

Tour seeks paranormal experience in Deadwood

By CHRISTOPHER VONDRACEK
Rapid City Journal

DEADWOOD, S.D. — The snow falling on the roads on a recent Saturday evening didn’t scare off Matt Phelps, who drove with family for two hours from Kyle to Deadwood for the paranormal investigation at the Adams House.

“I bought these tickets in August,” said Phelps, who stood in the visitor center adjacent the Victorian mansion off Sherman Street, warming himself. “Does the weather bring out the ghosts?”

“We’ll find out,” said Maurice “Mo” Miller, lead investigator of Black Hills Paranormal Investigations.

Ghost-hunting is serious business in historic Deadwood. A few years ago, the Travel Channel series “Ghost Adventures” descended on the Bullock Hotel and the Fairmont Hotel with gadgets and night-vision cameras. They even re-enacted the shooting of Wild Bill Hickok. But don’t get the team of Black Hills Paranormal, which runs the Adams House haunting hunts this October, started on cable television ghost-hunters.

“They blow things way out of proportion,” said case manager Scott Remboldt, who stood in the doorway prior to the sold-out investigation. “None of us have ever been possessed.”

“Never say never,” said Phelps’ girlfriend, Tony.

For two weekends this October, four times a night, approximately 30 amateur paranormal investigators split into two groups and entered the Adams House, the Rapid City Journal reported. Rose Spiers, communications director for Deadwood History Inc., accompanies the groups as well to set the historical scene.

The Queen Anne home was the culmination of the empire of W.E. Adams, a grocery store magnate and multiple-term mayor of Deadwood. Dumbwaiters, oaken smoking rooms for the gentleman, stained-glass windows and heavy drapes became part of the tour.

“Are those curtains moving?” asked an unnerved participant, as Miller’s group entered the dining room.

“Possibly,” Miller said. “Someone likely brushed past them, though. It’s our job to debunk things.”

His voice recorder on, Miller prompted the crowd to supernatural solicitations.

“It may feel weird to speak into thin air,” he said.

“Are you intimidated when the house is full of guests?”

No (audible) response.

Another woman asked, “Do you like using that light?”

“Yes, we do,” answered Dani Jo Butler, a psychic medium.



Photos by Christopher Vondracek/Rapid City Journal

The Adams House in Deadwood, S.D., during tour by the Black Hills Paranormal Investigations.

But Miller interrupted. “I think she was asking the air.”

The air, the spirits, the lingering presence. It can be confusing at first. But for 90 minutes, the tours cycle through the downstairs and upstairs, often with the paranormal investigators — “the professionals” as Miller reminds people — directing people toward common “hot spots.” A corridor. Steps to the attic, where a fire once burst out. The wallpaper.

Phelps’ sister-in-law ran the EVP reader, like a digital price-checker that reads electricity levels, over the table as the lights flickered.

“That’s likely the boiler underneath the floor,” Butler said.

Heads nodded, and the dozen or so people shuffle into the next room.

“Has anyone passed here?” asked Phelps, as the group entered the fireplace lounge.

“Yes, Mr. Adams was in bed for nine days before passing,” Spiers said.

In an adjacent room, some guests inspected the sheet music still on the stand for the ghosts to accompany each other.

Floorboards creaked. A ParaScope — multi-colored tubes in a circle that reads static electricity — briefly blinks up blue.

“Knock if you are with us,” Butler said.

Quietly, there’s what sounds like a knock on a wall. The room excitedly lights up.

“No, I think that’s the tour group upstairs,” said Miller, who gets used to being a kill-joy.

Before the tour, there were a number of ground rules provided. No whispering, which can confuse the investigators’ “slam EVP sessions.” No cellphones (save for a



Photos by Christopher Vondracek/Rapid City Journal

Rose Spiers, communications director for Deadwood History, Inc., and resident historian on the Adams House paranormal activity leads a tour by Black Hills Paranormal Investigations.

reporter’s for note taking). And lastly, no one would be dressed up like zombies.

“If you hear anything, see anything, feel anything, or smell anything,” said Miller, “let us know.”

Upstairs, in Adams’ bedroom, Mary Ellis Potts of Rapid City did just that, interrupting Spiers’ talk.

“Oh my gosh,” said Potts. “Something just slid my earring off.”

She held up her earring. Murmurs rippled through the group.

Ghosts usually aren’t malicious to humans, the investigators maintained — just occasionally playful. Later, seated near the bed, Potts feels a dark energy near the bed.

“I was going to tell you that Mr. Adams is standing there,” Butler said. “But you’ve figured that out already.”

In Mr. Adams’ study, spooky sightings now building, an ordinary Maglite flashlight that has been rigged up to respond to the feather-light nudge of a ghost’s presence was set on the mantel overlooking Adams’ desk, while Spiers gathered onlookers around the desk. Then, without warning, the flashlight inexplicably turned on.

A wave of excitement passed once again over the group.

“Wow, cool!” exclaimed Spiers. “I’ve been doing this for years, and only once before has this flashlight turned on.”

When the light turned off, Butler asked, “How many spirits are here with us? One, tw — “

At “one,” the flashlight turned back on and off.

“Thank you,” Butler replied, calmly, complimenting the tricks of the ghost like a trainer at SeaWorld might pat an Orca on the beak after raising its fin. “It’s nice having you here, Mr. Adams.”

