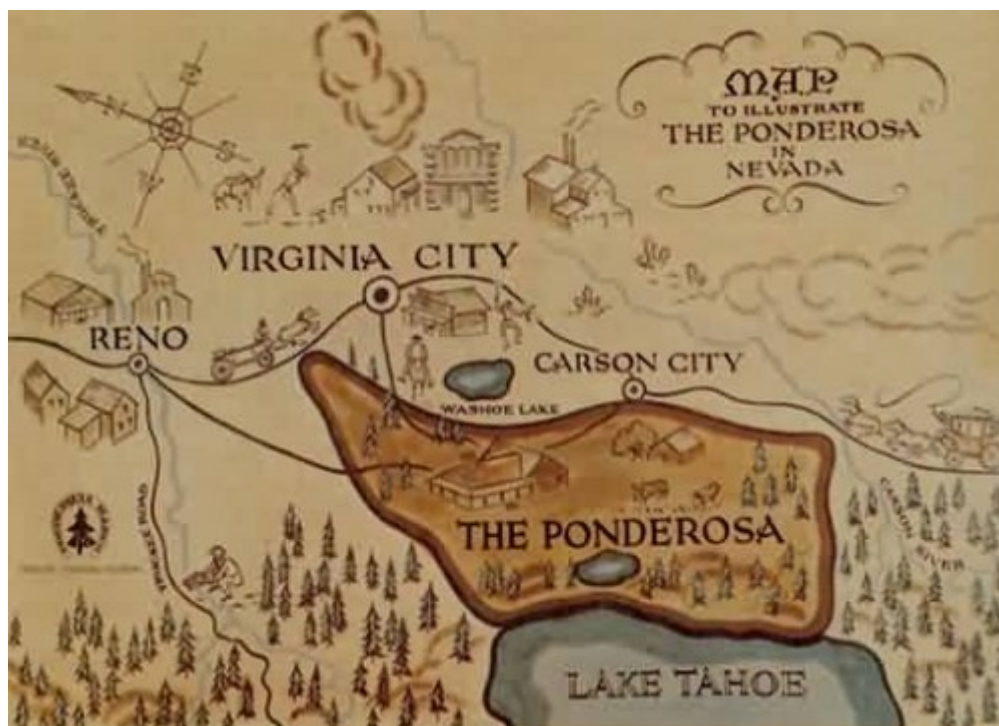


# Pondering on the Ponderosa



The opening of Bonanza, which premiered in 1959 and ran for 14 seasons, was one of the most iconic images on TV. So much so that when we were filming our western ([The DVA Kid](#)) last year in Tucson, I had wanted to imitate the effect.

If you recall, the screen filled with a old-timey map of the Ponderosa which then burst into a ring of fire, revealing the main cast riding towards the camera. After spending much of the night unsuccessfully trying to replicate the effect digitally, I finally decided to do a little research on how they actually accomplished the feat way back in the late 1950s. Turns out the answer was both simple and obvious. They just lit their map on fire and let a hole burn in it while the cameras were rolling. Wish I had thought of that.

Here are some other factoids about my favorite TV western:

- Producer David Dortort originally imagined Bonanza as an Old West reinvention of the King Arthur legend... with Ben Cartwright as Arthur and his sons as the knights of his

round table.

- Bonanza was the first series to have all its episodes broadcast in living color and as such carried the biggest price tag of any other show of its time.
- Lorne Greene (Ben Cartwright) must have loved the set. He built a replica of the Ponderosa home on a half-acre of land in Mesa, AZ. It went on the market in 2016 valued at \$849,000.
- During the first season, the actors brought on to play guest roles on the show were paid more than the regular cast members. The producers didn't think Green, Roberts, Blocker, and Landon were well known enough to draw in an audience on their own.
- The show was almost cancelled early in its first season but as it was one of the few shows being broadcast in color and NBC was owned by RCA which was selling color tv sets to consumers, the decision was made to keep it on the air in the hopes it would spark sales. A move from Saturday night to Sunday night catapulted the show to #1 status.
- The Ponderosa/Bonanza Steakhouses were inspired by the show and started by Dan Blocker who played Hoss.
- The main characters wore the same outfits from episode to episode. This was a deliberate choice by producers so it would be easier to reuse stock footage when necessary, thereby lowering production costs.

In case you've forgotten, here are the opening titles and theme song to Bonanza:

And if you've missed it in the past, here's the western we put together last summer with our opening credits:

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