

Film festival has Old West heritage

Lone Pine event features only selections filmed on nearby locations.

By **CHELLEY KITZMILLER**

Special to the Californian

It's likely that on the way to Bishop or to Mammoth on Highway 395, you've driven right through Lone Pine.

After all, it's a very small town, not much more than a bump in the road consisting of a few gas stations, a handful of motels and half as many places to eat.

It's one of those if you-blink-you-miss-it-towns.

But every October, Lone Pine sweeps its streets, shines up its store windows and puts its best cowboy boot forward for the annual Lone Pine Film Festival.

Lone Pine's film festival, scheduled to take place Oct. 5-7, is one of the nation's most focused film festivals because it features only films made there and invites only stars who worked those movies.

This year's lineup includes Connie Stevens; Ben Burt, a four-time Oscar winner for sound design; Alex Cord of "Stagecoach" fame; "Wagon Train's" own Robert Fuller; Loren Janes, Steve McQueen's stunt double for 22 years; and Herb Jeffries.

If you're a baby boomer and you watched Saturday morning TV, you'll recall the continuing adventures of Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, many episodes of which were shot in the nearby Alabama Hills.

You might have seen Gregory Peck draw down in "The Gunfighter," Clint Eastwood get even in "Joe Kidd," or Kirk Douglas' brilliant performance in "Along The Great Divide."

The entire filmography of Lone Pine includes more than 400 films.

The Alabama Hills is what draws many filmmakers to Lone Pine. They're a low range of granite hills that time and weather have sculpted into spectacular and bizarre shapes, many of which have served as an outlaw's hide-out or an Apache tribe's stronghold.

Because of their photographic appeal, the Alabamas have fascinated Hollywood since the 1920s.

One of the first films made there was Fox's "Riders Of The Purple Sage" with Tom Mix, and more recently Mel Gibson starred in "Maverick."

Throughout the three-day event, which has in the past drawn more than 5,000 movie buffs, films are shown continuously in the Lone Pine High School auditorium.

This year's featured film will be "How The West Was Won," an MGM classic about a pioneer family. Also scheduled are:

"Terror Trail" (1933), "Wheels Of Destiny" (1934), "Rhythm On The Range" (1936), "The Cisco Kid and The Lady" (1939), "Saga Of Death Valley" (1939), "King of the Pecos" (1936), "Hell Bent For Leather" (1960) and "Hopalong Cassidy Public Hero No. 1" (2001 documentary).

If You Go

Lone Pine Film Festival and Golf Tournament, Oct. 5-7

Phone: (760) 876-9103

Directions: Take highway 58 to 395 then north to Lone Pine.

Accommodations

(It's likely that these motels may be sold out, but it's a good idea to check for late cancellations)

Lone Pine

- Alabama Hills Inn
800-800-6468
760-876-8700
- Best Western Frontier
800-231-4071 CA
800-528-1234
760-876-5571
- Dow Villa Motel
800-824-9317
760-876-5521
- Lone Pine Budget Inn
760-876-5655
- Mt. Whitney Motel
800-845-2362
760-876-4207
- Portal Motel
800-531-7054
760-876-5930
- Trails Motel (Nat'l 9)
800-862-7020
760-876-5555

In Independence (15 minutes north)

- Circle V Motorlodge
760-878-2313
- Independence Court Motel
760-878-2732
- Ray's Den Motel
760-878-2122
- Vintage Motel
760-878-2007
- Winnedumah Country Inn
760-878-2040

In Big Pine (45 minutes north)

- Big Pine Motel
760-938-2282
- Big Pine Resort Cottages
760-878-2922
- Bristlecone Motel
760-938-2067
- Starlight Motel
760-938-2011

Camping

There is plenty of RV space and camping available.

- Boulder Creek RV Resort
760-876-4243
- Diaz Lake Campground
760-876-5656
- Foothill Campground
760-876-4120
- Portagee Joe
760-876-5656
- Sierra View Campground
760-876-4203

Also at the festival, you can hear the stories of professional stunt men, listen to the cowboy music of Don Edwards at the Friday night concert, play a little golf and watch the California Desperados Mounted Shooters perform at the Lone Pine Rodeo Grounds.

Bus tours are available to take fans on tours into the Alabamas to see Hoppy's cabin, Gene Autry Rock and the Lone Ranger ambush site.