

AN UNUSUAL LATENT

Officer Allen Hafner  
Howard County Police Department  
3410 Courthouse Drive  
Ellicott City, MD 21043

In the pre-dawn hours one morning in early March, 1990, I responded to a burglary at a video rental store in the rural village of West Friendship, MD. This incident was a typical "smash and grab" in which the suspect broke the glass out of the front door, took an armload of items, and left before anyone could respond to the alarm.

As in most cases of this type, there was very little in the way of physical evidence. While photographing the scene, I noticed a broken chocolate candybar laying on the floor near the base of an overturned video display rack. No candybars are sold in this store and its location indicated that the suspect dropped it when he bumped into the display rack on his way out the door.

I started to bag the candybar as evidence but noticed some faint ridges on the surface of the chocolate. I attempted to side-light the latent for photography but could not create enough contrast to make it visible. Fearing the latent would melt trying to get it back the the lab, I decided to try lifting it at the scene. Using the softest brush I had and the least amount of black powder possible, I was able to develop four distinct latents on the two small pieces of chocolate. Keeping the chocolate exposed to the freezing air blowing in the open front door, I was able to use tape to lift the latents. Photo 1 shows the candybar and Photo 2 shows one of the latent lifts.

