

# Esquire

<http://www.esquire.com/features/escape-kinross-prison-flipbook-0808>

## The Escape From Kinross Prison: An Inside Look

For nearly two years, four convicts dug a tunnel under and out of a prison in Michigan's upper peninsula. Here's how they did it.

By **Brian Mockenhaupt**



### Kinross Prison

Built as Air Force barracks during the cold war, the three-story housing units are more dormitory than cell block, and not nearly as tunnel-proof as the state's newer prisons. The eastern end of Easy Unit, left, where the inmates dug the tunnel, is very near the fences.

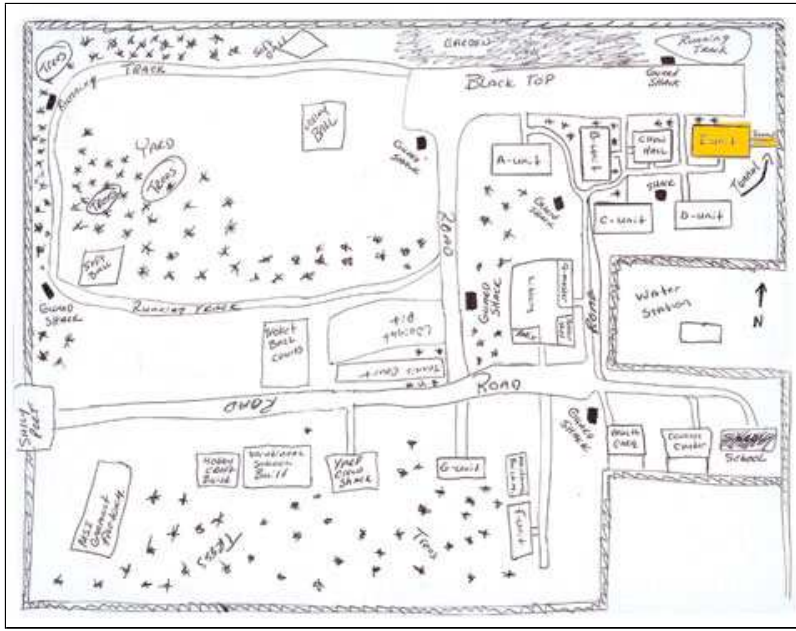
Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design



### The Inmates

Meet the men who attempted to escape from Kinross Prison. From upper left corner, counterclockwise: Joe Hoffman, Tim Murphy, Michael Shavkey, and Michael Spooner.

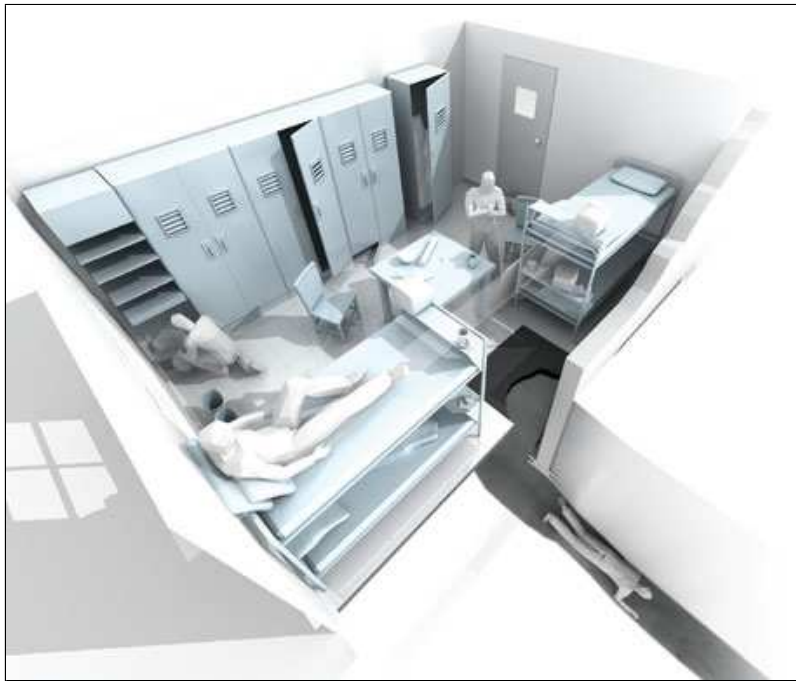
Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design



### The Map

Kinross state prison has no guard towers, but two high fences. The tunnel shown in yellow, while the most difficult option, offered the best chances for slipping away undetected. Over two years, Hoffman and Murphy painstakingly worked their plan, from arranging to be moved to the far corner of Easy Unit to dirt disposal. Not to mention keeping the whole thing totally secret.

