

**FILM-INDUCED FESTIVALS: RESHAPING DESTINATION
IMAGE IN SMALLTOWN AMERICA**

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Abstract

Film and television are major forces in shaping destination image and encouraging tourism visitation. A growing literature reports on how film and television either directly attract tourists or is incorporated into destination marketing campaigns. However, there has been little research examining how film and television may be used in festivals and events and how destinations may actively use such festivals as a medium for shaping their destination image. This paper considers film-induced festivals in the small American towns of Lone Pine and Jamestown. Both are located in California and are former gold-mining towns. However, rather than promoting their gold-mining heritage (and competing against other nearby gold towns), these smalltown destinations have focussed on their film heritage. Both have been extensively used as film locations since the 1920s, primarily for Westerns. Lone Pine has been the location for over 350 films, and Jamestown has been the location for 150 films.

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FILM-INDUCED FESTIVALS: RESHAPING DESTINATION IMAGE IN SMALLTOWN AMERICA

INTRODUCTION¹

The destination image of California is primarily based on film and television. Major attractions include Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Disneyland, Universal Studios and San Francisco. However, while tourism is focussed on the major cities, smaller rural towns struggle to attract visitors. Mass tourism concentrates in the metropolitan areas, but is difficult to draw out into the countryside. Such a scenario is not unique to California, rather it is commonplace around the world.

Many Californian towns have developed festivals as a way to develop a competitive destination image and attract visitors. As in other parts of the world, these towns have focussed on festivals as they require less capital to operate than permanent attractions.

One common theme is specific agricultural products, reflecting the rural hinterlands of these towns. As such Californian towns host annual festivals based on almonds (Oakley), artichokes (Castroville), asparagus (Stockton), avocados (Carpinteria, Fallbrook), carrots (Bakersfield), fruit and nuts (Hughson), garlic (Gilroy), lemons (Ventura), mushrooms (Morgan Hill), mustard (St Helena), peaches (Marysville), strawberries (Arroyo Grande, Roseville, Watsonville, Wheatlands) and tomatoes (Yuba City) (California Festivals, 2005; Festival USA, 2005). A different approach is taken at Jamestown and Lone Pine. These two small towns have utilised their long history as movie locations as a basis for their festivals.

In recent years there has been growing interest in film-induced tourism, that is, increased tourism visitation arising from a destination being featured in film and television. A number of researchers have examined how films have played a major part in developing a destination's image (Beeton, 2001, 2004a, 2004b; Busby and Klug, 2001; Croy and Walker, 2003; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Macionis, 2004; Riley et al, 1998; Sargent, 1998; Singh and Best, 2004 and Tooke and Baker, 1996). A number of these studies consider the effect of film on rural based tourism (Beeton, 2001, 2004b; Croy and Walker, 2003; Sargent, 1998). These studies note a strong trend for film to focus on small rural communities, often with quirky or eccentric characters, and to present them as a romanticised ideal. Many such productions have proved to be highly popular, particularly with urban audiences and to have stimulated strong tourism flows.

However, there is a tendency to view film-induced tourism in a passive sense. The destination image produced through film may be seen as *organic*, produced by forces outside of tourism and beyond the control of the operators. A particularly apt example of this is the film *Field of Dreams*, which provided the oft-quoted line of 'build it in and they will come'. Its set, built in a cornfield in rural Iowa, became an instant tourist attraction (Riley et al, 1998). Seemingly, no destination marketing or development strategy was needed, the film did it all and the local community reaped a bumper harvest.

As such, the literature has primarily considered the interaction between tourism managers and films in terms of efforts to encourage film production at a location (Croy and Walker, 2003). There is a need for this interaction to be explored further, to understand both how destinations use films to attract tourists and the experiences they provide. There may also be a process in which a destination will reshape its image and experiences to better fit a film image and the resultant expectations of tourists. It is particularly notable that there has been no research into how festivals may be tied into films and used to promote destinations. The aim of this paper is to use the case studies of film-related festivals at Jamestown and Lone Pine to examine these issues.

