

## IN ENGLISH

CINEMA

# Come to Burgos, Mr Eastwood

Spanish fans of 'The Good, The Bad and The Ugly' are racing to restore iconic cemetery  
The movie's 50th anniversary celebrations, due to be held next year, are approaching

SUSANA URRRA | Santo Domingo de Silos | 25 NOV 2015 - 14:34 CET



The two graves that feature in the last scene are already in place. / S.U.

On a recent October weekend, two people stood inside a stone circle in the middle of a green valley and reflected on the daunting task up ahead.

All around them were mounds of earth and weeds, and beyond the stony arena itself, rows of bushes where 5,000 graves should be.

“We’re trying to get as much done before the cold weather sets in,” says Joaquín González, a volunteer from Valladolid who came to do his part. “I bought myself a hoe just for this. I’m such a geek, even I scare myself sometimes.”



Volunteers inspect the work done to date at Sad Hill. / S.U.

This ruggedly beautiful spot in Arlanza Valley, in Spain’s northern Burgos province, is the site of one of the most famous scenes in film history: the cemetery shootout between Clint Eastwood, Eli Wallach and Lee Van Cleef in Sergio Leone’s classic spaghetti western *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*.

Next year marks the 50th anniversary of the making of a movie that regularly ranks among lists of the greatest films of all time. The cemetery scene has often been studied for its innovative camera motion and dramatic tension.

Yet the spot where it was shot has since fallen into disrepair, just like other nearby locations used for different scenes in the movie.

### If you build it, he will come

Since early October, Spanish fans of the western have been trekking to this remote location from far and wide to help restore it in time for the anniversary celebrations next year.

Powered by part-time volunteers who use social media to organize weekend cleanups, the project is an initiative of the Sad Hill Cultural Association, named after the fictitious cemetery – which was built by several hundred Spanish soldiers specifically for the film.

After fixing the cemetery, the association hopes that the movie’s various filming locations in Burgos province will become a tourist attraction in their own right.



The cemetery as it looked during the filming of the movie.

But before that, they are working on getting someone else to come to Burgos.

“We’re aiming high: we want Eastwood to come here, but we need to find a way to press his buttons,” explains David Alba, a spokesman for the Sad Hill Cultural Association. “For now we’ve sent him a letter with an honorary membership card, and we’re working on sending him all the information on our plans for the celebration.”

The association has also teamed up with the Clint Eastwood Fan Club in Spain to get fans to send in 30-second videos asking the actor to come to Burgos. The videos are posted online and “the idea is to create a chain that will reach Clint,” says Alba. The group also came up with a crowdfunding initiative called “Apadrina una tumba” (Sponsor-a-Grave) that gets people to donate €15 for their name to go on one of the crosses at Sad Hill.

## The Metallica connection

Admittedly, the chances are slim of getting the 85-year-old Hollywood star to travel all the way to this spot, accessible via a dirt track from the nearby village of Santo Domingo de Silos (which has its own claim to fame after local monks recorded an album of Gregorian chant that topped world charts in 1994.)

But if Eastwood won’t come, there’s always Metallica.



Aerial view of the site, which still bears marks of its former Roman theater shape.

“It’s obvious that Metallica are fans of the movie,” explains Alba. “Since 1983 they’ve been opening all their concerts with the film soundtrack and images from the Sad Hill scene, so it’s not unthinkable that some of the band members might want to drop by to become personally acquainted with the place where it was shot,” he adds. “Through Spain’s official fan page we’re working to get the information through to the band itself.”

Celebrities or no celebrities, the anniversary will be observed here next year with cultural events, a film screening and a festival. And in the process, volunteers have been learning more about the film they love.

Through his volunteer work, Joaquín González once met a man from the nearby village of Salas de los Infantes who participated in the original filming. “This man told me several anecdotes, like the time an Italian film crew member asked for a local painter and was sent a man who’d lost an arm in the Spanish Civil War. This man was eventually hired as a painter and also as an extra who played an injured soldier in the mission scene.”

González, who describes himself as “an unconditional fan” of Leone’s spaghetti western, is hopeful that Eastwood will somehow acknowledge their work.

“If he sent a message, even if it were just to say that he’s not coming, we’d frame it and hang it in our homes!”