Photo Credit: Tim Murphy



### The Prison Cell

After months of gathering intelligence, paying off inmates, and gaining the trust of the guards, the inmates move into the cell -- or "house," as they call it -- one of just two rooms from which a tunnel escape would be feasible.

Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design



### The Hiding Spots

Each room is shaken down at least once a month, sometimes more. They meticulously hide their tools, just as they would weapons or drugs.

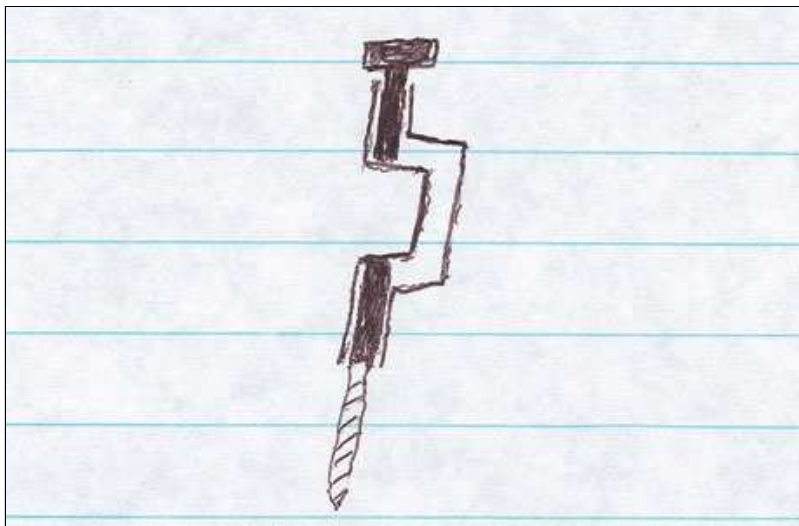
Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design



### The Lookout Perch

Perched on his bunk, Spooner serves as the lookout for the tunnel work. Standing by the door and peeking through the window -- "jigging" -- would bring immediate suspicion.

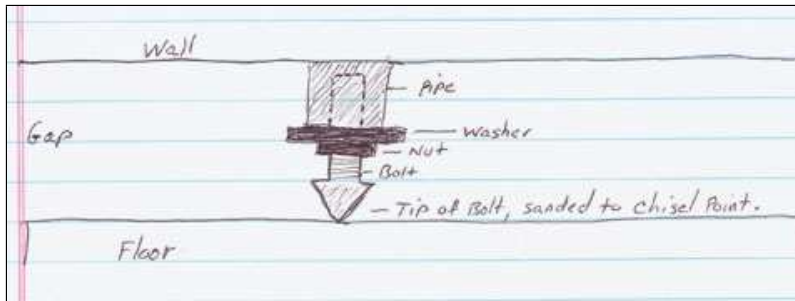
Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design



### The Tools: A Manual Hand Drill

Hoffman was inventive, fashioning found objects into implements of escape. In order to crack the thick concrete floor, Hoffman created a number of tools, like this manual hand drill, fashioned from a masonry drill bit and part of a chair leg.

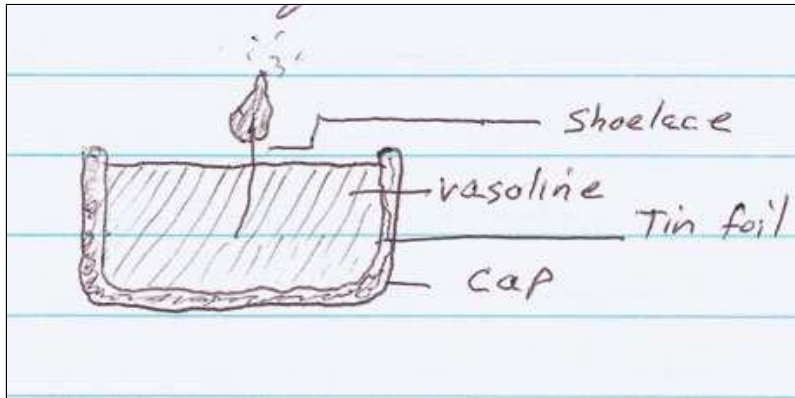
Photo Credit: Joe Hoffman



### The Tools: A Chiseled Bar Spreader

This crude jack, dubbed the "chiseled bar spreader," was used to widen the hole created by the hand drill. Each turn of the nut drove the pointed bolt tip into the concrete.

Photo Credit: Joe Hoffman



### The Tools: "Fire and Ice"

With the hand drill and bar spreader unable to widen the hole in the floor, they turned to a new plan: "fire and ice." The idea was to get the floor hot, then cool it off, hoping the rapid change in temperature would crack the cement.

