

30 Years Of Man's Life Disappear In Mysterious 'Kansas Rectangle'

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CHICAGO—The so-called "Kansas rectangle," a desolate and featureless region covering 82,277 square miles in America's mysterious Great Plains, has been a source of speculation among paranormal investigators for decades. Though the questions surrounding its existence have never been answered, one thing is certain: The life of former Chicagoan Kevin Corcoran suddenly vanished into the eerie region 30 years ago this week, never to return.



The last time Kevin Corcoran was seen being active.

According to his friends and family, Corcoran, a bright and energetic young man of 18, was last seen driving into the Rectangle in a Plymouth Duster on the afternoon of May 8, 1978. Surveillance footage shows him stopping at a gas station near the border to buy fuel and snacks at 4:15 p.m. Although his trip was only supposed to last the summer, he was never seen or heard from again.

The last known communication from Corcoran was sent from somewhere within the Rectangle, and made reference to plans to marry a large blond woman and enroll in a local technical college. Records indicate the message was received from 37 degrees 42 minutes north latitude and 97 degrees 20 minutes west longitude—but when searchers attempted to investigate that location, they found nothing but a tiny town with zero signs of life.

"Who knows if my son will ever return to civilization," said Corcoran's father, Dennis, now 76. "Some have reported seeing a pale and dead-eyed specter of him, trudging to and from a small office-supply firm every day, but they could just be legends. We don't know."

Acquaintances of Corcoran say they warned him that once he entered the Rectangle, he would never make it back out, but he did not listen, and was drawn there to investigate tales of cheap tuition. It wasn't until Corcoran failed to show up in the summer of 1978 for an annual camping trip, however, that the reality of his disappearance began to sink in.

"I knew then he wasn't coming back," friend Craig Wilkins said. "He got sucked into this alternative reality, and he can't get out. I'll never see my friend again."

The mysterious region has, according to some accounts, swallowed thousands of potentially interesting and active lives.

As haunting as his story may be, Kevin Corcoran is only one of hundreds of people who, for unknown reasons, have had years or even decades of their lives utterly fade away in the mystifying region. Still, most cases lack any hard evidence: The few known photos from inside the Rectangle show only a flat, blank emptiness, stretching unremarkably to the horizon.

What happens in the lives of those who venture within remains a mystery.

Matthew Hume, a researcher at the University of Chicago who studies the Rectangle, said the bizarre phenomena associated with the region might

never be fully understood.

"As best we can tell, those who go beyond the area's borders for too long are knocked off course by the low external pressure to succeed," Hume said. "But after that, it's as if they fall off the face of the earth. There are cases of an entire Greyhound bus full of people entering the Rectangle and vanishing into obscurity."

Experts estimate that several million tons of consumer goods disappear into the region per year. Yet, almost nothing, save for the odd Sunday morning church broadcast, is ever detected coming back out.

Still, some travelers have returned to tell their tales. The most frequent occurrence reported by those who have survived the Kansas Rectangle is extreme disorientation and an unsettling perception of time distortion.

Boulder, CO resident Ned Frome entered the Rectangle in 2005 while en route to visiting family in St. Louis.

"I had been driving for hours, but it was as though I hadn't moved at all," Frome said. "I had no idea which direction I was going in. No matter where I looked, everything was exactly the same and before long, normal navigation was almost impossible."

"I'll never go in there again," Frome added with a shudder. "I felt like I was going insane."

Kyle Manheim, a photocopier salesman from Minneapolis who was once inside the Kansas Rectangle for two weeks on business, said he could not clearly remember any events from the time period.

"There isn't a single thing I can recall that would be worth mentioning," Manheim said. "I know I was there, but that's about it. It's like those 14 days never happened."

While many strongly believe in the eerie, soul-destroying powers of the Kansas Rectangle, the dearth of concrete evidence has drawn its share of skeptics.

"If you look at the statistics, there's nothing going on in that area that doesn't happen every day in the rest of the country," said Stephen Finney, a long-haul trucker who is familiar with the region. "What happened to Kevin Corcoran could have happened in Iowa, Indiana, or even Michigan.

"It's just a myth," Finney added. "This whole 'Kansas' place people talk about simply does not exist."