

Putting the epic back in New Mexico film



David Salcido
Through the lens

When it comes to creating a viable film industry in southern New Mexico, I'm beginning to realize there are as many approaches to doing so as there are true stories and tall tales making up the fabric of life in our enchanting state.

In early October, I was introduced to one of those approaches when I was invited to tour the gorgeous Mimbres Valley, winding through the foothills of the Gila Wilderness south of Silver City.

Here, an enterprising duo named Mike Barragree and Glenn Tolhurst have founded Mimbres Film LLC, a film location scouting and logistics support company serving southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona. Their hope is to lure filmmakers to their corner of the world and seduce them with a majestic panorama of unspoiled lands that still look very much the same as they must have to the early native people and pioneers who made it their home.

Barragree has spent the last decade and a half since he retired to the area exploring and learning its history via odd jobs as a census taker, a mail carrier, a volunteer fireman and his "regular" job as medical investigator for the University of New Mexico. Tolhurst is

a professional photographer who, like Barragree, volunteers for Mimbres County Search and Rescue. It was here that the two met, began a dialogue and, in less than a year, decided to devote what spare time they could find to raising the profile of the area for cinematic ventures.

"What we're doing is going after the film industry," Barragree said. "We're not waiting for it to come to us. We're going to have a website and are working a deal with Western New Mexico University to utilize some of their resources so filmmakers can see what we have to offer. All we're trying to do is bring attention to the area. Nobody is doing that here. We don't have any representation. We're completely ignored."

The focus of this tour, then, was to acquaint city slickers like myself with three ranches that encompass literally thousands of acres within the Mimbres Valley. The ranches in question – the Harrington, Eby and Nan spreads – are a triumvirate of outstanding possibilities, covering four riparian zones between them, from bosque and babbling brook to Chihuahuan Desert and savanna like grasslands to piñon, juniper and scrub pine hillocks and up to the towering majesty of Ponderosa pine in the mountainous regions.

At some vantage points on these ranches, one can literally see for miles in all directions, without so much as a telephone pole, wire or tower to block the view. The skies are a brilliant blue

backdrop for scuttling clouds, which become more dramatic as the day progresses into evening. Very rarely will a jet trail scar these skies. It is far more likely that a lazy herd of cattle will break the silence than any modern conveyance.

Even the most unimaginative would be hard pressed not to picture herds of buffalo moving across these prairies, hordes of Apache warriors streaming down hillsides or wagons loaded with the meager possessions of a lifetime and hearty families rolling forward in search of a better tomorrow. Or, as Barragree pictures it, Clint Eastwood riding out on his faithful pony in search of epic adventures the likes of which haven't been seen since Peckinpah ruled the roost.

Of the three, it's El Rancho Nan, or the Nan Ranch, that offers the most varied possibilities – not to mention a miniseries worth of cattlemen, capitalists and cads from its storied past that would make the denizens of Southfork in "Dallas" look like the "Brady Bunch." From the rambling complex of houses, cottages, bunkhouses and barns – each decorated in different styles and at different times within the past 70 years – to the 70,000 acres of diverse, open land, the possibilities are endless.

The owners of the ranch, John and Betty Lang, are extremely film friendly and would love to see their holdings put to good use. Our brief excursion

into their backyard via ATV found us traversing a wilderness that is a time capsule of New Mexican history, with creeks, rocky outcroppings, homesteading ruins and wave upon wave of rippling prairie grass leading right up to the high country.

We also had an exhilarating experience bouncing alongside and crossing paths with a herd of wild antelope that brought back memories of every African safari documentary viewed since childhood.

"I always like to save the best for last," Barragree said with a knowing smile. "I like to call this part of the tour, the Sam Peckinpah experience."

For now, the gentlemen of Mimbres Film LLC are gathering and compiling information that will showcase the region's potential. They are putting together a database (www.mimbresfilm.com) which, when complete, will have location slide shows displaying all of the properties available to filmmakers, as well as names and contact information for people in the area with specialty services, such as electricians, carpenters, extras and even a mobile veterinarian.

"It's a pretty big job, but it will be all encompassing," Barragree said. "We want to represent a region, not just Grant County, because there aren't any film liaisons out here. We're going to be the go-to boys. That's what we want to be."

Sudoku

Complete the grids below so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively. It is a game of logic, not math, and there is only one solution per puzzle. Have fun and exercise the gray matter. Tips and computer program at www.sudoku.com

BEGINNER

1				3	8	4		2
		8			2	7		
7	9		6					1
8	3			1		5		
6			2		3			4
		5		8			3	1
	8				4		7	9
		4	5			8		
2		3	8	7				5

CHALLENGER

1			5					
			2	4			3	
6						2	9	
7			4		2			
9		2				6		7
			6		8			4
	7	3						1
	6			5	4			
					1			2

EXPERT

7				9				
				5				6
	4			8		3	7	
	2					6	4	
8	1						3	2
	7	6					1	
	9	7		6			2	
3					7			
				5				9

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

7	9	5	8	4	6	2	3	1
1	8	3	5	9	2	4	6	7
2	4	6	3	7	1	9	5	8
8	5	1	2	6	9	3	7	4
4	3	7	1	8	5	6	9	2
9	6	2	4	3	7	8	1	5
3	2	9	7	5	4	1	8	6
5	1	8	6	2	3	7	4	9
6	7	4	9	1	8	5	2	3

8	2	9	4	5	1	6	3	7
5	7	3	8	9	6	4	2	1
1	6	4	3	7	2	9	5	8
9	5	2	1	3	4	8	7	6
3	8	1	2	6	7	5	9	4
7	4	6	5	8	9	3	1	2
6	1	5	7	4	3	2	8	9
2	9	8	6	1	5	7	4	3
4	3	7	9	2	8	1	6	5

5	6	2	8	4	1	7	9	3
3	7	8	6	9	5	2	1	4
9	1	4	7	2	3	8	5	6
2	4	7	5	6	9	1	3	8
6	3	5	2	1	8	9	4	7
1	8	9	3	7	4	5	6	2
4	9	3	1	8	2	6	7	5
7	2	1	4	5	6	3	8	9
8	5	6	9	3	7	4	2	1

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