

SANTA SUSANA

WESTERN RANCHING AND MOVIE FILMING

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 California, Diego de Borica, to the Pico Family in 1795. "Simi" is derived from the Chumash word, "Shimiji," which means thread-like cloud, according to some historians. In 1842, the ranch was sold to Jose de la Guerra y Noriega, of Santa Barbara. Following his death, de la Guerra's family sold the ranch to the Philadelphia and

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.

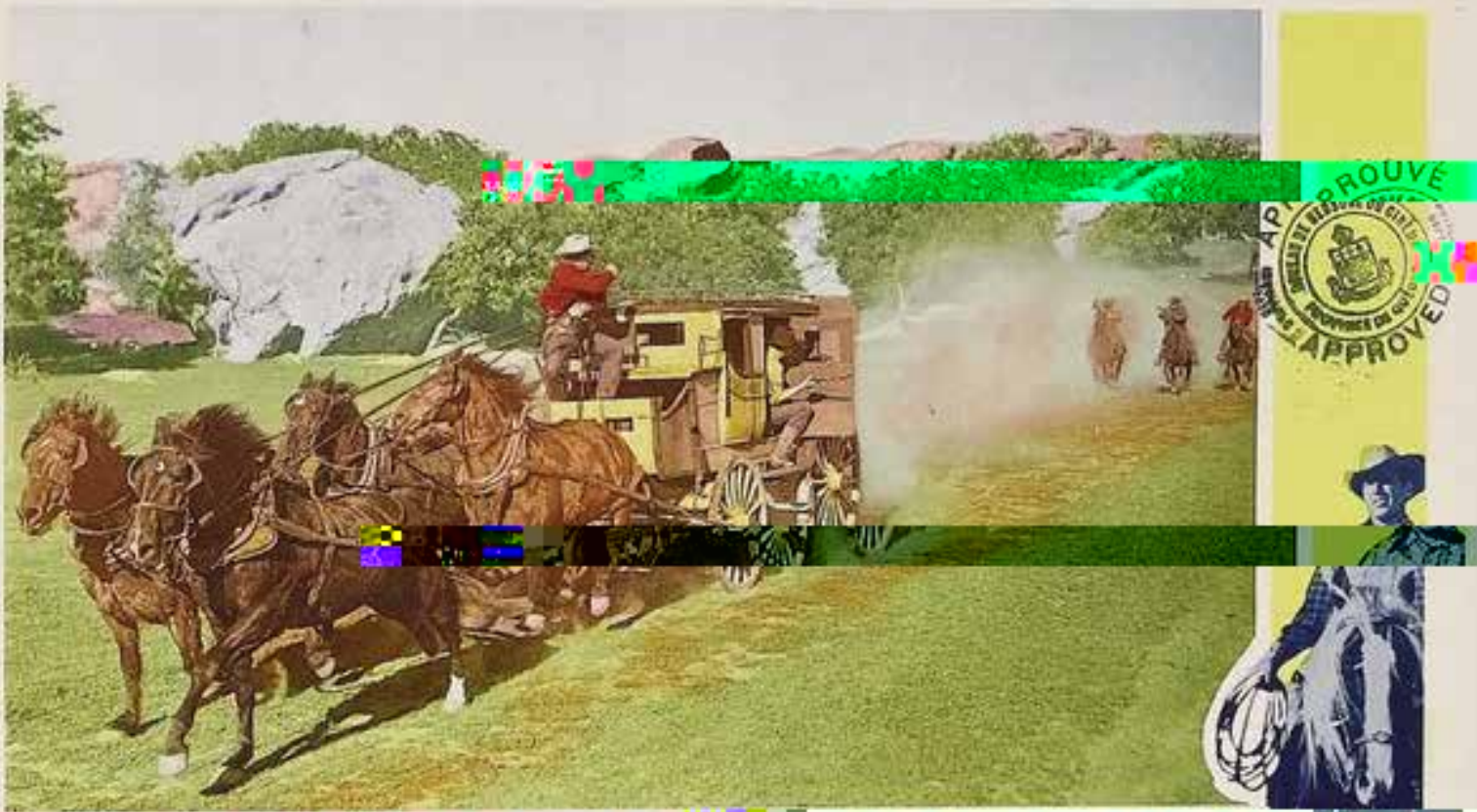
Westerns, often referred to by the early Hollywood press as "oaters," were the mainstay for the industry for decades. The Iverson Movie Ranch and Corriganville were two of the most used filming locations in the local Santa Susana Hills. Despite its remote location – or because of it – Burro Flats was 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



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SPECIAL THANKS

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