On June 11, 1962, bank robbers Frank Morris and brothers Clarence and John Anglin escaped the confines of the prison walls at Alcatraz and set off on the frigid waters of the San Francisco Bay in a homemade raft. Up until this day, it is not known whether or not the three of them made it to land or if they ended up somewhere out in the Pacific. The men were never heard from, and their bodies were never found. They disappeared and left a cold case that has mystified law enforcement for half a century.

Now, for the first time, Dutch scientists Olivier Hoes, Rolf Hut and Fedor Baart are using their work on flood risk assessment and innovative 3-D technology mapping tides to prove that the three men could have successfully escaped, but only if their timing was perfect and specific factors were in place. Experts work feverishly to reconstruct the raft and paddles from period raincoats and homemade glue that the Anglin brothers and Morris would have used. With a trio of paddlers weighing the same as the men, the raft is plunged into the waters off of Alcatraz Island and theories are put to the test. A window of as few as six minutes could make all the difference in the tides. If the escapees cast off between 11:30 p.m. and midnight, 3D models prove they could’ve reached a beach at the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge as the outgoing tide slackened. But if the prisoners launched before or after that window, the brutal currents would’ve swept them out into the endless waters of the Pacific where they’d have surely died.

Alcatraz: Escaping the Rock uses recreations and archival material to tell the story of one of history’s greatest, most mysterious prison escapes. It also employs modern science and reconstructed rafts using actual period raincoats to sort fact from fiction, establishing for the very first time that escape was entirely possible.

CREDITS
Director: Steven Hoggard
Producer: Daphna Rubin

Images: BTMedia/Shutterstock.com (Alcatraz); Ensuper/Shutterstock.com (texture).