Try these new flavors for chili season

Best ground beef chili

- Servings: 8-10**
Start to finish: 2 hours, 45 minutes
2 pounds of 85 percent lean ground beef
2 tablespoons plus 2 cups water
Salt and pepper
3/4 teaspoon baking soda
6 dried ancho chilies, stemmed, seeded, and torn into 1 inch pieces
1 ounce tortilla chips, crushed (1/4 cup)
2 tablespoons ground cumin
1 tablespoon paprika
1 tablespoon garlic powder
1 tablespoon ground coriander
2 teaspoons dried oregano
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
1 (14.5 ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 onion, chopped fine
3 garlic cloves, minced
1-2 teaspoons minced canned chipotle chili in adobo sauce
1 (15 ounce) can pinto beans
2 teaspoons sugar
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 275 F. Toss beef with 2 tablespoons water, 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, and baking soda in bowl until thoroughly combined. Set aside for 20 minutes.
Meanwhile, toast anchos in Dutch oven over medium-high heat, stirring frequently, until fragrant, 4 to 6 minutes, reducing heat if anchos begin to smoke.



Carl Tremblay/America's Test Kitchen

Ground beef chili

Transfer to food processor and let cool.
Add tortilla chips, cumin, paprika, garlic powder, coriander, oregano, thyme, and 2 teaspoons pepper to food processor with anchos and process until finely ground, about 2 minutes. Transfer mixture to bowl. Process tomatoes and their juice in now-empty work bowl until smooth, about 30 seconds.
Heat oil in now-empty pot over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, 4 to 6 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add beef and cook, stirring to break meat up into 1/4 inch pieces, until beef is browned and fond begins to form on pot bot-

tom, 12 to 14 minutes. Add ancho mixture and chipotle; cook, stirring frequently, until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes.
Add tomato puree, remaining 2 cups water, beans and their liquid, and sugar. Bring to boil, scraping bottom of pot to loosen any browned bits. Cover, transfer to oven, and cook until meat is tender and chili is slightly thickened, 1 1/2 to 2 hours, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking.
Remove chili from oven and let stand, uncovered, for 10 minutes. Stir in any fat that has risen to top of chili, then add vinegar and season with salt to taste. Serve. (Chili can be refrigerated for up to 3 days; add water as needed when reheating to adjust consistency.)

Texas Red Chili

If you know anything about Texas chili, then you know for certain the one thing that is NOT in this recipe.
If you have just yelled “BEANS!” then you are correct (and you knew you were correct and did not need me to tell you, thank you very much).
True Texas chili starts with a homemade chili paste, usually made from dried chilis. This recipe takes a shortcut with a generous amount of chili powder. If you have access to Hatch chili powder (from Texas), substitute about half of that in for the chili powder blends we all usually use.
The annual Terlingua Chili Contest, held in Grapevine, Texas, says in its densely written three pages of rules that “No beans, pasta, rice or other similar items are allowed.” That’s not a suggestion, friends, that’s a rule. (P.S., store-bought chili powder is allowed).
Cook this chili low and slow so the meat can become very soft and the liquid thickens into a sauce, and doesn’t just evaporate. The sauce that binds this chili together is thick — if it gets too thick, stir in 1/2 to 1 cup water toward the end, especially if it starts to stick to the bottom of the pot.
I also like to shred some of the big cubes of super-tender beef at the end to give the sauce more texture. We eat our Texas Red Chili over rice with what I think of as traditional chili toppings — cheese, sour cream, avocado — which I gather are also acceptable toppings in Texas.



Cheyenne Cohen via AP

Texas red chili

- TEXAS RED CHILI**
Servings 6-8
Start to finish: 4 hours
3 pounds cubed (1 to 1 1/2-inch) stew meat, such as beef chuck
Coarse or kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
1 to 2 tablespoons vegetable or canola oil
2 red or yellow onions, chopped (about 2 cups)
5 garlic cloves, minced
1/4 cup chili powder
1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes or tomato puree
3 cups less-sodium beef broth, plus more as needed
Hot rice to serve
To serve (as desired):
Guacamole or diced avocado, lime wedges, minced onions, diced tomatoes, salsa, sour cream, cilantro leaves
Season the beef with salt and pepper. In a large soup pot, or a Dutch oven, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil over medium high heat. Add the beef in batches and brown a few sides, about 8 minutes per batch (not every side has to be browned; it’s better to caramelize a few sides well and let the rest just be). Add

more oil between batches as needed. Transfer the meat with a slotted spoon to a plate as it finishes browning.
Drain off all but 1 tablespoon of the fat from the pot, if needed, and add the onions. Sauté them over medium heat for 5 minutes, until the onions are tender. Add the garlic and sauté for one more minute, until you can smell the garlic. Add the chili powder, give it a stir, then stir in the crushed tomatoes and the beef broth. Return the browned beef cubes to the pot and bring to a simmer over medium high heat.
Reduce the heat and simmer very gently, partially covered, for about 3 hours, until the beef is very tender. Add 1/2 to 1 cup of water toward the end if the sauce is too thick or the mixture looks too dry. When it is all tender, you can remove a cup or two of the beef cubes and shred them with two forks, then stir that back into the pot to thicken up the sauce a bit, if desired.
Serve hot over rice in bowls, with the accompaniments of your choice.