

Canadian-based Westerns

Western Canada has some of the most spectacular scenery in the world. This wondrous beauty has long been an attraction to citizens of other countries; among these being Hollywood producers of movies of the western genre. The foothills area to the west of Calgary has been especially popular with filmmakers. This shoot is a tribute to those westerns that have been filmed in western Canada.

One of the most popular locations for western movies is the CL Ranch located not far from the intersection of the Trans Canada Highway and the Cowboy Trail, also known as Highway 22. In the early 1990s the owners got a phone call from the Lonesome Dove production crew. They wanted to use the location to film the TV series, a spinoff of the movies starring Tommy Lee Jones and Robert Duvall, because they had never before seen 360 degrees of being able to film for a western and not have any power lines or roads in their way. Since then over 40 major films and television productions have used the land and backlot movies set which includes period buildings from the 1850s to the 1930s. In addition to the Lonesome Dove mini series, Lonesome Dove: The Series and Lonesome Dove: The Outlaw Years, CL Ranch has been used in the production of Little Big Man, Shanghai Noon, Crossfire Trail, Monte Walsh, The Jack Bull, You Know My Name, and Hell on Wheels.

Other westerns filmed in the Calgary area include Legends of the Fall, Unforgiven, The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford, Open Range, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, and Broken Trail. The western comedy, Gunless, was filmed in the Okanagan region near Osoyoos. Older westerns also featured Canadian locations: Far Country used Jasper National Park; Canadian Pacific filmed in Banff National Park, Yoho National Park and the Morley Indian Reserve; and River of No Return had scenes from Banff and Jasper.

Canadian Pacific, starring Randolph Scott and Jane Wyatt, was filmed in 1949. Scott plays a surveyor and construction boss, Tom Andrews, who discovers the pass which will construction of the CPR through the Rocky Mountains into BC. He intends to resign his position so he can marry Cecille Gautier, the girl he loves. From her, he learns that fur trader Dirk Rourke is opposed to the building of the railroad fearing that it will threaten his hold on the Indians and other trappers. Rourke's confederates use dynamite stolen from the railroad to slow down construction. Tom returns to finish his job with the railroad and almost loses his life when Rourke fires into some crates of dynamite Tom is unloading. The construction camp's doctor, Edith Cabot (played by Jane Wyatt), gives her own blood in a transfusion to save Tom's life. During his recovery he becomes attracted to the doctor. It is at this time that Cecille, who has learned of Rourke's plans to stir up the local Indian bands to halt construction, arrives to warn Tom. In the final battle the Indians are defeated and Tom finds that the doctor views him as being too violent, so he must settle for Cecille.

Far Country, a 1954 western, starred Jimmy Stewart and Walter Brennan. Their characters, Jeff Webster (Stewart) and Ben Tatum see the start of the Klondike gold

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rush as a golden opportunity to make a fortune by supplying the gold fields with beef. To do this they drive a cattle herd from Wyoming to Seattle, ship it to Skagway by boat, and drive it over the mountains to Dawson City. Many situations develop during their journey: Webster is accused of murder in Seattle, escapes to the boat and spends most of the voyage in the cabin of a woman named Rhonda Castle; in Skagway, Webster is arrested by town boss Judge Gannon, tried for the murder of which he's accused, acquitted on the grounds it was justified, and has his herd confiscated. Hired by a saloon owner (Rhonda Castle) to help take a pack train to Dawson, Webster and Tatum slip off during the first night's camp to steal back their cattle. Once their destination is reached the herd is put up for auction and Rhonda outbids the owners of a local eating establishment. soon after, Gannon and his henchmen arrive in Dawson and begin cheating miners out of their claims. Webster and Tatum having filed their own claim prefer to work it and avoid trouble with Gannon. Once their fortune is made, they attempt to leave by rafting down the river. Gannon and his men ride up, kill Tatum and wound Webster. After recovering from his wounds, Webster confronts and kills Gannon along with several of his gang.

