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New 'Indiana Jones' film gives Fresno a few minutes of fame

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Fresno's Chandler Field was transformed into a small Mexican airport for the filming of 'Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull' in this photo from October 2007. But a planned scene was never shot and the only footage filmed at Chandler was a scene inside a vintage airplane.
Fresno Bee Staff Photo

**By RICK BENTLEY
THE FRESNO BEE**

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FRESNO -- Cast and crew of "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" spent one day filming in Fresno County in October. Scenes were shot at Eagle Field in Firebaugh and Chandler Field in Fresno.

If you blink while watching the new Indy movie, you might miss the sequences.

Eagle Field was made to look like a small Mexican airport in the late '50s. A two-second scene shows a vintage plane taxi by to reveal Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) and his new sidekick, Mutt Williams (Shia LaBeouf), standing outside a dusty terminal.

Chandler Field doesn't even get that much screen time. The airport's old water tower was painted to read "Brandford, Conn.," but a planned scene was never shot. The only footage filmed at Chandler was a scene inside an airplane. Jones naps while Williams tinkers with his motorcycle.

Ray Arthur, Fresno's film and entertainment commissioner, explains that having a movie shot there is more about financial gain than hosting a piece of the glamour of Hollywood.

"We all get excited about the sizzle of the movie stars being in town," Arthur said. "But the film commission is in the economic development department for a purpose. It is about the business of filming. They were here for five days of setup, one of filming and two days of (dismantling) the set. The lack of on-screen exposure is not as much fun, but still generated \$250,000 to \$300,000 for the local economy."

Fresno County film commissioner Gigi Gibbs says there would have been a lot more filming here under the original movie shoot plans.

"They first came here to scout for a place to shoot the big sequence in the warehouse being shown in all the trailers," she said. "They liked Eagle Field. But when they saw the script and realized they needed to be able to turn a semi-trailer inside, they decided to build the set."

Even being a small part of the movie has its benefits. The local film commissions get a thank-you in the movie's closing credits.

A Fandango poll shows that "Crystal Skull" leads the list of this summer's most anticipated movies.

And all of those fans will at least get a quick glimpse of Fresno County.

The scenes shot here were the last day of filming on the movie. Eagle Field hosted a wrap party for the cast and crew. At Eagle Field's annual 1940s-era fly-in and dinner dance in June, "Crystal Skull" plot plans, stencils and conceptual drawings will be on display.

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