

NEW MEXICO STATE PENITENTIARY, OLD MAIN

INVESTIGATION



Santa The New Mexico

NM041



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The word "investigation" is defined as
"a searching inquiry for ascertaining facts; detailed or careful examination."

The key word here is "facts". Do ghosts exist? No, it has not been proven.

Therefore are no facts to investigate.

What we do have is the testimony of the witnesses and this is where an investigational process will work. Investigations are often viewed as a skeptical activity because the main goal is trying to determine what the witness actually saw. Is it explainable or not? This is done through critical thinking and an event replication process developed by SGHA. This is an important concept because what defines a haunting or ghost sighting is "Multiple witnesses reporting unusual phenomena over a period of time". If these phenomena can be explained, the witness reports are no longer validating paranormal activity as a cause and thus there is no ghost or haunting. Additionally historical research may be done in an attempt to validate facts.

It is important to understand that the goal of an investigation is not to find evidence of the paranormal but to attempt to identify any natural or manmade causes of the reported phenomena

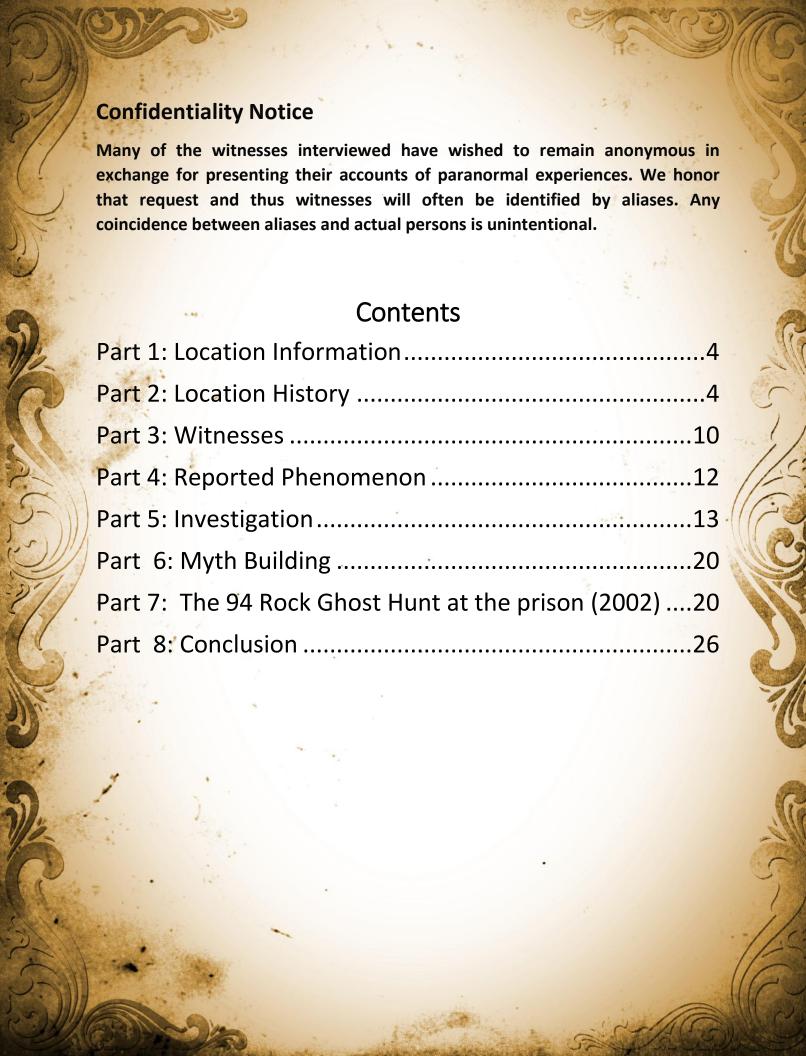
Definition of Terms

Investigation Status: Unsolved investigations will have either an open or closed status. An investigation is given an "Open" status if:

The investigators were unable to replicate all of the witness events. Something significant remains that is still unsolved.

It is important to understand that an "open" investigation does not mean that the unsolved facts are paranormal in nature. It simply means that we have exhausted our resources and cannot solve the "open" items/events.