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WESTERN FILM AT JAMESTOWN AND LONE PINE

Jamestown is in the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada, 200 kilometres inland of San Francisco. Lone Pine is on the eastern side of the Sierra, 400 kilometres north of Los Angeles. Both are former goldmining towns, but it is their history as movie locations, particularly for Westerns, which dominates their destination image.

Westerns are a highly popular genre of film. Firmly based in the historical West, their appeal extends well beyond their geographical setting, including to the eastern USA, Europe, Japan, South America and Australia (Calder, 1974; Fenin and Everson, 1977; McGrath, 2001; Penaloza, 2001; Pilkington and Graham). While the Western landscape contributes to the attraction, it is the stories and personalities, the heroes and villains, which dominate the mythic appeal of the Western (Calder, 1974; Coyne, 1997; Fenin and Everson, 1977; Hitt, 1990; Pilkington and Graham, 1979).

In the early days of film, the Western was one of the few genres which were given freedom of location by studio executives (Dickinson, 1971: 85). Filming on location allowed directors to escape close financial and artistic control and stars to hunt, fish or misbehave far from prying eyes (McBride, 2003: 102, 149 & 419; Rothel, 1990: 63 & 69). At Jamestown, filmmakers were attracted by the availability of the Sierra Railroad. Not only did this branch line offer nineteenth century steam locomotives and rolling stock, but the gently undulating countryside had no distinguishing features and could stand in for nearly anywhere in the USA. Commencing in 1919, nearly 150 movies were made at Jamestown (see Table 1).

Table 1: Major Movies Using Jamestown as a Location

Year	Title	Stars	Use of Jamestown
1929	The Virginian	Gary Cooper	Train sequences
1939	Dodge City	Errol Flynn	Race between stagecoach and train; finale fight on train; various town shots
1940	Return of Jessie James	Henry Fonda	Train sequences
1940	Go West	Marx Brothers	Finale – train chase
1952	High Noon	Gary Cooper	Station shots
1958	Man of the West	Gary Cooper	Train sequences
1980	The Long Riders	Stacey Keach, David Carradine	James Gang rob moving train
1990	Back to the Future III	Michael J. Fox	Finale – train chase and wreck. Town set built nearby
1992	The Unforgiven	Clint Eastwood	Train sequences

Source: Railtown 1897 State Historic Park, 2004.

In 1904 a group of Los Angeles businessmen began buying up land and attached irrigation rights at Lone Pine. The irrigation water was then pumped 400 kilometres south to aid the rapid suburban expansion in Los Angeles (Reisner, 1986). These strong connections stimulated Hollywood's interest in the area. In particular, the spectacular rocky Alabama Hills were used as a generic arid location. Indeed, most of the major films made at Lone Pine were set elsewhere, for example, a large number of films set in India were shot there (see Table 2).

Table 2: Major films at Lone Pine

Year	Film	Star	Setting
1934	Lives of a Bengal Lancer	Gary Cooper	19 th Century India
1936	Charge of the Light Brigade	Errol Flynn	19 th Century India and Crimea
1939	Gunga Din	Cary Grant	19 th Century India
1941	High Sierra	Humphrey Bogart	Contemporary
1949	Samson and Delilah	Victor Mature	Biblical
1950	Kim	Errol Flynn	19 th Century India
1951	Along the Great Divide	Kirk Douglas	Western
1953	King of the Khyber Rifles	Tyrone Power	19 th Century India
1955	Bad day at Black Rock	Spencer Tracy	Contemporary
1960	North to Alaska	John Wayne	Gold-Rush Alaska
1962	How the West was Won	Gregory Peck	Western
1972	Joe Kidd	Clint Eastwood	Western
1989	Tremors	Kevin Bacon	Science Fiction
1989	Star Trek V (also Star Trek VII in 1995)	William Shatner	Science Fiction
1992	Kalifornia	Brad Pitt	Contemporary
1994	Maverick	Mel Gibson	Western
2000	Gladiator	Russell Crowe	Ancient Rome

Sources: Holland, 1990; Lone Pine Film Festival, 2004.

However, the majority of 350 movies made at Lone Pine were B grade Westerns. Between 1920 and the early 1950s, Lone Pine was the location for films made by Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson, Ken Maynard, William Boyd (Hopalong Cassidy), Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Tim Holt and Randolph Scott (Holland, 1990; Rothel, 1990). Cheaply produced and relying on stock characterisations and plots, they received little critical appreciation, but were immensely popular, both in first release and then later on television.

