

ASSATEAGUE ISLAND



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The sound of surf along a broad and empty beach, the silence of a reedy marsh, the cries of seabirds and waterfowl—this is the music of nature heard on Assateague Island. The sand moves constantly in the wind, building up grain by grain into dunes that afford protection from storms. On higher portions of the island there are scattered patches of woodland where deer, foxes, and raccoons find refuge. In sheltered bays and tidal inlets, oysters and clams are harvested. Here on the ocean the sun and the clouds seem close at hand and the sunsets are spectacular.

Assateague Island National Seashore is on the Eastern Shore peninsula of Maryland and Virginia. Since the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, it is only 86 miles from Norfolk, Va.; it is 107 miles south of Wilmington, Del., and less than 150 miles from Baltimore, Md., and Washington, D.C. More than 8 million people live within a 3-hour drive of Assateague, which is the largest unspoiled stretch of Atlantic coast between Cape Cod, Mass., and Cape Hatteras, N.C.

The many unusual features of the island led to the establishment by Congress of the National Seashore. Perhaps the greatest asset of this long, narrow barrier reef—separated from the mainland by the shallow waters of Chincoteague Bay—is its 35 miles of broad, sandy beach with a gently sloping underwater shelf that makes for fine swimming.

Water temperatures are moderate during the usual vacation season and well into autumn. Surf fishing is excellent from June to October; small numbers of intrepid casters have been visiting the island for many years.



Assateague can now be reached over two highway bridges, one from Sinepuxent Neck, Md., near the northern end, and the other from the town of Chincoteague, Va., near the southern tip. The latter leads to Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The refuge occupies 9,450 acres of Assateague's total land area of 19,100 acres. As part of the National Seashore, it will retain its character as one of the sanctuaries for waterfowl on the Atlantic Flyway, the migration route that stretches from the Arctic Ocean to the Caribbean Sea. The refuge contains the highest ground on the island, with considerable areas of pine and oak woods, freshwater ponds, and bordering salt marshes. There is good feeding here for ducks and geese, and migrating waterfowl stop here by the thousands from October to April. One of the most magnificent North American birds, the greater snow goose, arrives about the beginning of November and many winter on the island. A triangular formation of these big white birds with their distinctive black wingtips is an unforgettable sight.

In addition to waterfowl and some 30 to 40 species of shore-birds, the refuge is inhabited by the small, exotic sika deer. Almost every year the deer population grows too large for the available habitat so that hunting is usually allowed in October, when several hundred deer may be taken by gun and by bow and arrow.

The most widely known four-footed inhabitants of Assateague are its wild ponies. No one knows where the forebears of these appealing little beasts came from, though it is legendary that they were survivors of the wreck of a Spanish galleon. At any rate, they are now as popular with visitors as the bears of Yellowstone National Park, and some of the boldest beg for sugar along the road that leads to the beach. Their ordinary diet is marsh grass and bayberry leaves. For some years the herd has been managed by the Chincoteague Fire Department, which holds an annual round-up or "pony-penning" during the last week in July.



THE DEVELOPMENT

Public-use development of Assateague National Seashore lies in the future. The National Park Service has a land acquisition program involving more than 3,500 owners of property on the island. It is hoped that within the next few years this program will be completed and that there will be facilities adequate to take care of several million visitors annually. Long-range plans call for a careful balance between conservation of the natural beauty of the island and maximum possible recreational enjoyment by the public. The future has already been tentatively mapped out. Maryland has acquired 688 acres and has begun development of visitor facilities where the Sinepuxent Neck Bridge reaches the northern section of the island.

South of Assateague State Park, a concession area—with overnight accommodations, food services, and recreational facilities—is planned for operation by private business. Although there will be visitor facilities elsewhere on the island, the northern end will be left in its natural state. It will be reached by foot and boat only and will be reserved for beachcombers and fishermen. Only drinking water, sanitary facilities, and bayside boat docks are planned.

Leading south from the Maryland Bridge, a seashore road is planned to connect with the Virginia Bridge, passing several areas of future development—probably in the vicinity of Lumber Marsh, Sugar Point, and Green Run Bay. At these areas visitors may expect to find parking, bathhouses, beach access, comfort stations, water, picnic facilities, and campgrounds. There will probably be a marina and dock for visitors crossing the bay by boat.



Near the mainland end of the Maryland Bridge, a visitor contact station and park headquarters will be built. Those who stop will realize that Assateague is a place where land and sea struggle for mastery. On the island itself they will follow trails with interpretive markers explaining the plant and animal life of the area. Most of all, by walking on miles of clean, sun-washed sand, they will discover nature undisturbed; and they will find a needed escape from the noisy world that exists so close at hand. No matter how much man may build in steel and concrete, he will always find the source of his true strength in an unspoiled bit of wilderness.

—Jack Long

Assateague Island Today and Tomorrow The boundaries for this new National Seashore have been defined but there is much to be done before the National Park Service can develop and administer the area. Acquisition of private land is in progress, and a master plan is being developed to locate roads, overnight accommodations, camping, picnicking, and interpretive facilities, some of which may be available by 1967 or 1968. Succeeding developments will include bathhouses, beach shelters, marinas, park ranger stations and additional interpretive facilities, all designed to preserve the natural area while increasing visitor enjoyment.

