

The Christmas Train at Dry Gulch, U.S.A. is very special

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by [Randy Bright](#)



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This was my first time back to Dry Gulch, U.S.A., in about twenty years. My, have things changed.

The last time I was there was when my church took a group of children for a day trip to see the western-theme camp that Willie George's Church on the Move had constructed. At the time, there were only a few buildings on each side of a gravel street, built as a movie set for children's Old West motion pictures.

Now there are over thirty buildings making up what looks to be an authentic, architecturally accurate 1800s era town and three steam locomotive trains that drive on a 7,500 foot-long track that surrounds the town.

The Christmas Train has become a very popular event each year since its beginnings in 1996. More than 50,000 tickets were sold this year. Over the past few years, the tickets sold out quickly, in just a few days. But this year, all 50,000 of the \$10 tickets were sold in just 90 minutes.

The price is a bargain for the four hours you have to spend at Dry Gulch. In fact, there are enough things to do and see that we were not able to see all of them in one evening.

About three hundred very pleasant and friendly volunteers work each evening, dressed in authentic costumes reminiscent of a Currier and Ives era.

Of course, the main attractions are the steam locomotives, but there are also wagons rides, stagecoach rides, a carousel, bumper cars, go karts, pony rides, a rope course and a playground. Some of the activities cost extra, but the train rides are free with the cost of admission. There are also several restaurants, a number of gift shops, a bakery and a coffee shop.

The Christmas Train ride lasts about twelve minutes, and while the lines were long, it took less than a half hour to get aboard.

As you travel on the train, a recorded message and exhibits – mostly billboard size graphics, but also some live presentations – tells the story of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus. And while the train ride is enjoyable as it is, it is purposeful and done well.

Dry Gulch, U.S.A. was founded by Church on the Move in 1986. It imitates the look of frontier town movie sets that had been seen in Hollywood, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico, and it is located about 10 miles northeast of Pryor, Oklahoma, which is about a one-hour drive from Tulsa.

It was originally founded to serve as a children's summer camp, as well as for a movie set for Willie George's western movies. It still serves as a summer camp and retreat center today, hosting over 4,500 campers each year. Their facilities are part of a 275-acre site that adjoins Lake Hudson, and it can bunk about 700 people at one time.

As most Christian venues do, Dry Gulch has received some bad publicity. After purchasing our tickets, I read a blog on the Internet in which someone claimed that people were heavily proselytized, and another person said that he had been told that after the train ride people were herded into a room for a mandatory message of the Gospel. Neither claim was true, nor did I see any evidence of anything even remotely resembling what I had heard. I found our stay at Dry Gulch to be very enjoyable, and it would have been the same for Christians and non-Christians alike.

I am sure that Church on the Move gets its share of criticism for spending so much money to build Dry Gulch and for making money on admissions and sales. *The Story of Jesus Passion Play* in Florida that I have been involved with for several years now receives similar criticisms each year.

What detractors don't see is that much of the cost of these kinds of venues is carried by hundreds of volunteers and the churches that sponsor them. There is very little profit made, and what profit is made is usually reinvested to make the venue even better and more meaningful. And if one were to comparison shop the price of admission with other for-profit venues, it would be immediately obvious what a bargain the price of admission to a Dry Gulch or *Story of Jesus* really is.

The greater good that comes from these are that they serve a purpose in keeping the message of Jesus Christ alive in a country that is drifting away from him. We need ways to keep the public aware of the church, and to show that Christian entertainment can be done with an excellence that anyone of any faith (or even no faith) can enjoy.

As for Willie George, the Church on the Move, and the hundreds (if not thousands) of volunteers who have made Dry Gulch and the Christmas Train possible, my word to you is well done. Keep up the good work and I will be back next year.

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