A "Closed" status indicates that there is insufficient data or confounding variables that prevents replication or identifying possible explanations. This often occurs when investigators do not have direct access to witnesses or some other environmental change have occurred that creates confounding variables.



Part 1: Location Information

New Mexico State Penitentiary (Old Main)

Santa Fe, NM

Part 2: Location History

Opened in 1885, the New Mexico Penitentiary had been authorized by Congress since 1853. The design was based on the same plans used for Sing Sing and Joliet.

The first prison industry produced bricks. Beginning in 1903, New Mexico became the first western state to employ prisoners in building highways.

On 19 July 1922, prisoners at the pen rioted against overcrowding, the poor food, and the use of excessive force by the prison authorities.[8] When the inmates refused to return to their cells, the tower guards opened fire, killing one inmate and injuring five others. In the report following the riot, the prison authorities were blamed for lack of experience, and failure to

understand how to control a prison population.

The second riot was 15 June 1953. Inmates protesting the use of excessive force seized Deputy Warden Ralph Tahash and twelve guards and held them hostage. In the resulting melee, guards killed two inmates and wounded a number of others. This second riot led to the

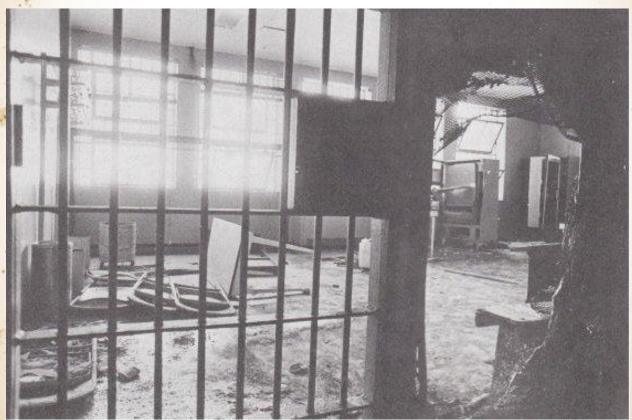
abandonment of the original facility as a prison and the construction in 1956 of what came to be called "the main unit".

In 1980, Cell Block 4, "the main unit", was the scene of one of the most violent prison riots in the correctional history of America. Over two days 33 inmates were killed and 12 officers were held hostage by prisoners who had escaped from cell blocks in the main unit. Men were brutally butchered, dismembered, and decapitated and hung up on the cells and burned alive.

This section of the prison was closed in 1998 and is now referred to as the "Old Main."

The 1980 Riot

It was an inmate rebellion without a plan, without leadership and without goals. There were few heroes, plenty of villains and many victims. When State Police marched into the Penitentiary of New Mexico on Feb. 3, 1980, they didn't retake the prison from rioting inmates so much as they occupied the charred shell after the riot had burned itself out. Thirty-three inmates were found dead inside -- some of them horribly butchered by their fellow prisoners.



The visiting room. Wall was broken through to gain access

The emergency room at St. Vincent Hospital in Santa Fe was overwhelmed with more than 100 inmates -- some beaten, others suffering from drug overdoses. Eight of the 12 guards who had been taken hostage were treated for injuries. Surprisingly, none of the guards was killed. It was a

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penitentiary_of_New_Mexico

black mark on New Mexico history as the nation was captivated by the horror stories that dribbled out of Santa Fe.

The riot began in the early morning hours of Saturday, Feb. 2, when guards entered dormitory E-2 on the south side of the Prison. The door to the dormitory wasn't locked, in violation of prison security procedures. Neither was a hallway gate that led to the prison control room. Four guards were taken hostage during the first few minutes of the riot.

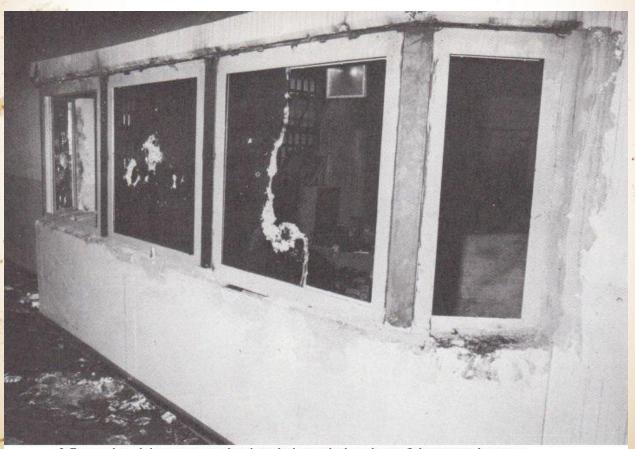


Cell block 4. Bars of a cell that were cut out with a blow torch.

