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MOVIE-MAKING IN MONUMENT VALLEY*

by

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Many people who have never known Monument Valley by name have known that it existed somewhere in our land because they saw its splendid spires and buttes in several of the Hollywood movies that have been made there since the film capital first included it in its location repertory in 1938. The account of how the movie-makers "discovered" Monument Valley and first went there is as colorful as any tale could be.

In that year of 1938, after pulling out of the depression and struggling through the middle thirties, Harry Goulding and his Navajos both were at economic low ebb. The absence of visitors in any number and the low prices paid for Indian products meant that both white man and red man had suffered. It was early in that year that Harry heard, through friends in Hollywood, that a Western movie was about to be made. At that time a Western movie to be made on location, as this one would be, was somewhat of a rarity. And it offered Harry an opportunity he had long been waiting for. His land deserved recognition and could prove a valuable asset to any movie. In the long run it would provide needed money for the Indians and it would also attract more visitors to this land of the monuments. All he needed to do was to convince the

*Reprinted from *Land of Room Enough and Time Enough*. Courtesy Univ. of N. Mex. Press.

movie people of his own certainty that Monument Valley was the ideal place to film a Western production.

Harry reacted in his usual manner. With Mike [Mrs. Goulding] beside him he set off for California with every cent they possessed—sixty dollars, and all the confidence in the world. It was truly a memorable journey. They practiced strict budgeting from the first, eating fewer meals, and carefully watching hotel bills. They arrived in Hollywood, and the first thing they received was free advice. "Turn right around and go back to your valley," another friend told him. "Unless you know someone on the *inside* of one of those studios, you don't stand a chance of even getting in, let alone talking with someone important." A person with less stamina than Harry would have ordered a retreat right then, but Harry had a reason for not giving up. He had Monument Valley, and a great love for his land.

Shrugging off the warning, and warming to the task ahead, Harry left Mike behind while he headed for United Artists studios. He was armed with the only ammunition he had brought along. A large stack of photographs of his beloved valley. Loaded with these pictures and trying to appear confident he sauntered casually into the reception room of one of the studio administration buildings facing the street. Spotting



the receptionist behind a glass window he explained to her just exactly what he had come for. A Western movie was to be filmed, and he knew just the place to film it. She smiled sweetly and asked if he had an appointment.

"No."

Did he know anyone in the studio?

"No."

She shook her head. "Sorry. You have to know someone."

Once again, Harry wouldn't say die. He insisted that he should see someone, and she insisted that he couldn't. But he wore her down. At length she gave in and placed a call. To the man on the other end of the line she offered a hasty summary of what this man from the reservation wanted. Then she listened to stern warnings to get him out of there right away.

The girl hung up the receiver and smiled sadly at Harry, who had overheard all the conversation. He was a bit taken aback, but quickly recovered. "Well," he said, "back on the reservation we always have lots of time, and we're never too busy to see anyone who drops in to talk with us. So, if you don't mind, I'll just make myself at home and wait. I brought along my bed roll just in case."

"You can't stay," she said.

"Don't know why not," he answered, and made himself comfortable in a large arm chair.

With that, the phone was busy again as the receptionist called the same number a second time. She explained once more to the man who answered.

"He can't do that," the voice ordered.

"He can and is." She said this as she eyed Harry, resting comfortably in the plush chair as if he intended to stay awhile.

"Well, I'll show *him* who's boss around here! ..." and the receiver clicked.

Harry heard footsteps coming down the hallway, and wondered for a moment if perhaps he had gone too far. But before all confidence had left him the door into the reception room opened and a short man bristled out. He looked up at Harry and stopped all forward motion. On both sides there was a brief moment of indecision and surprise. In that moment Harry did the wisest thing he could possibly have done. He turned toward the man so that the top picture under his left arm was in plain view. The short man looked down and his eye caught the picture. Quickly Harry turned and displayed the picture on the top of the bundle under the other arm. The man's interest increased. He looked for a moment longer, then smiled in a friendly way.

"What are those pictures of?" he asked.

Harry explained.

"I can spare a few minutes to talk with you about your Monument Valley," the movie-maker said.

The short man proved to be location director for the new Western movie, and that "few minutes" developed into hours. Could a movie be made there in the valley? What kind of facilities were at hand? Was it truly as remarkable and beautiful as the pictures showed it to be? And many other questions. At length the man brought in another man, a director by the name of John Ford, and together they examined the pictures carefully, one after the other, spreading them all over the room, and all the time asking more and more questions. Hours passed.