Crossfire Trail is a 2001 movie based on Louis L'Amour's 1954 book. After promising his severely beaten and dying friend, Charles Rodney, that he'd take care of his family and Wyoming ranch, Rafe Covington played by Tom Selleck and two friends abandon the freighter on which they'd been sailors. Six weeks later they arrive at Rodney's ranch which has been abandoned. Riding to the near-by town they discover that the locals believe that Rodney had been killed by a Sioux war party. Rodney's widow, now the local school teacher, is having difficulty making mortgage payments on the ranch to saloon owner and town boss Bruce Barkow (Mark Harmon) who has plans to marry her. After the widow, to whom Covington is attracted, refuses to accept the reality of her husband's death, Rafe and his companions return to the ranch where they undertake the task of repairing the year of neglect. After several attempts to remove Covington and his friends from the ranch, Barkow sends for a professional killer, Bo Dorn. Dorn succeeds in killing one of the ranch hands which leads to a shootout in town. Covington kills Dorn, Barkow shoots and wounds Covington, and the widow shoots Barkow in the back before he can kill Covington.

The western, **Monte Walsh**, was filmed in 2003. It starred Tom Selleck and Keith Carradine who play Monte Walsh and Chet Rollins, two long-time cowhands working whatever ranch work comes their way near the end of the nineteenth century. their lives are divided between months on the range and occasional trips into town where Monte has a long-term relationship with a prostitute, Martine Bernard (Isabella Rossellini). After a particularly brutal winter which decimated the cattle herds of all the ranches, most of the ranch hands found themselves without jobs. The ranches were purchased by an eastern company which hired the best hands, among them, Monte and Chet. A long time bronc buster, Monte found that the position has been given to a younger man, Shorty Austin (George Eads). When the company found they were making the profits they expected the crew was downsized and Shorty was laid off. Chet left to marry the

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widow who owned the hardware store. When Shorty kills Chet in a holdup of the store, Monte sets out to find him only to be side tracked by learning of the death of Martine. While attending to her funeral arrangements he encounters Shorty and the final showdown occurs with Shorty losing.

Another western filmed in 2003 was **Open Range** starring Kevin Costner, Robert Duvall, Annette Bening, and Michael Gambon. Boss Spearman (Duvall) and Charlie Waite (Costner) are open range cattlemen who with two other hands are driving a herd across country. When one of the hands, Mose, fails to return from town with needed supplies, Boss and Charlie ride in to investigate. They find a badly beaten Mose locked up in jail. Upon arranging for his release they are warned against free-grazing by local land Baron Denton Baxter (Gambon). Due to the severity of Mose's injuries he is taken to the local Doctor where they meet his sister Sue Barlow (Bening). Returning to the herd they find they are being scouted by masked riders. Trailing them to their camp, Boss and Charlie disarm them. When they return to the herd they find Mose dead and Button, their other hand, shot. Their return to the doctor's office leads to a confrontation with the town marshal, Baxter, and Baxter's men. After the shoot out in which Carlie and Boss are supported by the townspeople, Baxter and his men are killed. Boss decides to get out of the cattle business and asks Charlie to be his partner in the town's saloon.

In 2006, Robert Duvall starred in another duster along with Thomas Haden Church. **Broken Trail** chronicles the journey of Prentice Ritter (Duvall) and his nephew, Tom Harte (Church), as they transport a herd of 500 horses from Oregon to Sheridan, Wyoming to sell to the British army. Shortly after they begin their drive, Tom goes into a nearby town to purchase supplies. While there he hires an Irish fiddler, Heck Gilpin (Scott Cooper). Back on the trail they meet up with Captain Billy Fender and five Chinese girls he purchased in San Francisco to be sold as prostitutes in the gold fields of Idaho. That night Fender makes off with their money, saddle horses and one of the girls. Tom rides off after him, finds him, hangs him, and returns to camp with the girl. When the herd reaches Caribou City Idaho where Fender was supposed to deliver the girls to city boss Kate Becker. Tom and Heck take the girls, only four now - one dies from tick fever, into town to find someone with whom to leave them. After several unpleasant altercations, Tom and Heck leave town with the girls and two additional persons, Nola Johns, a prostitute, and Lung Hay, a Chinese immigrant who is able to speak to the girls in their native tongue. Ed Bywaters and a gang of men, having been hire by Kate to recover her property, follow the herd as it continues east toward its destination. Eventually Sheridan is reached, the herd is sold and Prentice and the rest of the crew relax. The following morning, after Tom sets out to gather the strays, Ed and his gang show up and kill Heck. In the ensuing gun fight, Prentice is forced to surrender. As Ed prepares to torture Prent, Tom returns and shoots the gang members. As eEd takes aim at Tom, Prent brains him with a crochet mallet.