In all, there were 15 guards on duty inside the prison that night, supervising more than 1,100 inmates. Inmates rushed down the main corridor and broke the shatterproof glass at the control center. The guard on duty fled, leaving behind keys that could open most of the prison gates and doors. The inside of the prison became a nightmare of violence. One Associated Press reporter later described it in a story distributed worldwide as a "merry-go-round gone crazy."

Fires were set. Inmates ripped out plumbing fixtures, flooding parts of the prison. Other inmates got into the infirmary and began taking drugs. Others began hunting their enemies, and found them. Sometime around 8 a.m. that Saturday morning, inmates began using tools from the prison to gain access to cellblock 4, which housed the "snitches" and inmates in protective segregation. The "snitches" met a horrible end. One was hung from the upper tier of the cellblock, another decapitated. Most of the 33 inmates killed were from the segregation unit.

Early Saturday morning, fitful negotiations began with some inmate leaders. Ambulances shuttled the dead and injured to St. Vincent. Smoke poured out of the prison gymnasium.



A fire extinguisher was used to break through the glass of the control center

It became clear later that neither the inmates nor the state had a single spokesman during the negotiations. Eventually, inmates made 11 basic demands. Some concerned basic prison conditions like overcrowding, inmate discipline, educational services and improving food. They also wanted outside witnesses -- federal officials and the news media.

Hostage guards were released. Some of the guards had been protected by inmates; others were brutally beaten. "One was tied to a chair. Another lay naked on a stretcher, blood pouring from a head wound," a Journal reporter wrote. Negotiations broke off about 1 a.m. Sunday and state officials insisted no concessions had been made. But the riot, fueled by drugs and hate, was running out of gas.

Later Sunday morning, inmates began to trickle out of the prison, seeking refuge at the fence where National Guardsmen stood with their M-16s. Black inmates led the exodus from the smoldering cellblocks, staying in groups large enough to defend themselves from other inmates.

It was over.



From the Attorney General's Report

Shortly before 2 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 2, 1980, inmates at the Penitentiary of New Mexico near Santa Fe overpowered four correctional officers in a

medium security dormitory. The inmates rushed through the open dormitory door and, within minutes, captured four more officers.

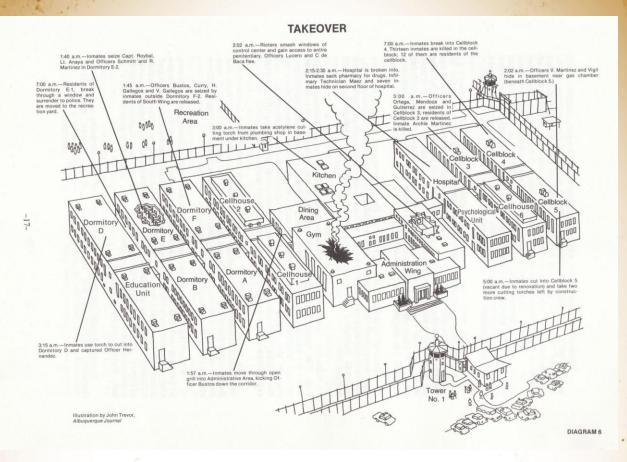
Using keys taken from the officers, inmates freed fellow prisoners then moved through an open grill gate to the administrative area, smashed their way into the main control center (and gained) access to every part of the main penitentiary building where 1,157 male inmates were under the custody and care of 25 correctional employees.

In the 36 hours that followed, 12 officers were held hostage, some of them beaten, stabbed and sodomized. Thirty-three inmates died at the hands of fellow prisoners, some of the victims were tortured and their bodies mutilated. At least 90 other inmates were seriously injured in the riot, suffering from drug overdoses or beatings, stabbings and rapes inflicted by other convicts. Most of the inmates had escaped to the outside of the walls by the time the riot was over.

