

ISABELLA LAKE

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Ancestral Territory (pre-1850s)



Kernville



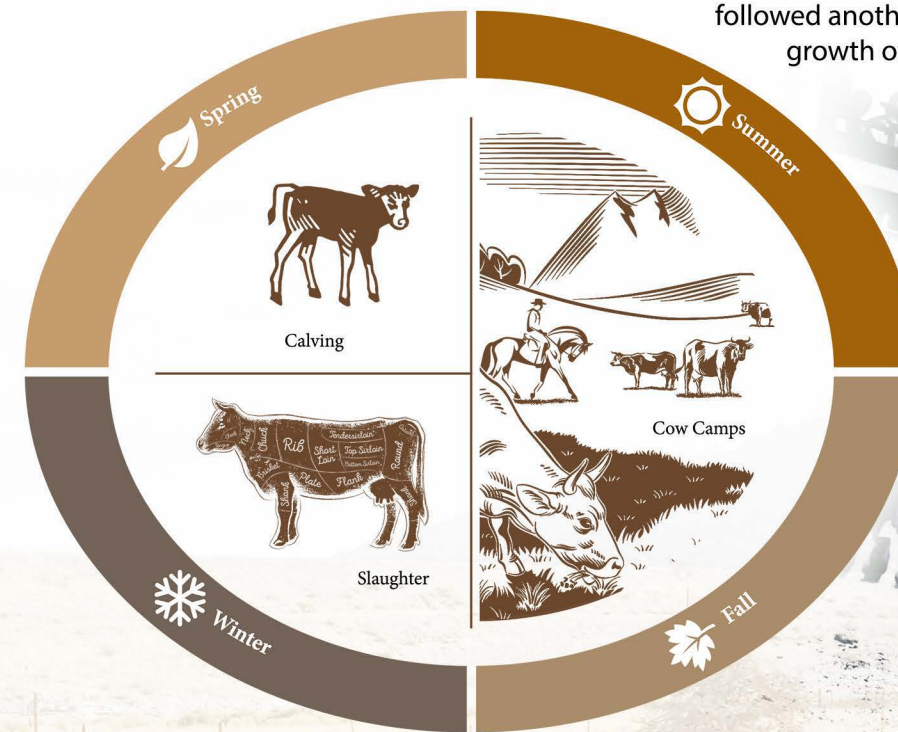
Cheh Weh (Esteban Miranda) and Marie Soustenant Carro, holding baby Teresa, 1916. Credit: Thomas T. Waterman, U.C. Berkeley.

The town of Lake Isabella, California, is located at the confluence of the north and south forks of the Kern River in the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains. Known as the “Kern Valley” or “Hot Springs Valley,” the area is named for the Kern River and naturally occurring hot springs

The town reflects a multilayered history of the American West. The Tübatulabal and Kawaiisu people were the first stewards of the region, building complex societies and a sophisticated trade network based on the seasonal cycles of their traditional lands.

Ranching and Agriculture (1870s, 1900s)

The rich soils and rangeland ushered in an era of ranching that followed another seasonal cycle revolving around rain, growth of forage and cattle.



Seasons on the Ranch



Rodeo champion Burel Mulkey on a bronco. Credit: Myrna Sweeney.

Non-Native Settlement and Mining (1850s)

Precious metals in the West drew attention and contact to the new territory of California during the 1850s, when Isabella was established on the coattails of the Kernville mining boom.

Most Common Occupations



50% Miner



11% Keeping House



6% Cook

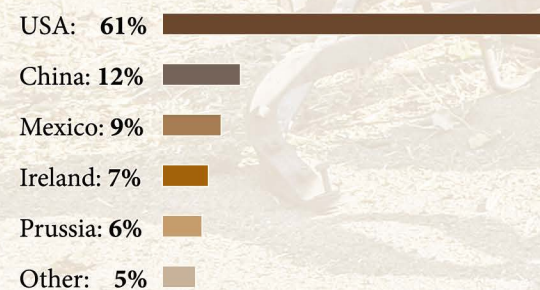


5% Teamster



4% Farmer

Nationality



Gender



Kernville in 1870. Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Isabella Dam (1953-Present)

In 1953 Isabella Dam was added to the landscape and brought protection from flooding, but also huge shifts in local lifeways as local communities were remade.

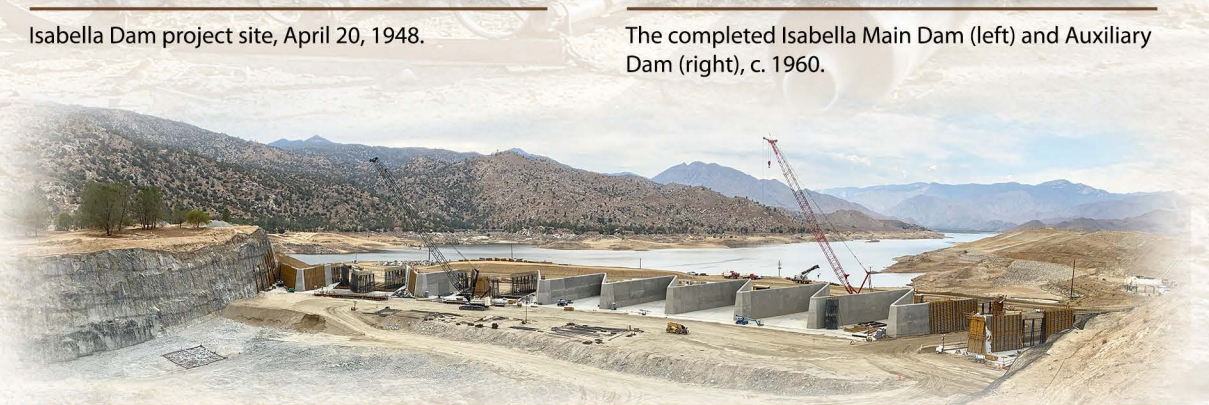


Isabella Dam project site, April 20, 1948.



The completed Isabella Main Dam (left) and Auxiliary Dam (right), c. 1960.

Today, the natural beauty of the Kern Valley, coupled with outdoor recreation, has created another seasonal cycle in the form of a summer tourist economy.



New construction work on the Isabella Dam Safety Modification Project, Aug. 12, 2021. The project will reduce the risk of catastrophic floods resulting from dam breach for downstream communities. Credit: John Prettyman

Infographic: design by John Prettyman. Illustrations by Getty Images. Background image: old farm equipment on the ranch with Isabella Auxiliary Dam in the background, Sept. 25, 2016. Credit: Rick Brown. Learn more at: spk.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Isabella-Dam/Exhibit/