

Paranormal Photography  
by  
Dr. Richard A. Barker

We use digital cameras exclusively for still photography. Cost and convenience far outweigh the few advantages offered by a 35mm. I use a FUJIFILM E510 for a number of reasons, and it has produced excellent results. Other members use other models, but as long as the camera has certain features that affect flash and exposure settings, it does not seem to matter what model is used. We also use two or more (depending on who is involved in the investigation) Sony DCR-HC28 Nightshot Plus digital video cameras that meet our budget and performance requirements. Generally, one camera is fixed to a tripod, and pointed at an area suspected of high activity. Basically, as far as equipment goes, we run investigations like a sandlot baseball game--we use whatever is brought to the field by the players. We do not have an organizational budget for equipment.

Because we rarely investigate in complete darkness, we have not felt a need to invest in infrared cameras with their limited flexibility and encumbrances. We do have a handheld Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) thermal imaging device. The device is very expensive, but it provides a unique look at the environment. There are no theories that paranormal phenomena radiate heat, or that objects that radiate heat are paranormal, but investigators who use such devices have produced interesting results. Appropriate technique and analysis is the key. I have used thermal imaging in my capacity as a manufacturing engineer, but I believe in testing the capabilities of this device in paranormal investigations. For one thing, it will indicate the presence of small and large mammals and birds, which can produce noises easily mistaken for paranormal activity.

Our photography protocol allows for experimentation and innovation. Aside from calling "flash" before snapping a picture, we have few rules. There is a sensitive among our members who is shy about having her picture taken, but I sometimes tempt her wrath to see if I can capture any orbs hovering around her. She is not happy with me for that, but she understands. Our number one rule is testing. All of our investigators are obliged to take photos in places that are probably not haunted to test the effects of certain environmental and technological conditions. I cannot tell you how disappointing it is to see photos on websites, touted as rife with orbs, that were clearly taken in misty or dusty or insecty conditions. Most commonly, I see photos of water vapor. Even if there are orbs in the picture, they become lost amongst the normal phenomena. Photos taken outdoors are scrutinized, and only the most dramatic anomalies are considered as evidence.

Another element of our investigation protocol is slow and deliberate movement. Many places are dusty, and movement stirs up the dust. You know when you are moving correctly when most photos have no anomalies. With photography, however, it is sometimes productive to turn quickly and shoot behind you. You never know what may be following.

We always have plenty of batteries for our devices. Whenever possible, I plug devices into wall outlets. Rapid battery drain is thought to occur in the presence of paranormal phenomena, and there are many testimonials to this. However, there are many other reasons for battery failure that have to do with age and design of the battery, defects in the equipment, leaving the batteries in the device for long periods, and improper recharging techniques. We stress knowing your equipment's design implications, limitations, and performance issues.