

Truckee Movies to Not Miss

By Judy DePuy

Summer is almost upon us and the release of new box buster films. Did you also know that Truckee has been the movie setting for over 200 films? Some filmed in their entirety and some for critical scenes were all made in this area.

Filming here in Truckee started in the early 1900s after the Transcontinental Railroad was completed and the filming industry was created. Travel by rail became so much easier and the movie industry, who never thought they would go to the Sierra, thought twice. Going from sets to the real locales became important.

Many of these movie companies needed snow scenes or beautiful lake backgrounds (for those who don't know this is before Computer Graphic Interface (aka CGI) and they had to do it 'real'). Some needed the ruggedness of our terrain. Some had the actors trapped in the snow. And there were the movies that had the actors actually in the water. The point was that they could easily get crews up to Truckee on the railroad and we had the hotels and food that would support the massive film crews to make a movie.

I have divided the films from Truckee into: Silent films, Drama & Adventure, Comedy, and Ski Movies. I've listed my top 2 of each category. Be aware that this is my preference and I hope you have an opinion on one (or more) I've missed. These are just the ones I want to make sure my kids and grandkids see.

Silent Movies

The Silent Era films were the lead into what we see today. The acting, storytelling, costumes, and never forget the makeup...nothing was more unique nor original. We learned much from these early movie makers.

The earliest known filming in the Truckee area was in 1910 with the film "In the Frozen North" when the Selig Polyscope Company had arrived in Truckee to film winter scenes to replicate the Alaskan wilderness.

The Silent film to not be missed, especially for the railroad enthusiast, is "**The Iron Horse**" directed by John Ford in 1924. John Ford was obsessed with being authentic to the construction of the railroad and his film shows the San Mateo locomotive being hauled over Donner Summit on skids, just as the Central Pacific had done in 1867 with Chinese laborers and 50 horses.

Then there is the "**Gold Rush**" directed and starring Charlie Chaplin. His 1925 movie captures the stories of the Klondike with their hardship, starvation, and survival. It is fun for its unusual combination of slapstick and tragedy. It was the highest grossing comedy and most elaborate and expensive movie of the era. It was also the movie Charlie Chaplin wanted to be remembered by.

I would be errant to not give credit to Buster Keaton who introduced Charlie Chaplin to our area. Buster was a master in "**The Frozen North**", 1922; "**Our Hospitality**", 1923; "**The Navigator**", (1924)) and was known to love the Truckee area. He knew what we had to offer.

Drama/Adventure:

This group of movies brought in some world-wide actors. It also made Truckee a place to be.

“The Call of the Wild” 1935, starring Clark Gable had a special movie set constructed near Prosser Creek. The movie is an adaptation of Jack London’s 1903 novel The Call of the Wild. It is a story about gold, greed, dogs, survival and love. Truly worthwhile not only watching but reading.

“Island in the Sky”, 1953, starring John Wayne is a film about an Air Force transport plane forced down on the bleak wastes of Labrador and the efforts of a rescue squadron to locate the plane in the frozen desolate area. The filming was done from the old Truckee airstrip near the current agriculture station on I-80.

Comedy/Adventure:

“True Lies”, 1994, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jamie Lee Curtis. Guns, love, and reunion... the best PG film out there. Need I say more?

OK...I’m a junky for this category but I have to say that I had never heard of the movie **“Diamonds”** (1999) starring Kirk Douglas and Dan Ackroyd. I watched it and it is brilliant. The story is about an elderly man and his son on a road trip to find what he had lost. Kirk Douglas has had to learn to speak in real life and he pulled it off. And the plot will beguile you!

Ski Movies:

There is a huge list of incredible ski movies made from our area. I recommend the book Squallywood by Robb Gaffney for the best and most complete history of skiing fun and the freedom to actually capture the big stuff on small cameras.

“Hot Dog...The Movie”, 1984. Outfits, skinny skis and silly 80’s humor. Classic underdog story goes big. It is Rated R for a reason for its outrageous costumes, hot tubs and bar scenes. It is also stereotypical of Squaw in the 1980s.

“Like There’s No Tomorrow” is the Warren Miller film narrated by Johnny Moseley. This one is just about watching him perform, with no pressure, and do what he does best.

Epilogue

Even though we have been able to get film crews to Truckee, Truckee is still a historic mountain town where our locals enjoy being part of the “extras” when the film crews show up.

So pick a movie, grab some popcorn (or more), relax on the couch and relive some of Truckee’s history!