Photo Credit: Joe Hoffman



### The Hole

After trying, and failing, to break through the seven-inch concrete floor, the inmates use brute force, finally smashing through the floor with a hundred-pound weight, drawing the attention of other inmates.



### Late December 2006

A metal conduit pipe with electrical wires runs through the middle of the hole. Hoffman saws through, and Shavkey rewires it using an extension cord. Murphy distracts the guard during the brief power outage.

Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design



### January 1, 2007

Just after midnight, Hoffman sucks in his breath, squeezes through the tiny opening, and drops into the hole for the first time.

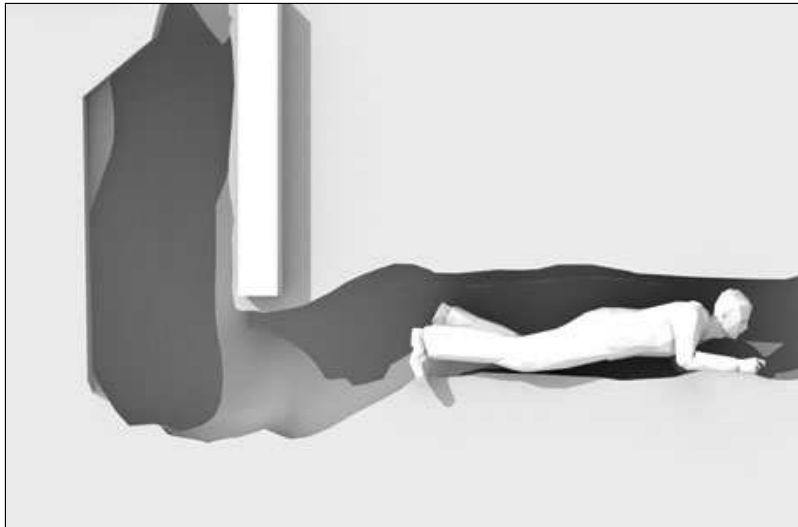
Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design



### The Trouble with Sand

The inmates store the sandbags in the wall lockers during digging operations, then pack them back into the tunnel by morning, so the room is a mess after each night's work. The crew scrubs the walls, bunks, and lockers; sweeps and mops the floor; then showers.

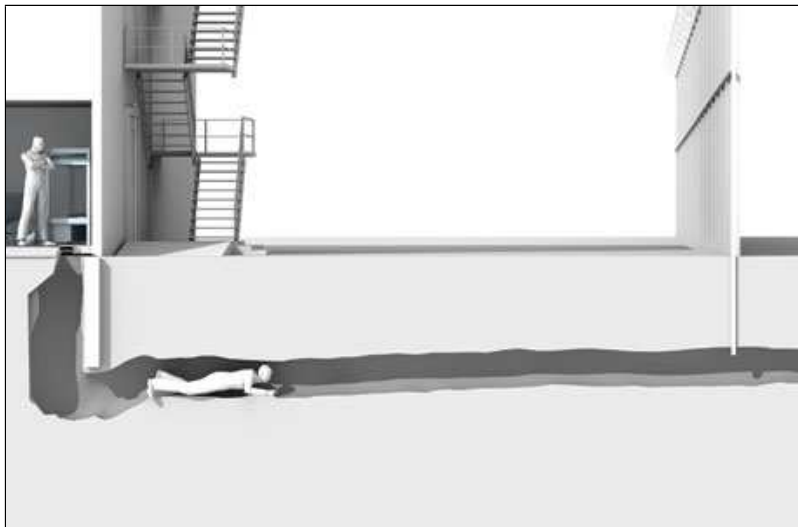
Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design



### Mid-January 2007

A section of the tunnel ceiling collapses near the foundation, dropping several pounds of dirt onto Hoffman, the first of many cave-ins.

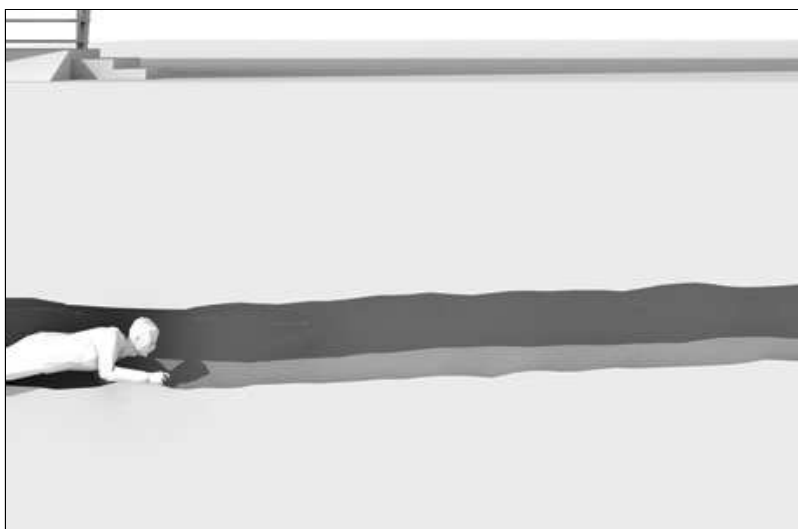
Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design



