad in 1867, Cheyenne remains the heart of Wyoming's cowboy country. Home to the world-famous Cheyenne Frontier Days, it's a city where rodeo, rail history and Western pride still reign supreme.

Coffeyville, KS:

Best known for the 1892 Dalton Gang raid gone wrong, Coffeyville turns outlaw history into living legend. Explore the Dalton Defenders Museum and walk the same streets where townsfolk stood their ground and changed Western lore forever.

Kingman, AZ:

Founded along the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad, Kingman grew into a vital stop on historic Route 66. Explore the Mohave Museum, old mining sites and classic diners that celebrate the spirit of America's Mother Road and the Old West.

Larned, KS:

Once a frontier stronghold along the Santa Fe Trail, Larned is home to Fort Larned National Historic Site, where well-preserved barracks and officers' quarters tell the story of soldiers, scouts and pioneers who settled the Great Plains.

Leadville, CO:

High in the Rockies, Leadville boomed on silver and swagger. Once home to Doc Holliday, the Tabor Opera House and rough-and-tumble miners, today its historic district and museums keep Colorado's richest mining-era stories shining bright.

St. Joseph, MO:

Gateway to the West and birthplace of the Pony Express, St. Joseph was once a bustling departure point for pioneers. Explore the Pony Express Museum, historic homes and streets where Jesse James met his fateful end.

Winnemucca, NV:

A true stop on the frontier, Winnemucca grew from a Humboldt River trading post into a lively railroad and ranching town. Visit the Humboldt Museum, Basque restaurants and annual rodeos that keep Nevada's Western heritage alive and well.

Top Towns Where History Lives

Baker City, OR:

Once the "Queen City of the Inland Empire," Baker City thrived during Oregon's gold rush and still gleams

with frontier pride. Explore the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, grand 1880s architecture and downtown streets where pioneers once struck it rich.

Bisbee, AZ:

Carved into the Mule Mountains, Bisbee boomed as one of the richest mining towns in the West. Today, its preserved Victorian buildings, underground mine tours and thriving arts scene make it a colorful blend of Old West grit and creative spirit.

Douglas, WY:

Born as a railroad and ranching town on the North Platte River, Douglas is home to the Wyoming Pioneer Museum and the birthplace of the legendary jackalope. Its historic downtown and county fair celebrate true Wyoming cowboy heritage.

Durango, CO:

Founded in 1880 by the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, Durango still runs on steam and spirit. Ride the famed Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, explore frontier-era saloons and experience Colorado's Old West adventure at full throttle.

El Paso, TX: A crossroads of cultures and frontiers, El Paso's history stretches from Spanish missions to six-shooter legends. Visit the old San Elizario district, Mission Trail and Concordia Cemetery, where lawmen and outlaws rest beneath the desert sun.

Fort Worth, TX:

Where the West begins, Fort Worth grew from a frontier outpost into a city that still rides with cowboy pride. Experience the daily cattle drives in the Stockyards, world-class museums and honky-tonks that keep Texas heritage alive.

Grapevine, TX:

Rooted in 1840s frontier history, Grapevine blends Old West charm with modern Texas hospitality. Stroll Main Street's historic buildings, ride the Grapevine Vintage Railroad and toast the town's heritage at local

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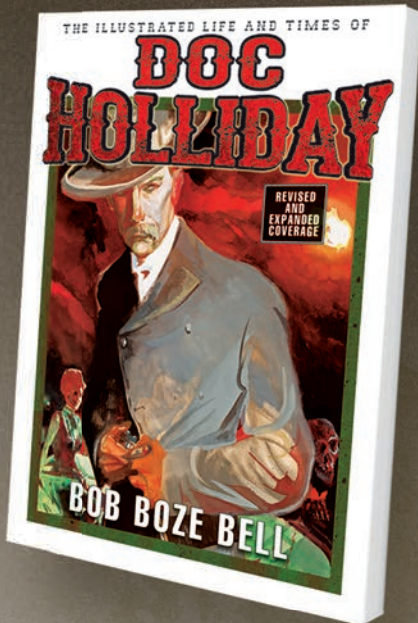
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Jerome, AZ:

Once dubbed the "Wickedest Town in the West," Jerome clings to the cliffs of Cleopatra Hill with stories of miners, gamblers and ghosts. Today, its restored buildings, art galleries and saloons keep the town's colorful past alive.

Lewiston, MT:

Nestled in the heart of Big Sky Country, Lewistown grew from a trading post along the Judith River into a ranching and railroad hub. Explore its historic downtown, pioneer museums and trails that echo Montana's true frontier spirit.

Lincoln, NM:

One of the best-preserved Old West towns, Lincoln was the heart of the Lincoln County War and Billy the Kid's legend. Walk dusty streets lined with 19th-century buildings that still whisper tales of outlaws and lawmen.

