



### ***Mono County's Hidden Lakes***

BRIDGEPORT, Calif. – If you've had too much of Paris and Nicky, yet are open to a different Hilton experience, head to the Hilton Lakes in Mono County, California. Unlike their pop-culture counterparts, these beauties are seen by few people and are at their best in the morning. That's when soft pastel light reflects surrounding alpine peaks upon their glassine surfaces. As, the Hilton Lakes are among the hidden lakes of Mono County.

"Hidden lakes?" you ask. Yes, unlike Mono County's better known Crowley, Mono and Topaz Lakes, which are easily seen from U.S. 395, numerous other lakes lie – unbeknownst to motorists – just beyond the highway.

Mono County's hidden lakes have provided the archetypal images that movie goers identify with the American West. Their placid, sky-blue waters reflecting sawtooth peaks have appeared as backdrops in such classic Westerns as John Wayne's *True Grit* and Clint Eastwood's *High Plains Drifter*.

"One reason so many of our lakes have appeared in movies is that you  
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can drive right up to many of them , and , from U.S. 395 , you only have to travel a short distance to find them.” says Mono County Economic Development Director Dan Lyster.

Not far from the high plains ranch town of Bridgeport, paved roads lead through blind canyons to the shores of such hidden waters as the Twin Lakes (two legendary fishing waters surrounded by cabins and traditional resorts), the eight pristine Virginia Lakes (dominated by 12,374 foot Dunderberg Peak) and Lundy Lake (at the southern edge of the Hoover Wilderness). Approaching Yosemite National Park from Lee Vining, the Tioga Road (SR 120) passes Ellery and Tioga lakes on its winding ascent. Along the June Lake Loop (SR 158), a necklace of sub-alpine lakes (Grant, Silver, Gull and June) is strung through the town of June Lakes. And, further south, Mammoth Lakes gets its name for several forested basins that are scattered across the town’s southwest hills.

However, Mono County’s most legendary tarn is Convict Lake where, in 1871, escaped prisoners from the Nevada State Penitentiary were cornered, resulting in shoot outs that killed local sheriff Robert Morrison and his Deputy guide, Mono Jim. Today, their story is retold on guided horseback rides along the shore of Convict Lake as riders pass new escapees who have fled city life to cast flies from float tubes.

Wranglers also lead riders to Mono County’s hidden lakes on day rides and multi-day pack trips. A popular day ride from the Leavitt Meadows Pack Station off the eastern side of Sonora Pass (SR 108) visits Secret

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Lake, described by artist Logan Franklin in his weblog as “clear and cold,” reflecting “the surrounding mountains like a mirror.” Franklin wrote that he and his dog, Steve, had the mountains to themselves with “no campers, hunters or fishermen. It was great.”

It's experiences like Franklin's that motivates hikers and backpackers to trek miles into the backcountry for solace and the picturesque settings of lush, creek-fed meadows like those on the long trail to McGee Lake, west of Crowley Lake. There – typical of Mono County's hidden lakes – a ridge of snow-flecked sawtooth peaks is reflected in McGee Lake's azure waters, causing one to pause and consider not hiking farther.

Though, on further consideration, why stop after visiting just one of these hidden lakes? After all, there's Saddlebag, Duck, Fremont, Stella, Roosevelt, Dorothy and hundreds of others, including a few Hiltons, that the paparazzi haven't yet discovered hiding in Mono County.

*For more information on exploring Mono County's hidden lakes, visit [www.monocounty.org](http://www.monocounty.org) or call the Mono County Tourism/Film Commission, toll free, at (800) 845-7922.*

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Contact:

Jeff Irons, Mono County Film/Tourism Commission, (760) 924-1812  
Prepared by: John Poimiroo, Poimiroo & Partners, (916) 933-8860

*Note to Editors: high resolution digital scans are available by calling John Poimiroo*