### February 2007

They reach the halfway point, the first fence, twenty-one feet out. Hoffman clips it with his digging tool, a cereal bowl, and wonders if he's just triggered the prison's motion and vibration sensors.

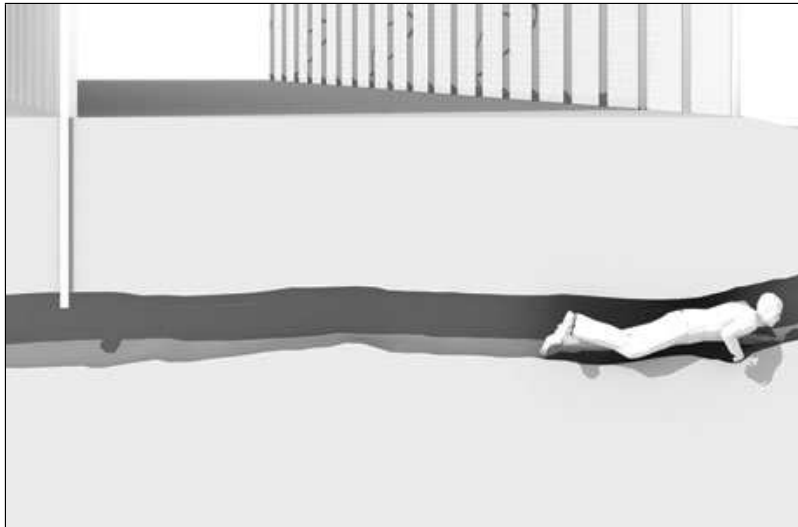
Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design



### January to March 2007

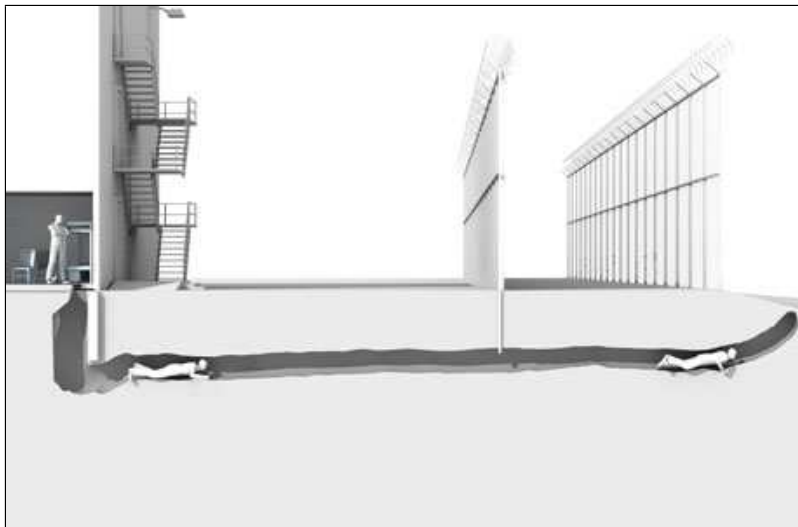
Hoffman serves as the designated digger. Spooner can't fit through the hole. Shavkey is too claustrophobic. So is Murphy -- after his sister locked him in a toy box as a boy -- but he serves time in the tunnel loading and unloading the bags. With hundreds of bags of dirt packed in the tunnel, it takes three hours just to unload them for a night's digging. By the end, a full digging shift lasts eight to ten hours.

Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design

**March 2007**

By now, Murphy and Hoffman are dumping several bags of dirt every day. Hoffman reaches the second fence. Roving patrols pass by overhead every few minutes. The plan: They will wait for their window, scurry from the hole, then cover it with cardboard wrapped in a white sheet, blending with the snow. By the time the next guard passes, they will be across the field, hiding in trees.

Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design

**March 17, 2007**

The tunnel is finished, but they still haven't found the getaway driver. The escape is delayed one week and the inmates are caught.

Photo Credit: Bryan Christie Design

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