About Your Visit Now At present, there is no road on Assateague Island connecting the Maryland and Virginia sections, although there are bridges at both ends of the island. To reach the Virginia section use U.S. 13 and Va. 175. To reach the Maryland section use U.S. 13, then either U.S. 50 or 113 and Md. 376 or 611. Assateague Island is about 2 hours driving time from Norfolk and about 3 hours from Washington, Baltimore, or Philadelphia.



Available Facilities Because the National Seashore was only recently authorized by Congress, there are presently no National Park Service facilities. However, there are minimum developed areas at each end of the island. MUCH OF THE LAND IS STILL IN PRIVATE OWNERSHIP—VISITORS ARE REMINDED TO RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF LANDOWNERS.

Maryland. Partially developed Assateague State Park occupies a 2-mile section of the island at the Maryland terminus of the bridge. Here are 250 parking spaces for day-use visitors, 150 spaces for camping trailers and campers' cars, water, a bathhouse and concession stand, and a swimming area. There is a fee for parking and camping. Nearby are privately operated campgrounds; and at Ocean City, just 6 miles away, is a highly developed resort.

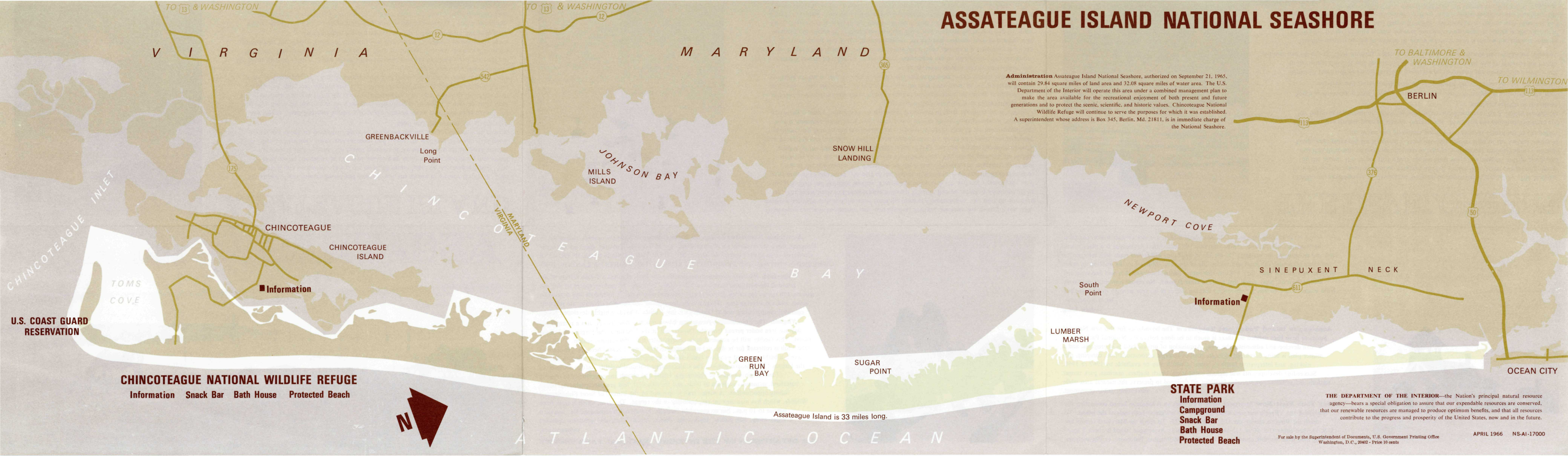
Virginia. The Chincoteague-Assateague Island Beach Authority operates a recreational day-use area under permit from the Department of the Interior at the Virginia end of the island. This facility will be acquired in its entirety after the 1966 summer season. Until that time a toll is collected for bridge and road access to that area. Located here are a concession stand, a bathhouse, and excellent beach and water activity areas. Within this area too are the famous Chincoteague ponies. The Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge occupies all of the Virginia section of Assateague Island and affords the opportunity to observe waterfowl, numerous varieties of birds, and the sika deer, and presents spectacular ocean fishing opportunities. A nature trail is operated by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, which has management responsibility of the refuge. The area, which is open from sunrise to 10 p.m., has no overnight facilities; however, Chincoteague, Va., less than 2 miles away, has motels, restaurants, stores, rental boats, and privately operated campgrounds.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ASSATEAGUE ISLAND



ASSATEAGUE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE



Administration Assateague Island National Seashore, authorized on September 21, 1965, will contain 29.84 square miles of land area and 32.08 square miles of water area. The U.S. Department of the Interior will operate this area under a combined management plan to make the area available for the recreational enjoyment of both present and future generations and to protect the scenic, scientific, and historic values. Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge will continue to serve the purposes for which it was established. A superintendent whose address is Box 345, Berlin, Md. 21811, is in immediate charge of the National Seashore.

CHINCOTEAGUE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Information Snack Bar Bath House Protected Beach

STATE PARK

Information
Campground
Snack Bar
Bath House
Protected Beach

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—bears a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

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Assateague Island is 33 miles long.