Lubbock, TX:

Founded on the Llano Estacado, Lubbock blends pioneer grit with Western pride. Explore the National Ranching Heritage Center, Buddy Holly Museum and nearby trails that tell the story of Texas ranchers, settlers and musicians who shaped the modern West.

Muskogee, OK:

In the heart of Indian Territory, Muskogee honors lawman Bass Reeves, who rode these lands enforcing justice. Visit Fort Gibson, the Five Civilized Tribes Museum and discover a town rich in Native and frontier history.

Northfield, MN:

Famous for the failed 1876 Jesse James Gang raid, Northfield turned outlaw history into pride. Explore the Northfield Historical Society, lively downtown and Defeat of Jesse James Days, where the town still celebrates its daring stand.

Olathe, KS:

Once a key stop on the Santa Fe Trail, Olathe's frontier roots run deep. Visit Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop

& Farm, where costumed interpreters, wagons and livestock bring the pioneer era vividly to life.

Prescott, AZ:

Once the Territorial Capital of Arizona, Prescott still shines with frontier spirit. Stroll Whiskey Row's historic saloons, tour Sharlot Hall Museum and enjoy courthouse square events that keep this mountain town's Wild West heritage alive year-round.

Russell, KS:

Founded along the Smoky Hill Trail, Russell grew from a pioneer settlement into a proud prairie town. Visit the Deines Cultural Center, Oil Patch Museum and nearby trails that honor the hardworking spirit of Kansas's heartland frontier.

Silverton, CO:

High in the San Juan Mountains, Silverton thrived as a rugged mining town filled with fortune seekers and saloons. Today, its preserved Victorian streets and scenic Durango & Silverton Railroad keep Colorado's boomtown spirit gleaming bright.

Taos, NM:

One of the oldest continuously inhabited places in America, Taos blends Native, Spanish and frontier heritage. Visit Taos Pueblo, frontier-era plazas and Western art galleries that capture the timeless spirit of the high desert.

Tombstone, AZ:

The town too tough to die still lives up to its legend. Walk Allen Street, where the Earp brothers faced the Clantons at the O.K. Corral and experience gunfights, saloons and history that never fades.

Virginia City, NV:

Once the richest silver strike in the world, Virginia City boomed with miners, gamblers and newspapermen like Mark Twain. Today, wooden boardwalks, saloons and mine tours keep the Comstock Lode's Wild West legacy shining bright.



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Once and for all, is it “Huckleberry”? Or is it “Hucklebearer”?

Martin Harvey
Chicago, IL

This is a question that just won't seem to go away. The original screenplay for *Tombstone* by Kevin Jarre clearly states that Val Kilmer's Doc would say “huckleberry” and that, like most phrases in the film, was correct to the period. According to Green's Dictionary of Slang, “huckleberry” is defined as a “fellow” or “a boy,” while a subordinate definition states that it is a “person who suits one's wishes” and could be used as a synonym for “sweetheart.” Doc calling himself a sweetheart in a confident and vengeful jest to his enemy is the most Doc thing he could do. “Huckle bearer,” on the other hand, seems to be an amalgamation of internet tropes presented over the years to offer an alternative, but shaky, explanation for the phrase. One common belief is that “huckle” was a Southern slang word for some kind of handle or extension or protrusion and, combined with “bearer,” some have been led to believe this is an informal way of saying “pallbearer.” However, no evidence of this term exists in period newspapers so it seems to be a modern invention.

Would you offer some info on CDs to listen to or to order?

John Pearson
Atlanta, GA

Here's something better, a list of classic books, “textbooks” on the



Illustration by Bob Boze Bell

history of cowboy songs, lyrics and music. Most if not all of them are available on Amazon.

Favorites are *He Was Singing This Song and For a Cowboy Has to Sing* by Jim Bob Tinsley.

Others include *Git Along Little Dogies* by John L White; *Cowboy*

Poetry: Classic Poems and Prose by Badger Clark; *Songs of the Cowboys: The First Printed Collection of Cowboy Songs Collected at the Turn of The Century* by Jack Thorp, Austin and Alta Fife; *Ten Thousand Goddam Cattle* by Katie Lee.

Did the Apaches really torture people like soldiers, miners and settlers?

Pryce Craig
Scottsbluff, NE

Yes, they absolutely did and we wouldn't have wanted to run against them during the Apache Wars, as their military prowess and tactics in psychological warfare were unmatched. There are myriad firsthand accounts of those who either survived the extreme treatment or those who came upon the remains of victims in the desert. One such example talks about a soldier (or possibly a freighter) who was isolated from his group, tied to a wagon wheel, and burned alive in Arizona's Davidson Canyon. You still cross Davidson Canyon today when traveling from Tucson to Tombstone.



True West Archives

NOTE
If you have a question you'd like answered, go to AskTheMarshal@twmag.com and ask away. Please include your city and state.

