



SEARCHING FOR SPOOKS

Casey S. Hibbert peers out into the natural world through a window in the top floor of the haunted Adams House in Deadwood. *Photos by Billy Gibson*

Paranormal enthusiasts search for signs of the hereafter in SD's haunted spaces

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Those eerie, creaky footsteps heard coming from the stairwell in Deadwood's historic Adams House could be the restless spirit of former owner W.E. Adams. Or they could simply be a figment of the imagination.

Maurice "Mo" Miller isn't going to try to convince you either way. He just wants to collect evidence that there was in fact an unexplained sound and let you draw your own conclusions.

Miller is founder and lead sleuth of the Black Hills Paranormal Investigations team. He and his six-member squad aren't out to bust ghosts or chase mischievous spirits away. They only want to make a friendly connection with inhabitants of the afterlife, maybe say hello and spend some quality time together.

For the past 10 years, Miller and his crew have been conducting their missions all across the Black Hills area and have logged scores of audio recordings and other evidence they offer as possible proof of the existence of the hereafter.

Every October, Miller invites fearless guests to accompany the investigators on their missions. But he often warns visitors beforehand: Don't come dressed in a Dracula costume or some silly getup - this is serious business.

"This isn't a dog-and-pony show," Miller said. "We never do investigations with the public on Halloween because people will come dressed up as a vampire or a witch and think it's the county fair. The shows on TV are for entertainment. We have fun, but we don't contrive things for entertainment value and promise we'll deliver a ghost in a jar or yank one out into the open with a hook."

Miller developed a passion for the paranormal when he had an unexplained experience as a youngster.

"I was in my bedroom and - I don't know how or why it happened - the closet door blew off the hinges and went flying across the room. My parents thought the door came down because I'd been swinging on it like a monkey. I was a little unnerved and slept on the couch for a month. But I started reading academic material on the subject to see if there was really something to this paranormal thing, and it's been my passion ever since."

The BHPI team has several black metal cases, or "spirit boxes" full of devices, contraptions and gizmos they use to detect the presence of wandering ghosts. There are electromagnetic field meters, binoptic cameras, infrared static cameras, digital audio recorders and more.

They've completed investigations of many haunted places in Deadwood and the surrounding area such as the Homestake Opera House, the Bullock Hotel, the Brothel Deadwood, the Lucky Nugget Casino and others.



Black Hills Paranormal Investigations team member LeAnn Harlan keeps an eye out for spirits during a recent visit to a private residence in Spearfish. Above/right, a device used by BHPI triggers when spirits are detected nearby.

As far as the fear factor goes, Miller said during late-night investigations he often finds himself keeping a close eye on BHPI Case Manager Mark Shadley, a retired police sergeant and seasoned law enforcement officer. If the former lawman starts showing

selling author Ann Charles, but there are many other famously haunted places and spaces around the state.

Author Chad Lewis has been researching paranormal activity in South Dakota, across the region, and around world for nearly 30 years and has written 25 books on the supernatural, including *The South Dakota Road Guide to Haunted Locations* as part of his “Unexplained” series. While Lewis has made many television appearances, he often speaks to local audiences and calls attention to some of the lesser known haunted sites such as Devil’s Gulch in Garretson and Spirit Mound State Historic Prairie near Vermillion.

“Spirit Mound’s legends date back as far as Lewis and Clark. In their journals, they wrote that once arriving upon Spirit Mound, their guides would go no further as they feared small creatures that looked like little people and were very good with poisonous arrows.”

He has explored many haunted sites in the Hills such as the Mount Moriah Cemetery and the Keystone Mount View Cemetery at the foot of Mount Rushmore. But Lewis has also studied spooky places in eastern South Dakota such as the Orpheum Theatre and Old Minnehaha Courthouse in Sioux Falls, Mount Marty College and Dakota

Visit these haunted sites if you dare

Here is our Top 10 list of the eeriest, scariest, most haunted places in South Dakota. Enter at your own risk:

- Bullock Hotel - Deadwood
- Adams House - Deadwood
- Old Minnehaha Courthouse Museum - Sioux Falls
- Dakota Theater - Yankton
- Hotel Alex Johnson - Rapid City
- Sioux San Hospital - Rapid City
- Lucky Nugget Casino - Deadwood
- Homestake Opera House - Lead
- Eastons Castle - Aberdeen
- Mount Marty College - Yankton



BHPI lead investigator Maurice “Mo” Miller discusses strategy with Deb Sutton and Kayleigh Johnson.

signs of fright or starts heading for the door, then it’s probably time to scam.

The Black Hills area is often considered a hotbed of paranormal activity of the kind depicted in local folklore and in the tales spun by best-

Theatre in Yankton, Eastons Castle in Aberdeen and others.

With Halloween coming up, Lewis encourages anyone interested in all things unexplained to get out and explore haunted sites and also to learn more about the history, lore and culture of different locations.

“I think people should venture out and see things for themselves and make their own determinations,” he said. “If you go out to Spirit Mound, make sure to leave an offering like a shiny rock or candy for the Little People. This will protect you from them getting followed home.”