Prison officials communicated with inmates throughout the weekend in an effort to negotiate the release of the hostage officers and the surrender of the inmates. By 1:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 3, 1980, the violence had spent itself; police and National Guardsmen retook the penitentiary without resistance.



Inside the control center after the riot



Click to enlarge

1980 New Mexico State Penitentiary prison riot - documentary (YouTube)

Part 3: Witnesses

During the course of nine investigations we have interviewed a total of 26 people that consisted of current and former corrections officer and guardsmen of the NM National Guard. In 2013, Secretary of Corrections Gregg Marcantel decided to open Old Main for touring.

"State Corrections Secretary Gregg Marcantel said he wants to avoid the ghost stories and graphic depictions of the 1980 violence that accompanied some of the tours offered last year at the former penitentiary."

"These tours are centered around the "Old Main" theme; "Respecting our Past to Create a Better Future". There will be no ghost stories or related topics discussed on these tours."

² http://www.eventbrite.com/e/old-main-prison-tours-2014-tickets-9928211548

Many of the people that we had on previous reports requested that their names be removed because of the new policy. We have honored that request.

Scott Patterson's Celebrity Ghost Story

After landing the role of an Army captain in charge of the prison in the movie The Boys of Abu Ghraib, actor Scott Patterson (The Gilmore Girls) reached Albuquerque around midnight, arriving on a late night flight. A producer on the new film greeted him at the airport.

Instead of heading for his hotel, Patterson accepted the producer's offer to take him for a late night visit to the site selected for filming the interior prison scenes — the abandoned, former maximum-security New Mexico State Penitentiary, located just outside of Santa Fe.

Also at his producer's suggestion, Patterson decided to visit Death Row. He intended to sit in the chair inside the gas chamber itself for "the experience."

As the two men made their way underground three levels toward the gas chamber, Patterson noted a spot on the floor where the concrete had been marred by what appeared to be hacking marks. Further along the way, he saw a blackened spot on the floor that he didn't understand, uneasily noting it took the vague shape of a human form.

When they reached the viewing room for the gas chamber, the two men found a lit small candle standing upright in a chair. By Patterson's account, the producer looked terrified and claimed to have no knowledge of how the candle got there. He expressed an interest in leaving at that point, but Patterson said, "My training is such that I don't back away from such experiences."

So he insisted on continuing on until he actually sat in the gas chamber chair. Patterson described what happened next as he looked as his producer, standing in the entrance to the gas chamber:

...and I looked at him. I noticed that he was fixated on the viewing area behind me. And I turned around. In the viewing area, we saw black shapes, sitting in chairs.

We ran so fast...

As the two men ran from Death Row, Patterson claimed that they encountered a winged demonic specter in a stairwell that literally flew at them. The two men cowered in fright, screaming like little children. Patterson exclaimed, "And we felt it whoosh over us, actually felt the wind over us."

Somewhere along the line as they fled in terror, Patterson dropped his cell phone. The following morning, a sound technician, a local hire, found the phone on Death Row and returned it.

The technician said, Wait a minute. You went down into the death chamber at night? ³No, no, no, no, no, no, no. Don't you know the history of this prison?

Other accounts from film crews

An ex-warden reported the dark figure threw down a cigarette and disappeared. He said he found the cigarette butt smoldering on the ground near where the apparition had disappeared.

A member of one of the film crews reported seeing the dark garbed figure while he was alone in the prison. The figure went into a bathroom. When the crew member followed, the bathroom was empty.

1980 NM Prison Riot Remembered (Youtube)

Bob White, a New Mexico Corrections Department retiree, describes his experience during the New Mexico Penitentiary Riot. He also describes the olfactory phenomenon reported by many of the penitentiary's visitors.

Part 4: Reported Phenomenon

The areas of the prison where the most unusual phenomena is reported are Cell Blocks 3, 4, the Tool room and the laundry room.

