

# SANTA SUSANA

## WESTERN RANCHING AND MOVIE FILMING

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The Santa Susana Field Laboratory is well known as a historic rocket engine testing site that propelled Americans into space and helped land man on the moon. The site is also known as home to Native American cultural resources, abundant wildlife and endangered plant species. But there is a period of Santa Susana's bygone era that is less well known, but still of great historical importance – Western ranching and movie filming.

The site was originally part of the 113,009-acre Rancho Simi land-grant given by the Spanish Governor of

During its 15-year existence, some of the land at Sky Valley Ranch was dry-farmed, which meant crops were cultivated without irrigation. The other areas of the ranch were used for raising cattle.

The rugged open terrain and majestic rock formations interspersed with sculpted oak trees made the area a natural choice for country living. It was also a picturesque setting for motion pictures. RKO and Republic Pictures approached Henry Silvernale about using his property for movies and television shows and they entered into a filming agreement.

Between the late 1930s and the early 1950s, more than 40 movies, mostly Westerns, were filmed in and around Burro Flats and elsewhere on Sky Valley Ranch.

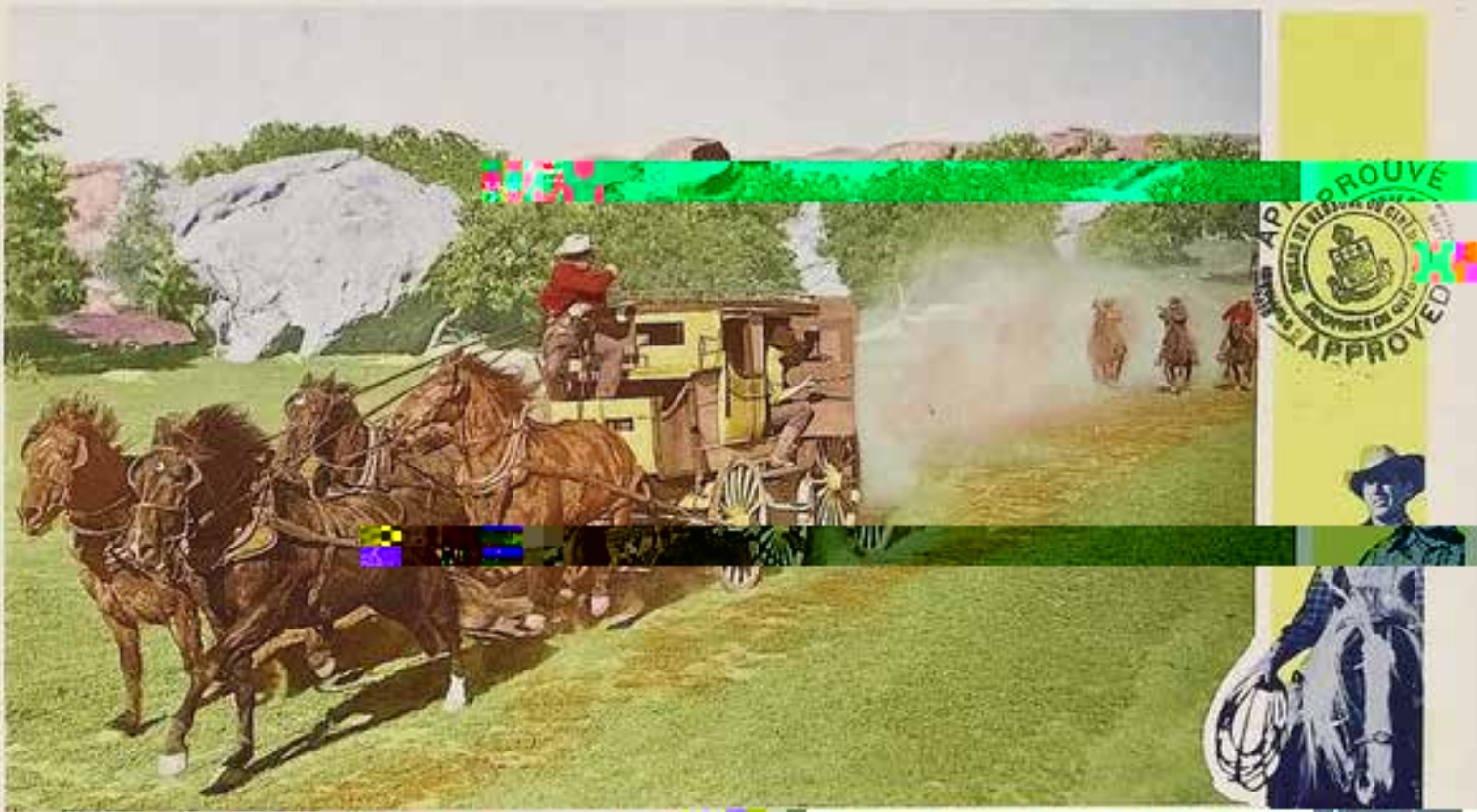
Westerns, often referred to by the early Hollywood press as "oaters," were the mainstay for the industry for decades. The Iverson Movie Ranch and Corriganville were two of the most used filming locations in the local Santa Susana Hills. Despite its remote location – or because of it – Burro Flats was used to film dozens of movies, including *Romance of the Rio Grande*, *Arrow in the Dust*, *Ride Clear of Diablo*, *Drums Across the River* and *Apache*. The movie stars featured in the

