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PROUDLY CALGARY SINCE 1883

Hell on Wheels renewed for fifth and final season

News that series will end with 14-episode run over two years
'bittersweet' says producer

By Eric Volmers, Calgary Herald November 8, 2014



Cullen Bohannon (Anson Mount) Photograph by: Chris Large

There is good news and bad news for fans of the Alberta-shot western Hell on Wheels.

AMC announced Friday that the railroad drama will be renewed for an extended fifth season that will stretch into the summer of 2016. But it also confirmed that it will be the last season for the series.

Seven new episodes will air next summer and seven will air in the summer of 2016.

“I don’t view it as a cancellation, personally,” says showrunner John Wirth, on his cellphone from Los Angeles. “I view it as being lucky enough in our medium to actually be able to tell the end of a story. It doesn’t happen often. Usually it would be a phone call to me and I gather the cast and crew and I tell everybody to enjoy their lunch, pack up, it’s over. It’s really nice to be able to know that we’re working toward the end and take the time to consciously approach that.”

Of course, historically, the Hell on Wheels premise does have a natural ending. The series began airing in 2011 and followed the building of America’s first transcontinental railroad. In 1869, the “golden spike” was hammered in Promontory Summit, Utah, connecting the Central Pacific and Union Pacific. While specific locations have not been confirmed, Season 5 will be shot in Alberta and will likely go to camera in May, Wirth said.

The first season of Hell on Wheels was shot on the Tsuu T’ina Nation. Seasons 2 through 4 were shot near Okotoks.

Calgary producer Chad Oakes of Nomadic Pictures said the news Friday morning was bittersweet.

“Getting picked up for another 14 episodes is awesome,” Oakes said. “Knowing that the end is near, and now is confirmed, is sad. All of the partners Entertainment One, Endemol and AMC, we’re talking about what we’re going to do next. This will not be the end of this group of incredible writers, directors, showrunners working together.”

After a month-long hiatus, Season 4 of Hell on Wheels continues on Saturday. Anson Mount and Colm Meany star in the show. Common, who played freed slave Elam, left the series after his character was killed off earlier this season.

AMC’s gamble to move the series to Saturday nights in Season 3 has paid off. Season 4 is delivering an average of 3.4-million viewers.

“I have a very clear idea of how it ends because we have historical record, of course,” Wirth said. “But not of all our characters are from history and we are creating their stories. I have a pretty good idea, a couple of different versions actually, of how the story will end in terms of who survives and who doesn’t.”

Hell on Wheels airs Saturday on AMC.

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