Cell Block 3 was the maximum security ward which also contains the Solitary confinement cell. Activity reported here includes unexplainable noises, a burning flesh or "death" smell, doors that open and close by themselves, and lights that turn on and off without any apparent cause.

³ http://www.southernprose.com/2012/02/14/scott-pattersons-celebrity-ghost-story/

Cell block 4 was the area where the "snitches" and other prisoners held in protective custody were contained. Upon entering the cell block, there are marks on the floor where rioters used power tools to decapitate the snitches and several other inmates. Also visible are the outlines of scorch marks where other inmates were burned to death with propane cutting torches. Another inmate was hung from the upper tier of the cell block with sheets that had been tied together. The activity reported here is similar to those reported in Cell Block 3. Twenty three of the inmates that were murdered during the riot were killed in Cell Block 4.

The laundry was the site of several murders, although they occurred long before the riot of 1980. It is located in a labyrinth of corridors that lie underneath the prison. These corridors also link to the gas chamber, many mechanical rooms and the tool room where the inmates stole the propane torches and other tools that were used during the riots. Uneasy feelings and whispers are often reported down there as well as unusual human shaped shadows.

Unusual phenomenon has also been reported by corrections officers and national guardsmen who use the facility for training. The commonly reported things are the human shaped shadows and the "burning flesh smell.

In 2011, Action 7 News (KOAT) Investigated the NM State Penitentiary. During the filming, Brian Morton encounters strange noises and cell doors closing by themselves. (Click here to watch)

Update 2012: The penitentiary was featured on the Travel Channel's "Dead Files", Season 1, Episode 18, Death Sentence, 29 June 2012. Two of the former corrections Officers are interviewed, describing many of the same things that other have reported. (Click here to watch)

Part 5: Investigation

SGHA has conducted eight investigations of Old Main from 2002 to 2010. One important thing to understand about all of the investigations before 2010 was that "Old Main" was a secured area that lies on the grounds of the present day Hi-Max Correctional Facility. Everyone entering the grounds had to have a background check and must be escorted by a corrections officer at all times. As you move through the facility the

corrections officer radioed the groups location and movements so our location was constantly known by the control center of the current penitentiary. This created a type of controlled environment as the location of anyone inside the penitentiary is known.

October 2002

This was primarily a media gig with 94 Rock. We were not there to do an investigation but to assist them with a contest they were doing. Several unusual things occurred which peaked our interest. See Section 7.

July 2004

The focus of this investigation was to attempt to replicate the "human-like shadows" that witnesses have been seeing in the penitentiary. Since many of these encounters happened during the day we hypothesized that they actually were shadows, created by something moving outside of the windows and blocking the ambient light that enters the building, the tests were repeated during different times (to change the angle of the light entering) and in different areas. While we were able to create shadows in some areas, they were too diffuse to replicate what the witnesses were reporting.

October 2005

We visited the penitentiary several times this year, mostly to familiarize ourselves with the facility as we were going to be the first ones to lead tours through the pen at the end of the month. On the investigative side, this knowledge was used to create new hypotheses about how noises could travel so readily through the cell blocks and what could produce the noises that the witnesses were hearing.

We examined the acoustic properties of the main corridor in the basement and analyzed how noises made on one end of the corridor were heard on the opposite end. There was some suggestion that this could be possible but we were not content with the results. If this was an explanation, we would have to know exactly where the noises originated in the first place to be able to replicated the sound. Unfortunately, the origins are still a mystery. Sound mapping is worthless. The microphones are overdriven too easily to obtain any useable data and isolate any noises.

