



Cowboys, Wagons and Blazing Saddles... Must be the new Rough Guide to Westerns

“From the saloon to the cattle trail, gunslinging outlaws to the ferocious Indians - Westerns move us in mysterious ways”, says Paul Simpson, author of the new **Rough Guide to Westerns**. “When trying to define their appeal, I always end up quoting Robert Redford in *Havana* who says ‘I like Westerns. I don’t know what they have to do with anything but I like them.’”

Simpson begins by telling us to forget geographical implications. “Westerns, although usually set in the West, can occur anywhere there are frontiers to be tamed, pioneers to be celebrated and dangers to be faced, from Monument Valley and Kentucky to the Australian outback, the hills of Yugoslavia to the steppes of Central Asia.”

But there is a “Western” stereotype. “The classic Western took the messy, awkward, violent history of the American West and turned it into a glorious shiny nation-unifying myth,” says Simpson. “It’s easy to see why Westerns appealed to Americans - the genre created a powerful fantasy of a simple world where the individual can make a difference.”

How does the book work?

The new guide explores how the myth of the West was shaped by entertainers such as Buffalo Bill and James Fenimore Cooper, and other real-life figures like Wyatt Earp and Billy The Kid. The ultimate companion to a genre that has, since the birth of cinema, fed our fascination with the Wild West, the Rough Guide takes us through the history of Westerns and how they have evolved over the decades, from the silent era to 1950s box-office domination through to the present day, with profiles of the legendary actors, directors, and 50 essential must-sees.

Who is the Rough Guide for?

It’s for anyone who’s forgotten which is their favourite Western and wants to enjoy the old classics again. The new guide is full of loners, saloons, heroes and villains. Discover the ones you haven’t seen and rediscover the movies you love.

The Top Ten

At the top of the Rough Guide list, *Shane (1953)* “satisfies on an instinctively raw level with thrilling contrasts and characterisation,” says Simpson. It beats *Once Upon A Time In The West (1968)* and *The Searchers (1956)* as the Rough Guide number one.

1. *Shane (1953)*
2. *Once Upon A Time In The West (1968)*
3. *The Searchers (1956)*
4. *Pat Garrett And Billy The Kid (1973)*
5. *Johnny Guitar (1954)*
6. *Warlock (1959)*
7. *The Outlaw Josey Wales (1976)*
8. *Red River (1949)*
9. *Bad Day At Black Rock (1954)*
10. *The Tall T (1957)*

Most Overrated Western

Rio Bravo (1959)

In *Rio Bravo*, Howard Hawks made a Western in which John Wayne, Dean Martin and Ricky Nelson are obliged to do a difficult job, taking on an army of gunmen intent on springing their murderous pal from jail. A formula repeated again and again, by Hawks himself, Simpson argues that even though many claim it the classic Hawksian Western ‘the film seems too slack, too hackneyed, too monotonous and the story too slight to justify anyone’s time.’”

Most Underrated Western

Pursued (1947)

“This Hollywood Western was so neglected that Martin Scorsese had to help pay for the print to be restored” says Simpson. The film’s star, Robert Mitchum, plays a laconic hero who spends his entire life being victimised by everyone around him. Simpson argues: “Mitchum gives a superbly intense performance of world-weary reserve and sad-eyed nonchalance, helping to make the movie a lost treasure of American Cinema.”

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Rough Guide to Westerns adds to an impressive array of Film and TV titles from Rough Guides. Already published: British Cult Comedy, American Independent Film, Kids’ Movies, Cult Movies and film genre guides covering; Chick Flicks, Horror, Gangster, and Sci-Fi Movies. Forthcoming: Film Musicals and Film Noir. Rough Guides published the Rough Guide to Greece in 1982 and now publish over 300 travel titles and 60 reference books on subjects ranging from Classical Music to Climate Change and from iPods to MySpace.

The Rough Guide to Westerns

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