However, while the Apaches and other Southwestern and Plains Indian tribes were brutal in their warfare, many of their actions were exaggerated by the 20th-century mythmaking processes of Hollywood and fiction writers.

When subjects were arrested in the old Western films, their guns were often taken but they kept their holsters with ammunition. Also, the movies depicted most of the characters with shirts and ties, even if crossing the desert in 100-degree temps. Was this normal dress in those days?

Cal Boyer
Email submission

Policing and incarceration in the 19th century was not a standardized thing like it is now. Today, law enforcement and jail officials are mandated at the local, state and federal levels for how they talk to, interact with, and house inmates. Things like cleanliness, meals, medical care and accessibility are all carefully monitored. This was not the case in the Old West.

For a look into jail conditions, we recommend George Hand's revealing diary from when he was a custodian of the Pima County (Arizona) jail. For example, on January 31, 1886, Hand wrote about an inmate who was “opposed to water.” In a stunning affront to these modern standards, Hand put the man in a cell with two other inmates and “warm water, soap, and brushes, and they gave him a good scrubbing; and for half an hour the people on the outside thought someone was being murdered.” Hand

added, “I never heard such moaning and screaming...”

For your other question, we will look to John Ringo for an example of people having their own habits. Riding his horse across southern Arizona Territory shortly before his death, Ringo was spotted in his undershirt and with his boots tied to his saddlehorn. Comfort—not style—was the trick to staying cool on horseback.

How did Billy the Kid (William H. Bonney) get the surname Bonney?

George Murrell
Victoria, BC, Canada

The short answer is we don't know for sure why Billy the Kid chose “Bonney” as an alias. The long answer is a lot more complex. Some think it could be taken after a man his mother married, but that remains uncertain. Billy was a man of aliases. Born William Henry McCarty, Jr. in New York City, he soon took the surname of his stepfather, Antrim, and went by his middle name at that time, too. After he killed a blacksmith named Frank Cahill in Arizona, Billy began going by William Bonney using his true first name and the new alias for the last name. After that he became known as “the Kid” and both the name and the legend stuck, forever.



Billy the Kid
True West Archives

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For my money the best Western movie is *The Searchers*. John Ford's masterpiece perfected nearly everything the genre had been to that point and shaped nearly everything that came after. That is true greatness.

The biggest challenge for museums today is that everyone wants them to be everything at once. Entertaining but serious. Traditional but innovative. Cheap, fast and good. Meanwhile, the past insists on being complicated, and good museum work takes time. The hard part is convincing people that slow, careful work is still worth it.

My favorite quotation about history is from LP Hartley's *The Go-Between*: "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." It reminds us to approach history with generosity, curiosity, humility and sometimes mercy.

My favorite beverage is TaB. Or was. For most of my life, I only drank two things: TaB and water. In that order. A can of TaB was one of the favors given to every guest at my wedding. That's how much I loved its distinct, saccharin-sweetened diet cola taste. Coca-Cola discontinuing it in 2021 was the closest I've come to an existential crisis. Lord, how I miss it.

If I could go back in time, I would kill baby Hitler.

One of the biggest breaks I ever got was a producer inviting me to appear on *Legends and Lies: The Real West*. I had no idea it would lead to a decade of work in popular history TV. I'm grateful every time I get to talk about Western and movie (and other) history with a broad audience.

The toughest part of my job is doing the work I was hired to do in between all the other work I was hired to do.

Growing up I was taught to listen more than I spoke. Advice I've followed, mostly successfully. And it's served me well.

I wish I had a dollar for every time someone said, "TaB? My mom used to drink that!"



Photo by Bob Boze Bell

ANDREW PATRICK NELSON

Andrew Patrick Nelson is a historian of American cinema and culture. He's the chief curator at Western Spirit Museum in Scottsdale, Arizona, and the former chair of the Department of Film & Media Arts at the University of Utah. He's the author and editor of several books and essays, including *Still in the Saddle: The Hollywood Western, 1969-1980*. He appears regularly on History Channel, INSP and other networks, and cohosts the podcast *How the West Was 'Cast*. He lives in Phoenix with his wife and son.

The best way to be authentic is to remember that everyone else is too busy worrying about what everyone else thinks about what they're doing to actually think about what you're doing.

My current challenge is finishing a book about *The Searchers*. It's taking me longer than it took Ethan and Marty to find Debbie. But I'll finish it in the end, I promise you. Just as sure as the turnin' of the earth....

The most important lesson I tried to teach my students is that history is really a set of competing arguments. The historian's job is less about establishing what happened than explaining why it happened and what it meant. And means. That's the conversation we join every time we study history.

I was born to drink TaB and kick ass. And I'm all out of TaB.

What history has taught me is that we're often more attached to the stories we tell ourselves about the past than to the past itself. The past is always more complicated than those stories. It rarely behaves the way we want it to, and that's exactly what makes it worth studying.



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