Then the two men called in Walter Wanger, producing chief at United Artists, to talk with Harry. When Wanger came, there were more questions, more discussions, more examina-

tions of all the pictures. Then, some eight hours after Harry had come into the office, came the big, important question. Could you handle one hundred people in three days to begin shooting of a Western movie?

Harry was taken aback. Three days? Why so soon? The monuments had been there for quite a spell and would certainly stay there longer than another three days. How about a week or two?

But Harry had things to learn about Hollywood. "The first thing you have to learn," said Walter Wanger, "is that when Hollywood wants to do something right now, they *do* it right now. Can you be ready in three days?"

"Well," said Harry, "I suppose so, but it's going to cost a whale of a lot of money."

"Lesson number two," said Wanger. "Money is no object. Can we do it or not?"

"Yes, I guess we probably can."

Then things began to happen. A check was made out and handed to Harry, and he was hustled off to return to his valley to prepare for an invasion. He told Mike the wonderful news, and that very night they headed for Flagstaff.

In Flagstaff they stopped at Babbitt Brothers General Store to order the necessary supplies for the hundred people who soon would be on hand. But once again Harry had underestimated the power of Hollywood. Eleven trucks, being loaded with merchandise, stood parked in front of the store. As Harry stared at them, Ed Babbitt came running excitedly out of the store. Breathlessly, he explained. Harry Goulding was already far behind times. A group of men already had flown in from Hollywood and ordered all the things that were to be needed in the valley. Everything from canned carrots to tar paper was loaded up, waiting only for Harry to make a final check and send it on its way.

Yes, Hollywood, Harry Goulding soon found out, does things in a big way. He examined the eleven truck loads of supplies and found great quantities of all the things they would need, plus many other "luxury" items he would never have thought to include. Another day passed and then the movies began coming to Monument Valley in full force. John Ford, John Wayne, Thomas Mitchell, Claire Trevor, Andy Devine, and almost a hundred others, stars, technicians, and skilled workmen, came in to film their movie against the majestic backdrop of Monument Valley. The resulting picture, released in late 1938 was the Academy Award winner "Stagecoach."

Movie-goers who are familiar with the valley were amused by the fact that the stagecoach was first shown to be going in one direction and then the other. At the beginning of the movie the journey commences in the shadow of the Mittens. Some reels and many adventures later, the trip ends in the very same spot. Perhaps the travellers had round-trip tickets.

In addition to being the culmination of an unforgettable adventure "Stagecoach" achieved the very ends that Harry Goulding had been working for. Thousands of dollars were paid in salaries to the Indians who worked as laborers and movie extras. Everyone, from Hoskinnini Begay to the poorest member of the tribe, had the opportunity to work, and they eagerly seized the chance. The Monument Valley Trading Post was the main target every evening as Navajos lined up to redeem their pawn, and to buy blankets, food, and supplies that they needed for the winter ahead. "Stagecoach" won an



Two "Big Johns" (Ford and Wayne) on location near the mittens.

(Photo courtesy: John Burden, Goulding's Lodge)

Academy Award with the Indians, too. It helped them at a time when they needed help in a big way.

But the help was only temporary, and it wasn't long before Harry was back once again in Hollywood to encourage movie production among the monuments. Friends in strategic places did and still do tip him off when a Western adventure is about to be filmed on location. But, often, Harry waited for no such prodding. In past years he made trips to Hollywood almost yearly just to lure Hollywood into Monument Valley.

In 1940, Harry learned that United Artists was preparing another Western thriller, a picture that would recount the feats of Kit Carson. And this time it was Edward Small who heard from Harry Goulding. But the second attempt was much easier than the first had been. "Oh, yes," said Small when Harry called him, "you're the long-legged trader from the Indian reservation." Harry got in to see Edward Small on that introduction, and he succeeded in getting another movie crew to come into his valley. It was "Kit Carson," starring Jon Hall. In a way it was almost ironic that seventy-seven years after Kit Carson had pursued Hoskinnini and his people into the place of the monuments, descendants of those same Indians were assisting in the filming of a movie lauding the feats of the Indian scout. Time indeed plays strange tricks.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer discovered the valley in 1941, when the location crew of "Billy the Kid" came in and filmed large portions of that picture, for the first time showing Monument Valley in technicolor.

