



## THE MUSEUM OF WESTERN FILM HISTORY

### High Sierra



**High Sierra** is a 1941 early heist film and film noir\* written by W.R. Burnett and John Huston from the novel by Burnett. The movie features Ida Lupino and Humphrey Bogart and was directed by Raoul Walsh on location at Whitney Portal, halfway up Mount Whitney.

Widely acknowledged as one of the gangster pictures that paved the way for the style and moral complexities of film noir, High

Sierra (1941) is the story of gangster "Mad Dog," Roy Earle, being early paroled, by a Governor's pardon, to lead a crucial heist.

Saddled with inexperienced accomplices (played by character actors Alan Curtis and Arthur Kennedy), and a dime-a-dance girl who falls for him (Ida Lupino, who would later become a noted director), Earle awaits instructions at a mountain cabin, planning to go straight after this last robbery. During a trip to the mountains, he befriends the family of a lame girl (Joan Leslie) and pays for her operation, orbiting the "pure" life he desires.

Earle was modeled on John Dillinger, but the Hollywood Production Code strictly prohibited glamorizing the thirties gangster legend. John Huston's script, based on W.R. Burnett's novel, was returned to Warners by the censors with over forty objectionable references. They were largely ignored by Jack Warner, who wanted to protect the "spirit" of the story. However, the Code was firm on the ending. Gangsters, no matter how sympathetic they might appear at times, had to pay for moral transgressions on the screen. In other words, death or life in prison was their only option.

**High Sierra** is also noted for its extensive location shooting, especially in the climactic final scenes, as the authorities pursue Bogart's character, gangster "Mad Dog" Roy Earle, from Lone Pine up to the foot of the mountain.

The film is also notable as the breakthrough in Bogart's career, transforming him from supporting player to leading man, and his success in High Sierra would lead to his being cast in many of his famous roles.

In a manner of speaking, Humphrey Bogart had George Raft to thank for his ascendancy to stardom. High Sierra was one of three films that George Raft turned down and were given to Humphrey Bogart that established him as a leading man. The other two were *The Maltese Falcon* and *Casablanca*. Raft must have had some agent back in the day!

The movie and many key shots of the movie were filmed on location in the Sierra Nevada. In a climactic scene, Bogart's character slid 90 feet (27 m) down a mountainside to his just reward. His stunt double, Buster Wiles, bounced a few times going down the mountain and wanted another take to do better. "Forget it," said Raoul Walsh.



Roy Earle's dog, "Pard," was erroneously believed by some to be canine actor "Terry" ("Toto" from *The Wizard of Oz*). In fact, it was Bogart's own dog, Zero. In the final scene, Buster Wiles, a stunt performer, plays Roy's corpse. His hand is filled with biscuits to encourage Pard to lick Roy's hand.

The film was remade twice: As the 1949 western *Colorado Territory* starring Joel McCrea and Virginia Mayo, also directed by Raoul Walsh and in 1955 ***as I Died a Thousand Times*** starring Jack Palance and Shelley Winters, and directed by Stuart Heisler. The remake was also filmed in Lone Pine.



The Museum is fortunate to exhibit the 1937 Plymouth that Bogart drove, in a police chase scene, down Whitney Portal Road. The car was donated from the collection of Beverly and Jim Rogers.

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Film Noir: A movie about crime that uses dark shadows and lighting to show the complicated moral nature of the subject.