RAILROAD MOVIE DAYS AT JAMESTOWN

Railroad Movie Days are held irregularly at the Jamestown railway station. Located about half a kilometre from the town centre, the station contained the main railworks for the Sierra Railroad, including engine roundhouse, workshops and turntable. In the 1950s conversion from steam to diesel led to most railworks being demolished. However, the revenue from film hire convinced the railroad company to retain a steam train operation at Jamestown. In addition, further income was generated from excursion trains. In 1970 the Jamestown station began operations as a privately operated theme park called Railtown 1897. Following financial difficulties the site was purchased by the State of California in 1981 and became a state park. In 1992 the California State Railroad Museum took over operations, though it remained a state park (*Union Democrat*, 2001: 10-12).

The Movie Railroad Days (initially known as the Wild West Film Fest) were designed to supplement the ongoing steam rides and railworks tours. The weekend festival aims for a balance between train and film related activities. For rail enthusiasts there are steam train excursions and demonstrations of equipment (such as the roundtable) and unusual rolling stock (including an ambulance and a handcar). These demonstrations are only undertaken at such special events and not on normal operating days. For film buffs there are panel discussions and autograph sessions with actors and stuntmen who worked at Jamestown. A number of celebrity 'look-a-likes' roam around posing for photographs and on the main set re-enact scenes from famous films. Further sessions focus on special effects and feature film props from the museum (*Union Democrat*, 2001: 3).

Railtown 1897 and the Movie Railroad Days are a joint operation between California State Parks and the volunteers from the California State Railroad Museum. Such a partnership generates tensions. While California State Parks is experienced in operating heritage attractions, few are as interactive as this and none of its other parks puts as great an emphasis on movies. For some staff there is an enormous gulf between the nation-building heritage of some parks and the triviality of movies at Jamestown. In turn, the very nature of volunteers may be frustrating to the smooth operation of the attraction. For example, on one of my visits a guided tour scheduled for 40 minutes, ran for 90 minutes because the volunteer guide was having such fun. While appreciated by the visitors on the tour, this meant the next tour was nearly an hour late in starting. These tensions have come to a head in Movie Railroad Days. Since 2001, California State Parks has declined to provide seeding funding for an event which is considered beyond the normal operations of a state park.

LONE PINE FILM FESTIVAL

Since 1990 Lone Pine has held an annual Film Festival. Its core event is the screening of a number of films made in Lone Pine. Other activities in the festival include parades, concerts, barbecues, discussion panels and guided tours of locations. Much of the appeal is in the presence of actors and film-makers who worked at Lone Pine. For example, the 2004 festival included panels of both stuntmen and children of the stars (Lone Pine Film Festival, 2004).

Revenue from the Film Festival is directed towards the establishment of a film museum. By 2001 \$US230,000 had been raised and was used to purchase a site on the main highway. Construction was scheduled to commence in 2004 (Lone Pine Film History Museum, 2004). In addition, film memorabilia figures prominently in the décor of a range of tourism-related businesses, including restaurants, hotels, motels and bars. Many of these businesses boast walls decorated with photos and posters, some feature autographs and others have external murals. These restaurants and bars are used as venues for the Film Festival and for accommodation operators it provides an out-of-season peak. The State of California's Interagency Visitors Center, while primarily concerned with nature-based tourism and recreation, features interpretation on film heritage. The close link between natural and cultural heritage is illustrated by the premier scenic drive – the Mt Whitney Portal Road, also being routed through the Alabama Hills and numerous film locations. A further feature of the area is that films are still being made and that the local county is active in seeking to attract films (Inyo County Film Commission, 2004).

In developing tourism built on its film heritage, Lone Pine has chosen to reshape itself in terms of Westerns. While most major films made at Lone Pine were set in other areas, it is the B Westerns that have come to represent the town. As Rothel noted in visiting a local restaurant, their display of famous actors included only those from B Westerns and excluded those who made big-budget films (1990: 67). Furthermore, the physical fabric of the town has been altered to portray a Western image. The Dow Hotel was built in 1923 in the then fashionable Spanish Mission style. However, now it has been clad in unpainted clapboards to present a frontier image (Holland, 1990: 78). The local McDonalds is also clad in weathered clapboard rather than in the conventional corporate style (Lone Pine Chamber of Commerce, 2004).