Shanghai Noon, filmed in 2000, starred Jackie Chan as Chon Wang and Owen Wilson as Roy O'Bannon. Chon Wang, an Imperial Guard to the Emperor of China, feels

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personally responsible when Princess Pei Pei is kidnapped from the Imperial Palace. He insists on joining the guards sent to rescue the Princess, who has been whisked away to the United States. In Nevada, while hot on the trail of the kidnapers, Wang is separated from the group and soon finds himself and unlikely partner of Roy O'Bannon, a small time robber with delusions of grandeur. Roy trains Wang in the ways of the cowboy. They find Lo Fong, formerly a guard at the Forbidden City and viewed as a traitor, is behind the kidnapping of the Princess. After Wang hears Roy saying that he and Wang are not friends, Wang rides off alone to find the Princess. Roy follows and saves him from Fong. At the time the ransom is to be paid, the simple exchange becomes complicated. Wang is forced to fight the three imperial guards sent to retrieve the Princess, Roy engages in a gunfight with a marshal ally of Fong, and Wang kills Fong by hanging him.

Unforgiven, filmed in 1993, won four Oscars including best picture. The cast included Clint Eastwood, Gene Hackman, and Morgan Freeman. When a prostitute is cut up by a couple of cowboys and Sheriff Little Bill (Hackman) does nothing about it, the prostitutes of the town of Big Whiskey put a bounty on the cowboys. The bounty attracts a young gun who calls himself the Schofield Kid and an aging killer, Will Munny (Eastwood). Munny enlists the help of his old partner, Ned Logan (Freeland). Will and Ned soon find the the Kid is severely nearsighted. They arrive in Big Whiskey during a torrential downpour with Munny sick with fever. An encounter with Little Billy leaves Munny badly beaten and thrown into the street. Forced to escape through a window, Ned and the Kid get Munny on a horse and leave town. After Will's recovery, the trio locate one of their targets. Ned fires and breaks the man's leg but can't bring himself to finish him off, so Will is forced to do so. Ned finds that he's had enough of killing and sets off to return home. He is captured and killed by Little Bill. Meanwhile the other target is killed by the Kid. One of the prostitutes brings the bounty money and informs them of Ned's death. Munny sends the Kid home with the reward money, then rides into Big Whiskey where he proceeds to avenge Ned's death.

Legends of the Fall is set in early twentieth century Montana. Colonel William Ludlow (Sir Anthony Hopkins) lives in the wilderness with his sons Tristan (Brad Pitt), Alfred (Aidan Quinn) and Samuel (Henry Thomas). When he returns from Harvard, Samuel is accompanied by his fiancée Susannah Fincannon (Julia Ormond). The seeds of discord are sown when Alfred finds himself attracted to Susannah and she finds herself attracted to Tristan, the colonel's favorite son. Soon after the three brothers enlist to fight in World War I. Samuel is killed. Tristan and Alfred survive their tours of duty and return home. Both men fall for Susannah and their intense rivalry begins to destroy the family. For a time Tristan enjoys Susannah's affections, but then he leaves to spend several years as a sailor. In the meantime, Alfred marries Susannah and begins a career as a politician. Eventually Tristan returns to the ranch and marries Isabel Two, the daughter of a ranch hand, whom he has known since she was a little girl. This came during the time of Prohibition and Tristan becomes involved in bootlegging which brings him into competition with supporters of his brother who are part of the

underworld. Upon learning that her feelings for Tristan are not reciprocated, Susannah commits suicide. In a confrontation with his competition, Tristan's wife is murdered. After revenge is taken on the murderer and his boss, the mobsters, supported by the sheriff arrive at the ranch to kill Tristan. Alfred steps in to save the lives of his brother and father.