October 2006

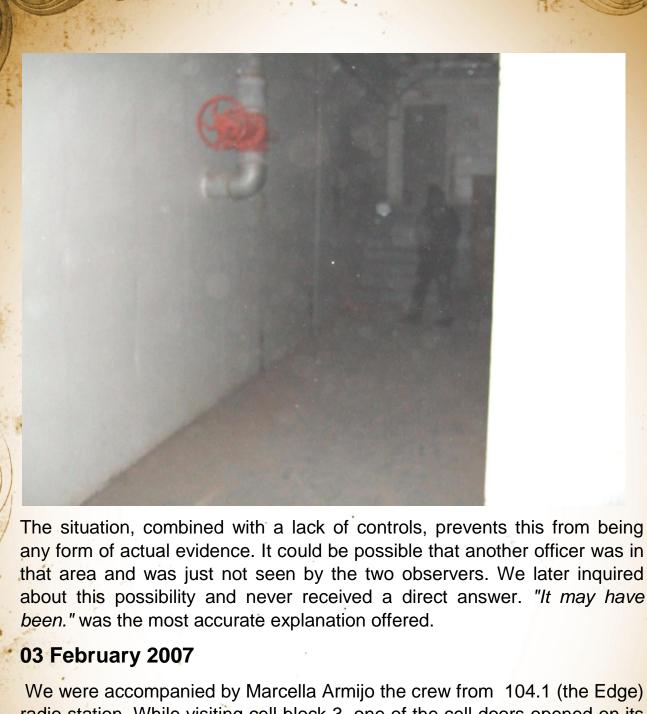
In 2006, we were back in the prison for two reasons, we were leading a tour through the penitentiary and testing another hypothesis to attempt to explain some of the unusual noises that are often heard in the basement. The idea was that a sound that occurred on the floor above could be transmitted through the stairwells and amplified sufficiently enough to be heard in the basement. the amplification and acoustics of the stairwell and basement causes the source to be misidentified and incorrectly assumed that the sound was originating from the basement itself. The tests were not successful. Our replication attempts could clearly be identified as originating from upstairs.

However, something unusual did occur on the tour. The group was guided

by two corrections Officers, one in front and one that followed the group. We were in the basement near the gas chamber. One of the corrections officers was explaining how the gas chamber was operated. Since the actual room is small, a few people were allowed in, while the remainder of the group waited outside in the hallway. After the demonstration was given, the group went back out to the hall and another group was allowed in.

Just after the second group was moving out, metallic banging sound came from the main hall leading up to the main basement corridor. The corrections officer at the rear of the group and

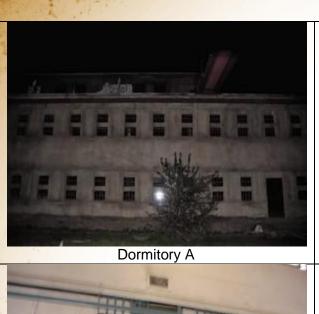
one of the participants of the tour looked around the corner. No one was there. The tour participant took a photograph and then went into the gas chamber for the demonstration. While she was in the gas chamber room she checked the camera to see the last picture that was taken. There is clearly a figure in the photo despite the fact that neither person saw anyone back there. The corrections officers were show the picture. They quickly did a head count of the people in the tour and with all accounted for, they radioed the control center and informed them that we had a visitor that was not authorized to be in the area.



We were accompanied by Marcella Armijo the crew from 104.1 (the Edge) radio station. While visiting cell block 3, one of the cell doors opened on its own. We checked the control box only to discover that the fuses were

missing, making any possibly of a mechanical failure very unlikely.

Marcella also noted that if the door had been opened mechanically, we would have heard the motor that operates the door. The motor was not heard at all. Two more correctional officers were interviewed about their experiences at the penitentiary. Both accounts were about the human shaped figures which were seen in cell blocks 3 and 4.





The Longest Yard movie set



The Longest Yard movie set



The Longest Yard movie set



Basement, hall leading to gas chamber



Door that opened by itself

September 2007

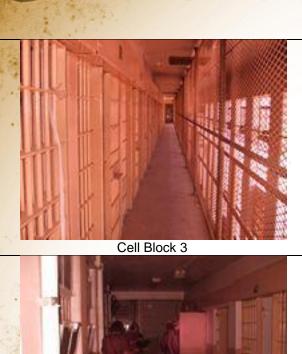
We were at the penitentiary twice in September 2007. The first visit was to film a television documentary and the second was to test a new hypothesis.

During our last investigation we encountered an owl that was living in the south wing of the mental ward. The objective of this investigation was to test a hypothesis to see if the shadows could have been caused by birds flying near the windows to the cell blocks. We used a black helium balloon which was moved across the windows on the outside of the building at varying distances and times to see what kinds of shadows they could produce.