DISCUSSION

In examining the impact of these festivals on Lone Pine and Jamestown three important patterns stand out. First, a significant part of the attraction of both festivals is what MacCannell termed a 'staged back region' experience. This is, 'a space for outsiders who are permitted to view details of the inner operation of a commercial, domestic, industrial or public institution' (1999: 99). At Jamestown, festival attendees experience re-enactments of the *filming* of scenes from famous movies, and at sessions on special effects they are let in on the secrets of these effects and are able to handle props. At Lone Pine, stuntmen explain their secrets and the (now adult) children of

the stars reminisce on their childhood experiences of being on the set. The attraction is not just the films, but being able to go *behind* the cameras and learn about *film-making*. Most importantly these experiences can only be gained by attending the festivals. At other times of the year visitors may come to see these film locations, but they will not have these backstage experiences.

Second, in both towns, these festivals have been major contributors to the development of a destination image based on films, particularly Western films. This gives both towns a major competitive advantage in comparison to nearby towns. These competing towns share many attributes, including agricultural production, Gold Rush heritage and proximity to the Sierra Nevada Mountains. If Lone Pine and Jamestown focussed on these attributes, they would struggle to attract visitors, for they would hardly differ from their neighbours. By promoting their connections to films, they have developed a distinct and commercially valuable destination image.

However, this destination image is to a certain extent an invention. Neither Jamestown nor Lone Pine were the towns they seek to portray themselves at. There were never gunfights in the main street of Jamestown, nor was the train robbed by masked men on horseback. The railway was built to service orchardists, loggers and tourists to Yosemite. That its Gold Rush buildings remind tourists of the Wild West is due to the impact of films. The more arid Lone Pine may have a greater claim to authenticity, but its buildings have been substantially altered to bolster the Western image. Hewison's conclusion that English heritage attractions promoted 'fantasies of a world that never was' (1987: 10) could equally be applied to Lone Pine and Jamestown.

Other aspects of Lone Pine's history, such as the Gold Rushes and the battle with Los Angeles over the water from the Owens River, are marginalised. Recognition of Native Americans and their continuing existence in the town are missing from the festival. Similarly, Jamestown's actual connections with the Gold Rushes are downplayed. Indeed it is striking that Jamestown has turned its back on a history which includes Mark Twain and John Muir. While internationally famous, these personalities can also be claimed by the surrounding towns. Instead Jamestown builds its appeal on actors such as Gary Cooper, Errol Flynn and the Marx Brothers, which can only be connected to it.

Concerns with the authenticity of the heritage projected by these festivals are manifested at Jamestown by California State Parks' decision not to provide seeding funding. While this government agency has experience of various heritage days at other state parks, the emphasis on film and invented images at Jamestown is not seen as appropriate. In contrast, at Lone Pine, the major land agency is the Los Angeles Power and Water Department, which being presumably experienced with the activities of film-makers, has no objections.

Third, Jamestown and Lone Pine provide instructive case studies of how festivals may assist in the development of tourism. Film-induced tourism is often viewed as a type of *cargo cult*. Films are made, capture the imagination of the public and increase tourism flow. It is easy to see destinations as passive receivers of benefits which they did little to receive. Unfortunately, such a view misses the vital question – how did the destination translate the interest generated by film into actual tourism?

These festivals were designed to link film interest to visitation. They contribute to the development of a destination image and they provide the tourist with an experience. In both cases, there are strong relationships with permanent attractions. At Jamestown, the Movie Railroad Days highlight the existing attraction of the 1897 Railtown State Historic Park. The festival provides an opportunity for the staff and volunteers at the park to undertake activities and display machinery to large numbers of visitors. Normally it would not be viable to conduct such a wide range of activities. The festival promotes an enhanced or extended attraction. At Lone Pine, the festival has the specific objective of raising funds to build a permanent museum. Once built, this museum will ensure a more even tourist flow and no doubt provide a wider range of activities and displays during future festivals.

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