Gunless, filmed in 2010, is one of a very few westerns to be set in Canada. When a wounded and stinky gunslinger rode into a quiet and peaceful prairie community, few of its inhabitants realized what was to follow. The Montana Kid (Paul Gross) succumbed to his wounds and passed out. While being treated by the local doctor, the town blacksmith, Jack Smith (Tyler Mane), put the horse in his barn to get him out of the sun. When the Kid exited the doctor's office, he took immediately took exception to the "theft" of his horse and challenged the blacksmith to a showdown. A problem arose when it was discovered the blacksmith had no revolver, nor did anyone else in town. The widow of a homesteader, Jane Taylor (Sienna Guillory), in town to pick up a part for her windmill, said she had one at home which the kid could have if he helped get her windmill fixed. An agreement was reached, but when the Kid got the gun, he discovered it was inoperable due to a broken hammer. And the only person who could fix the hammer was the blacksmith, who did so grudgingly. After the Kid retrieved the repaired hammer, he cleaned and test-fired the gun.. All worked as it should. The period of time which passed while the hammer was being fixed allowed the Kid to reflect on his past life and the person he'd become, a person he didn't particularly like. So when the showdown took place he tried to let Jack shoot him. Only the gun wouldn't fire. While Jack and the Kid worked on the gun, it went off and the ricochet hit Jack in the butt.

Little Big Man, a 1970 western, recounts the life story of 121 year old Jack Crabb (Dustin Hoffman) to a curious historian. Crabb tells of having been rescued and raised by a Cheyenne tribal leader (Chief Dan George), of working as a snake-oil salesman, as a gunslinger and associate of Wild Bill Hickok, and as a mule skinner under General Custer. It is during this period of his life that Crabb becomes involved in a battle against the Cheyenne. When the troopers begin killing women and children, he turns on them. He later marries the daughter of the warrior who rescued him as a child and becomes a member of her tribe. During a surprise attack by the 7th Cavalry, she is killed. An attempt to exact revenge on Custer fails and Jack becomes a trapper and hermit. Seeing Custer and his troops marching nearby he decides to return to his quest for revenge. Custer hires him as a scout believing that anything Jack tells him will be a lie. Realizing this Jack truthfully tells Custer of an overwhelming force of hostiles hidden a valley. As Custer's command is slaughtered, Jack is wounded but escapes the battlefield. He claims to be the only white survivor of the Battle of Little Bighorn. All the outdoor Indian scenes other than the Little Bighorn Battle were filmed near Calgary; the Little Big Horn battle footage was filmed on location near the actual battle site.

The Jack Bull is a 1999 made for TV western filmed in large part at the CL Ranch and the Heritage Park Historical Village in Calgary. It tells the story of Meryl Redding (John Cusack), a Wyoming horse trader who clashes with Henry Ballard (L. Q. Jones), a fellow rancher. While trailing a herd of horses to Casper, Redding is forced to pay a toll to Ballard, part of which are two horses which are to be returned to Redding upon the sale of his herd. Their Crow Indian caretaker, Billy, is left to ensure their safety. Upon his return, Redding finds the horses have been starved and beaten, and Billy is missing. When he returns home Billy is there, beaten and bitten. Billy recounts how, when he attempted to prevent the mistreatment of the horses, he was attacked by two of Ballard's men who then set the dogs on him. Redding turns to the law to seek justice, but when Judge Wilkins throws out his complaint, the war he wages to force Ballard to nurse the emaciated horses back to health escalates into a vigilante manhunt, murder, and, eventually, a hanging.

There's something compelling about western movies, be it the good versus bad, right versus wrong, or simply good guy versus bad guy. They have been popular with audiences for many decades. As long as Hollywood continues to produce them, many of them will continue to be filmed in western Canada.