The movies returned in force in 1944, but this time it was only a second company which filmed background shots, then returned to Hollywood to put them behind a production. What came out was "The Harvey Girls," starring Judy Garland. Harry Goulding will never forget that one. In the movie Monument Valley can be seen out of the windows of the train that provides most of the movie's setting. Hollywood magic again! Though Monument Valley is farthest from a railroad of any place in the entire United States, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe was shown to be running directly between the Mittens.

"My Darling Clementine" was the next big production brought into the valley and resulted in the construction of the first permanent set. At a cost of \$250,000 "The town too tough to die," Tombstone, Arizona, was recreated in Monument Valley. It had the same Bird Cage Theatre, the same Mansion House Hotel, and the same bars. But despite the similarity, Tombstone itself could never claim the prime distinguishing feature between the Hollywood imitation and the real thing—the great red monuments of Monument Valley.

When the movie was finished and the last Navajo had received his pay check, the entire movie set was turned over to the tribal council to be rented to other studios that came into the valley or disposed of in a manner the Indians saw fit. For five years it rested quietly in the sun, disconcerting to visitors who were discovering Monument Valley for the first time. Blinking in amazement they would hurriedly survey their road

maps to find the name of this tiny village huddled in the middle of the majestic loneliness. In 1951, the make-believe Tombstone was sold for salvage, dismantled, and carted away, removing an unsightly and unnatural blemish from the sun-caressed valley of the monuments.

John Ford returned to the valley for a third time, in 1947, to film the exterior shots of "Fort Apache." The fort itself was built in Hollywood and all connected shots were filmed against prop backgrounds which resulted in some incongruities when the movie was tied together with the real scenery.

In 1948, came "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon," a movie that sang the praises of the United States Cavalry, in technicolor. More of the haunting magnificence of the valley was recorded than had ever before been put on film. The red rocks, white clouds, and royal blue skies performed admirably before the cameras. One hundred stars and technicians were housed at the Goulding post for that movie. A supplementary camp was set up nearby to house an additional five hundred people. Rather than build complete new sets it was decided that the actual buildings of Harry's lodge and trading post would be used. Certain additions and improvements were made; and before the first camera started turning, the Monument Valley Trading Post and Lodge had been turned into a cavalry post of the late 1860s.

Again it was only exterior shots that were filmed in the valley, but by far the greatest portion of the picture takes place out-of-doors. The few interior shots were spliced in after

the company returned to Hollywood. And no wonder that they were filmed in Hollywood. The inside of the movie's trading post and tavern was Harry Goulding's dining room. The cavalry company headquarters was actually filled with flour, salt, and canned goods, for it was the real trading post. And John Wayne's personal billet, from which, according to the movie, he came proudly charging every morning, was really the potato cellar.

River scenes were shot just east of Bluff, on the San Juan, but one of the most remarkable shots concerns the buffalo shown in the film. Actually, the buffalo were a part of the largest remaining herd in the United States, located far to the west of Monument Valley in Houserock Valley. But—and it's a pleasure to hear Harry Goulding tell this—he sat there on the porch of his lodge and watched a group of cavalymen ride to the top of a tiny knoll and point to the west—at nothing. "Sure enough," says Harry, "When the movie came out, there was Johnnie Agar pointing at the buffalo way over in Houserock Valley, and they saw them!" Once again, recurring Hollywood magic.

Harry told me of a few of the many wild stagecoach rides and horseback rides he has seen take place across the rough land out in front of his trading post. Only Hollywood would do it, he said. No one else would be crazy enough.

Numerous other film companies have made the trek into



Goulding's Trading Post.

H. L. James

Monument Valley, more recently to film such notables as "The Searchers," "Cheyenne Autumn," "How the West Was Won" and Disney's "The Living Desert." In fact, almost every major studio has been there at least once. But, except for the ones mentioned above, these others all have been second units which filmed only a few background shots and took them back to Hollywood. Even the movie capital cannot match the wondrous beauty of the monuments. The favorite season is September, October, and November, when photography is at its best.

But our fast-moving civilization has temporarily demanded too much of the valley. In order that Hollywood may enjoy the speed it has become used to, it has taken up the practice of flying stars, technicians, and portions of the necessary equipment in by air to the location where the movie will be filmed. Heavy equipment still must come by road, but a sizeable portion can be flown in. And that means a large airstrip is needed close to the point of production, one that is larger than the one available at the present time in Monument Valley. And true to style, Harry is working toward this end.

