

The Southwest: backdrop for the Movies

THE PANORAMIC DESERT LANDSCAPE of the Southwest is familiar the world over thanks to the countless movies that have been filmed here. As legendary actor John Wayne once said: "TV you can do on the back lot; for the real outdoor dramas, you have to do them where God put the West." Monument Valley (see pp164-5) is famous for its association with John Ford's Westerns, while the stark beauty of southern Utah, particularly around the Moab and Kanab areas, has appeared in several films. The popular idea of the "Wild West" (see pp54-5) has been formed more through film than by any other medium, and visitors to the Southwest may find much of its scenery strangely familiar. Many TV series and commercials have also been shot here.



Old Tucson Studio was built for the 1940 motion picture *Arizona*. The studio is still a popular movie location and is now also home to a family-oriented, Wild West theme park (see pp86-7).

Johnson Canyon, near Kanab (see p148), was the location of the 1962 film *How the West was Won*. It is a western town set that was built for the 1952 movie *Westward the Women*. Today, the set is open to visitors.



JOHN FORD AND MONUMENT VALLEY

John Ford was not the first director to shoot a movie using Monument Valley's spectacular buttes as a backdrop. That honor goes to George B. Seitz, who filmed *The Vanishing American* there in 1924. But it was John Ford's genius that captured the spectacle of the West as people had never seen it before. His first movie there, *Stagecoach* (1939), so enthralled audiences that it brought the Western back into vogue and made the young John Wayne into a star. Ford set a new standard for movies, bringing the grandeur of the West to the big screen, and setting off a "studio stampede" of directors wanting to utilize the beauty of the region. In all, over 60 movies and countless TV shows, commercials, and videos have used Monument Valley as a spectacular panoramic backdrop.



Director John Ford on the set of *Stagecoach*



Moab's snow-capped mountains, red rock formations, and deep river canyons (see p141) have been the backdrop for over 100 major motion pictures, including *Thelma and Louise* in 1991.

Robert Zemeckis used Monument Valley in 1990 as the backdrop for the third installment of his *Back to the Future* series of films, starring Michael J. Fox and Christopher Lloyd.



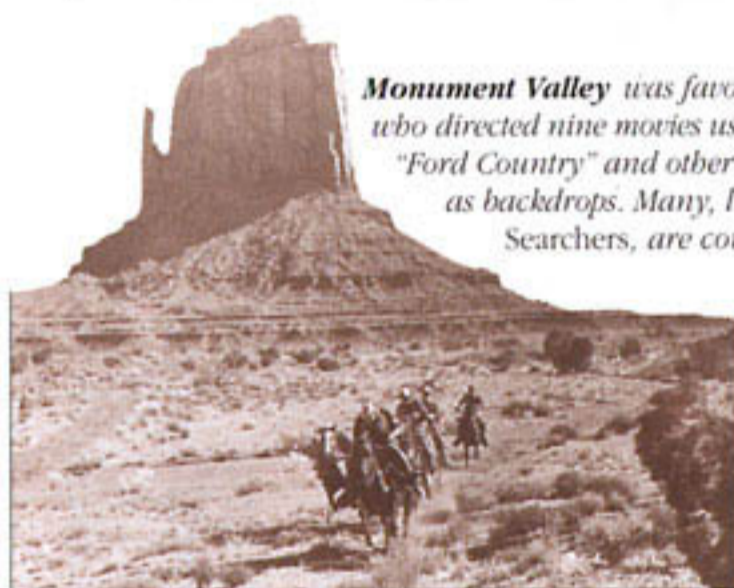
THE SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

Actor and director Robert Redford owns the Sundance Resort, which combines an environmentally responsible mountain vacation development with an institute for the promotion of the cinematic arts. Founded by Redford in 1981, the Sundance Film Festival takes place annually in the second half of January. The majority of screenings, which showcase independent film- and documentary-makers, are not held at the Sundance Resort (about 75 miles (121 km) northwest of Moab), but in Park City and at the Tower Theater in Salt Lake City. The festival has become America's foremost venue for innovative cinema and attracts the big Hollywood names. Tickets sell out quickly, so make ticket and lodging reservations ahead.

Robert Redford at the Sundance Film Festival in 1998



Monument Valley was favored by John Ford, who directed nine movies using the area dubbed "Ford Country" and other southern Utah sites as backdrops. Many, like the 1956 epic *The Searchers*, are considered classics.



Dead Horse Point State Park (see p143) has long been used by directors who want a spectacular setting. It was seen in the 1991 film *Thelma and Louise* and, more recently, actor Tom Cruise free-climbed up the sheer cliff-face in the thrilling opening sequence of *Mission Impossible: 2*.



Tombstone was the setting for the 1993 film of the same name (see p92). Starring Val Kilmer, Sam Elliott, Bill Paxton, and Kurt Russell, it is a modern interpretation of the Western genre.

Lake Powell is the most spectacular artificial lake in the US (see pp150-51). Its stark and otherworldly beauty has been used as a set for such diverse movies as the 1967 Dean Martin Western *Rough Night in Jericho*, the 1965 biblical epic *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (pictured here), with Charlton Heston, and the 1968 science fiction classic *Planet of the Apes*.