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needed a large and remote location to test them. NAA leased, and later bought, 540 acres to the immediate east of Sky Valley Ranch from the Dundas family; the acres were previously leased by Sage Ranch. By 1954, the "Rocketdyne and Power Division of North American Aviation" purchased Sky Valley Ranch from the Silvernals and Halls. Sky Valley Ranch was subsequently divided into what became known as Areas I, II, III and IV. The field lab was renamed



**IRON MOUNTAIN TRAIL**

STARRING **REX ALLEN** THE ARIZONA COWBOY **KOKO** THE MIRACLE HORSE OF THE MOVIES WITH **SLIM PICKENS · GRANT WITHERS · NAN LESLIE · ROY BARCROFT**

Story by WILLIAM LIVELY · Screen Play by LUTHER DORFMEYER · Directed by WILLIAM WILNET

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SPECIAL THANKS

1. England, Jerry. Reel Cowboys of the Santa Susana. 2008.
2. England, Jerry. A Drifting Cowboy Blogspot. <http://a-drifting-co-bo.blogspot.com/2012/07/chatsworth-Iming-location-burro-ats.html>.
3. Knight, Albert. The History of Sky Valley Ranch. 2017.
4. Kramer, Robert S. Rocketdyne: Powering Humans into Space. AIAA Education. 2007.
5. Vincent, Ann and Ray. Burro Flats movie clips. Chatsworth Historical Museum. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29QZKgpS4bQ&t=1s>.
6. Simi Valley Historical Society. [www.simihistor.com](http://www.simihistor.com).
7. Iverson Movie Location Ranch. [https://www.iversonranch.com/Iverson\\_Ranch.html](https://www.iversonranch.com/Iverson_Ranch.html).

TELEVISION SHOWS & MOVIES FILMED AT THE  
**SANTA SUSANA FIELD LABORATORY**



- Iron Mountain Trail (1953)
- Shadows of Tombstone (1953)
- The Nebraskan (1953)
- They Rode West (1954)
- Arrow in the Dust (1954)
- Apache (1954)
- Drums Across the River (1954)
- The Black Dakotas (1954)
- Overland Pacific (1954)
- I Spy: Apollo episode (1967)
- Barnaby Jones: The Alpha-Bravo War episode (1975)
- Six Million Dollar Man: Return of the Robot Maker episode (1975)
- Wings of the Hawk (1953)
- Jack Slade (1953)
- Ride Clear of Diablo (1954)



- Star Wars Saga: Episode IV (1977)
- Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope (1977)
- Telefon (1977)
- Hooper (1978)
- Return From Witch Mountain (1978)
- Star Trek Deep Space Nine: The Quickening episode (1996)
- Space: Above and Beyond
- Air Wolf
- Alien Nation

The Internet Movie Database (IMDB), [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com), typically lists the movie set location for television shows or movies as "Burro Flats" or the "Santa Susana Field Laboratory." Sources:

- IMDB, Internet Movie Database, [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)
- Jerry England, "Real Cowboys of the Santa Susanas: Chatsworth Movie Ranches," [www.co bo up.com/Mo ieHist](http://www.co bo up.com/Mo ieHist)
- Ray and Ann Vincent, Chatsworth Historical Society
- Rocketdyne historical archives
- North American Aviation, Rocketdyne and Atomics International retirees
- Boeing employees