When the sun was directly behind the balloon and the balloon was within three feet from the window, it produced a very vivid shadow that had a distinct outline. However the balloon itself was also very visible in the window making this an unlikely alternative explanation.

Later that day and into the evening we conducted another ghost hunt. Observation teams were stationed throughout the building in the hope that one of the teams may experience something identical to what the witnesses reported. One unusual picture was taken of the main corridor leading to cellblocks 3 and 4 but the camera acted strangely. Right after the photo was taken, the camera made and strange buzzing sound and shut off. It powered back on immediately and we had no future problems with it.







Cell Block 3



Mental health ward



Camera Malfunction?

October 2008

In October we conducted another ghost hunt hoping to hear or observe some of the phenomenon that the witnesses have reported. The day and night were uneventful.

June 2010

We met with four correctional officers that are currently employed at the Hi-Max facility, part of their duties includes conducting training and VIP tours of Old Main.

The officers told us several stories about their paranormal encounters. One of the most notable involved a training exercise where the officers were required to clear a cell block. After they swept the area and called "all clear", their captain noticed someone moving in the hallway and into the cell block the team just cleared.

The captain became upset and chewed the team out for not doing the job properly and the exercise had to be performed again, despite the fact that a head count of all of the team members showed that everyone was accounted for.

Part 6: Myth Building

We interviewed Marcella Armijo, the 1st female captain in the Old State Pen. She started in 1976 and worked there until the late early 90s. She was one of the first ones in after the 1980 riot to help identify bodies and then to assist clean-up crew. Considered to be the bloodiest riot in U.S. history, the truth has been obscured by people who were not there and by bad information presented in books like the Devils Butcher shop and The Hate Factory. Now a direct eyewitness to the events tells it like it really was and dispels several rumors and stories surrounding the old pen. Originally aired on Ecto Radio, it contains some background music. The interview also contains graphic language. (Click here to listen)

Part 7: The 94 Rock Ghost Hunt at the prison (2002)

SGHA was sent to the prison with the crew of KZZR, 94 Rock and the contestants of a "MTV Fear" type of contest to be conducted on the grounds.

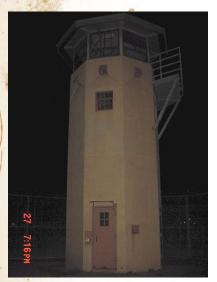


After arriving at the prison, we were briefed on the contest and that there was a "holding area near the front entrance where everyone would wait while the contestants did their "dares". We were then given a tour of the grounds, including cell block 4 and the basement. The contestants were no due to arrive for another hour and a half.

After the tour we took IR cameras down to solitary confinement in Cell Block three to monitor the contestant there to ensure that he stayed in the cell for the full twenty minutes of his "dare". After we positioned the camera,

Cody moved to the far end of the corridor to take photographs while Bob shot IR video from the other end. After a few minutes there was a distinct sound of a cell door slowly opening or closing. As Cody moved towards the area where the sound seemed to be coming from a second similar noise, this time much louder and faster, echoed down the hallway behind Cody's position.

Bob, assuming that the noise was coming from the contestants, started to radio in to the holding area to confirm that the contestants had arrived. Suddenly his radio started changing frequencies by itself and a extremely loud noise echoed down the hallway that resembled a cell door violently slamming shut. The sound came from somewhere behind Cody, who had moved forward to look for the source of the first strange noise.



Bob quickly moved forward towards Cody's position and after verifying that he was okay, began checking the area. All of the cell doors were closed and locked when we arrived to set up the cameras and they were still closed and locked. We attempted to replicate the sound by banging on the cell doors themselves and trying to open them. However, we could not replicate anything that sounded close to the noises we heard earlier. Bob, on the other hand, thought that the noise may had originated from one of the cells upstairs, so we moved up two levels to the

top tier. We were unable to locate anything that could have caused the loud noise. We continued down the catwalk of the cellblock, taking photos. Just as we reached the end of the catwalk, a repeating thumping noise moved across a ventilation pipe towards us, eventually stopping three feet away from our position. Although it was quite strange and downright spooky, we assumed it was a wild animal running inside of the pipe towards us. We then moved back to the holding area at the front of the prison to take a break.