First, he approached the governor of Utah and asked for an appropriation so that a larger airstrip could be financed. Next, though the land was in the state of Utah, it was also a part of the Indian lands, and to obtain it Harry would have to trade a small piece of his land for another piece for the airstrip. No such thing had ever been done before and it required a special act of Congress to make it legal. But Harry won out, and now he has that exchange of land. Even so, developments went backward as well as forward. While trying to secure the land exchange, a new Utah governor entered the statehouse and all fund appropriations were revoked.

Before leaving the subject of movies in Monument Valley there is a most unusual sidelight that has proved to be very interesting over a period of years and has assumed somewhat the status of a legend among the movie people. When John Ford first came into the valley with his "Stagecoach" company, he was doubtful as to the reliability of the weather, something very vital in film production. That doubt paved the way for his introduction to Hosteen Tso—Mister Big, or Fatso, as he became generally known.

Hosteen Tso is a Navajo medicine man of great renown among his people, and also somewhat of a joker, as Harry Goulding has found out through experience. Recently Fatso was low on necessary cash, and looked around for something to pawn. He owned a large four-wheeled wagon, and settled on that as a likely choice. Shortly after pawning it at one post and spending the pawn money, he returned there with a sad tale of his plight. Seems the family had no wood, and he had no way of getting any more for them since his wagon was in hock. The trader, sympathizing to an extent he later discovered was too great, lent the wagon to the big man for just long enough to get the necessary wood.

With the wagon once more in his possession, Fatso promptly went to another trading post and pawned it again, later returning with the same story he had used before. It succeeded just as well the second time, and it was not until he had successfully pawned the wagon three times that the traders became wise and closed in on him. When caught with the wagon, he blithely confessed his trick and smiled with a sense of supreme achievement.

But Fatso's prowess as a medicine man was even greater

than his abilities as a pawning artist. And, with him in mind, Harry promised John Ford fabulous things about the weather in the never-never land of the monuments.

"Just have your weather orders in by four o'clock a day in advance and I'll have Old Fatso fix you up," Harry facetiously told the movie director. And that's just how it happened. If a clear blue sky was wanted, with perhaps just a few snowball clouds in it, Fatso would see to it that that was exactly what they received. But then, that was easy. How about something complicated? How about a thunderstorm, or a dust storm? Those should have been a lot harder—but Fatso brought them around too.

One day, during the filming of "Stagecoach," Ford remarked that he had a bit of an unusual order for the following day. He wanted clear blue skies for a few shots in the morning, and a dust storm in the afternoon. Harry didn't say anything. He just passed the word on to Hosteen Tso. The following day dawned bright and clear, with just the right amount of thin, wispy clouds. Shooting went ahead on schedule, but dragged out a bit along toward noon. "Better hurry up," Harry advised Ford. "Don't forget you have a dust storm coming up for this afternoon." Ford looked at him doubtfully. A dust storm? It never looked any less like a dust storm. But, already respecting the combination of Harry and Fatso, he hastened completion of the morning's shooting.

And, sure enough, right on schedule, the dust storm arrived. It materialized from out of nowhere quite suddenly. Luckily, cameras were set for action and all the props were on hand. The takes were completed as rapidly as possible, and just in time. The dusty prelude was followed by a full-fledged storm that stopped everything with its swirling sand and heavy winds. Hosteen Tso retained a firm grip on the elements.

Right then, John Ford stopped laughing at Fatso and gave him an honored place on his list of essential personnel. Now, whenever Ford goes out on location to the valley of the monuments or a nearby area, such as during the filming of "Wagonmaster" and "Rio Grande" at close-by Moab, Utah, Fatso is the person placed at the very top of the payroll roster. Maybe it's being superstitious, but why take chances?

Remember the thunderstorm in "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon"? That, too, was a special order. Thunderstorms are fairly rare and are unusually evasive when there is particular need for one. But there was a command performance in "Yellow Ribbon." Three hundred people watched in the shadow of the South Mitten as Hosteen Tso called on his rain gods to send forth a storm. And three hundred people got wet when it came.

John Ford was awed by Monument Valley, and he was awed by the performances given by old Hosteen Tso. In the guest book at the Monument Valley Trading Post after the filming of "Fort Apache" he wrote, "Again I am sorry to say 'Adios' to you and your hospitality. My thanks also to old Fatso who gave us such wonderful weather."

It all sounds strange in our day. "Impossible," you might say. Navajo medicine contains many of the dark and mystic elements our world knew many centuries ago. As such it is unfathomable to our educated minds. Occasionally it actually seems to work. But inconsistency seems its biggest pitfall. Would that Hosteen Tso could eliminate the great water needs of his people so easily as he can satisfy the needs of Mr. Ford.