



# THE MUSEUM OF WESTERN FILM HISTORY

## THE ALABAMA HILLS: HISTORY AND CULTURAL IMPORTANCE CSS ALABAMA & USS KEARSARGE

People often question why the Alabama Hills are named after a southern state when the two look almost nothing alike. The Alabama Hills west of Lone Pine and the state of Alabama do have a connection, but a somewhat indirect one.



The story goes back to the Civil War when the Confederacy had a screw-sloop-of-war built in secret in 1862 at Birkenhead, United Kingdom by John Laird Sons and Company. After commissioning in international waters the [CSS Alabama](#) went on a two-year rampage of naval encounters, eventually sinking at least 65 Union ships. The ship under the command of Captain Semmes sailed to Cape Town, South Africa, and on to the East Indies. The ship sailed back to Cherbourg, France, and the captain requested dry dock to make repairs.

By this time the ship had become rather famous, and Southern sympathizers mining in the Alabama Hills named their mine, and eventually the mining district west of Lone Pine, the Alabama Mining District. The *CSS Alabama* had become almost legendary as Union ships seldom encountered the ship at sea and survived to talk about it.

The [USS Kearsarge](#) under the command of Captain Winslow made for the port of Cherbourg and with the help of another Union ship had the *Alabama* boxed in. What ensued was the most famous of the Civil War naval battles. Captain Semmes chose to fight rather than to rot away in dry dock and through diplomatic channels relayed his challenge to Captain Winslow.

After three days, the *Alabama* sailed out to challenge the *Kearsarge* and was reduced to a sinking wreck. Captain Semmes had not known that the *Kearsarge* had been armor clad in the Azores a year before pursuing the *Alabama* and he later said he would not have challenged the Union ship if he had known this. The *Kearsarge* rescued a majority of the survivors but 41, including Captain Semmes, were rescued by the British ship the *Deerhound* and taken to England.



Northern sympathizers in the Lone Pine area had their turn at naming things to celebrate the victory of the *USS Kearsarge*: [Kearsarge Peak](#), north of Lone Pine; the Kearsarge Pass; and the next mining district north of the Alabama Mining District, is called the Kearsarge Mining District. Finally, the town of Kearsarge was located on the Carson and Colorado Narrow Gauge RR line just east of the town of Independence. By driving out Mazourka Canyon Road you can find the site to this day, now marked by a historic plaque and some ruins.

In November of 1984 the *Alabama* wreck was discovered and in 2002 a diving team recovered her bell and other items from the ship. While most of these historic battles did not happen in the Alabama Hills, a famous battle of the Owens Valley Indian Wars of 1861 to 1864 did. The battle of the Alabama Hills was one of the most famous of the skirmishes, battles and massacres of this war.