(Click here to watch the video of this event)

Once we were outside, we were able to talk to some of the former guards of the prison and showed the video of the incident in cell block three to

them and the radio staff. One of the guards thought the sound resembled a fuse blowing out down there and went to check it out. Meanwhile, several of the radio staff had heard noises coming from the guard tower while we were in cell block three. They said that the noises sounded like the trap door of the guard tower being opened and slammed shut. So we all moved off to the tower to check it out.

Bob moved about, trying to isolate the origin of the noise, the remainder of the group received visitors, one being the former warden of the prison. When asked about the tower and if anything had happened there, he simply replied "There are some things you just do not want to know." He would not comment on the tower any further. Bob was unable to find anything that could make a noise that resembled the noise heard by the radio station staff. Shortly afterwards, the contestants arrived and the contest began.

Audio Files from the broadcast

- Part 1. A description of the contest (Click to Listen)
- Part 2. Descriptions of cell block three. The Rainman (94 Rock D.J.) takes contestant Rich to solitary confinement. (Click to Listen)
- Part 3. Rainman returns to get Rich out of the Hole. Rich's descriptions of what he heard. T.J Trout (94 Rock D.J.) takes Hollie to the mental ward. (Click to Listen)
- Part 4. T.J. retrieves Hollie from the mental ward and she describes her experiences. Mahoney (94 Rock D.J.) and Chevon head to the gas chamber. (Click to Listen)
- Part 5. Mahoney retrieves Chevon from the gas chamber and she tells what she experienced. Rob (94 Rock D.J.) takes Maggie to the entry cell block four where prisoners were beheaded with power tools for the Ouija Challenge. (Click to Listen)
- Part 6. Erica Viking (94 Rock D.J.) takes Shawn to a cell in Cellblock 4. (Click to Listen)
- Part 7. The final challenge. Each contestant must make his or her way down to the laundry room in the basement and retrieve a glow stick and an envelope. (Click to Listen)

While waiting during the contest, the guard that checked the fuses in cell block three returned and informed us that the fuses were all okay. He had no idea what could have caused that noise. After the completion of the "dare" in Cell block four, we were able to move around that area and see what we could find. We were on the bottom tier walking towards the opposite end of the corridor when the squeaky sound of a metal door closing rang out from behind us. We turned to see that one of the doors we had passed was wide open. We moved to check out that area but found nothing unusual. The door itself was quite heavy, maybe 60 pounds or so and the hinges were rusted. After manually closing and opening it, we ruled out the possibility of it being pushed open by a gust of air or by the vibration of us walking past it. We later learned from a guard that all of these doors had been locked. The door that had opened was very freaky because it was locked shut and they did not have a key for it, making it impossible to even open it in the first place. (Click here to watch the video of this event)

During the last "dare" of the contest, we were able to take Erica Viking down to the basement to conduct an EVP session. Afterwards, we returned to the holding area and waited for the contest to finish. We then searched the laundry room and other parts of the basement before heading out.

Photographs from 2002 with 94 Rock (click on a image to enlarge)







Visitor center





Visitor center





Part 8: Conclusion

We were not able to identify any alternative explanations for the phenomena that was reported by the witnesses.

The most notable of the reported phenomena is the observation of a human shaped shadow. The accounts start in 1981 and have continued into the present day. They have been seen by corrections officers as well as members of the New Mexico National Guard.

The phenomenon can be attributed to a mix of pareidolia (the tendency to see patterns everywhere) and the low-resolution nature of peripheral vision. Several physiological and psychological conditions can account for reported experiences of shadow people. These include sleep paralysis, illusions, or hallucinations brought on by physiological or psychological circumstances, drug use or side effects of medication, and the interaction of external agents on the human body. Another reason that could be behind the illusion is sleep deprivation, which may lead to hallucinations⁴

This may seem to the a logical explanation if there were only a few accounts. There are simply too many accounts occurring to multiple witnesses. In one account from two corrections officers working in old main in 1984, they both saw the "human shaped figure" simultaneously.

The noises, especially those that are loud and sound like cell doors slamming shut are elusive. we could identify the origins of these noises. They occur rarely (we heard them only twice out of nine visits).

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadow_person