

ASSATEAGUE ISLAND

Assateague Island reflects many moods and contrasts. Its rhythms and patterns change from moment to moment and from season to season.

Summer is a mosaic of activity. Waves caress the glimmering beach as dune grass etches swirls in the sand. Bathers romp in the surf, and fishermen cast their lines and their hopes seaward. The laughter of frolicking children mingles with the cries of gulls and terns. The clap of a sudden thunderstorm, the drone of mosquitoes, the bite of a greenhead fly—these, too, must sometimes be accepted as part of the summer experience.

Autumn brings placid Indian-summer days, brisk nights, and fewer visitors. Green foliage shades to yellow, then to brown. The clamorous honking of southbound geese heralds the coming of winter as armadas of migrating waterfowl assemble in the bays. Most of them move south, and the tempo of island life slackens.

Winter storms assault the island with thunderous waves and biting winds. Morning fog sometimes shrouds the island; occasionally it is mantled by a blanket of snow.

Spring signals rebirth and renewal. Flowers awaken to splash color

ecosystem is an important marine nursery. In the shallows teeming with young salt-water fishes, long-legged wading birds stalk their prey. Invertebrate animals abound: snails, worms, mussels, and—in the marsh grass and in the air—insects.

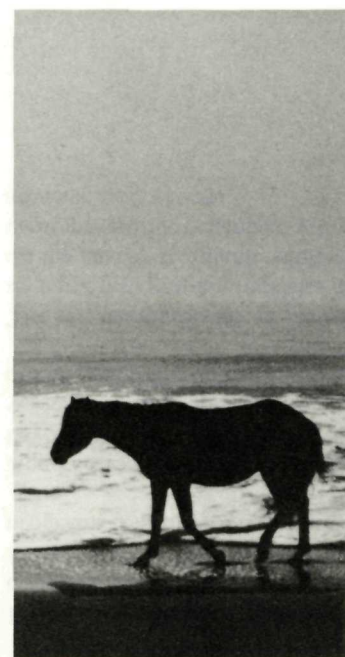
The oysters, clams and crabs that flourish in these waters have long provided food, income, and recreation to local citizens. Nowhere are the threads that bind all life together more apparent.

PONIES, DEER, AND FALCONS

Wild ponies roaming Assateague Island undoubtedly command a greater share of visitor attention than do the native animals. Legend romantically attributes their origin to horses that swam ashore from a wrecked Spanish galleon. Historical evidence now suggests that Eastern Shore planters imported horses to the mainland peninsula in the mid-1600's, and released some of them on the offshore islands to graze. During three centuries these ponies have adapted to the island's harsh environment. Today, they are stunted, shaggy, and sturdy. Marsh grasses and bayberry leaves supply the bulk of their food. There are now two herds on the island. The Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company owns the ponies in the Virginia section and perpetuates the traditional roundup and auction during the last week of July. The Park Service owns and manages the small Maryland herd.

on the landscape. Newborn appear, and the pace of activity quickens as the days grow longer.

Such are the moods of the place called Assateague.



Peregrine Falcon.

THE LAND AND ITS LIFE

Slender and low in profile, this 37-mile barrier strand is a link in a disarticulated chain of islands that hugs the middle Atlantic coastline. Interplay of wind and sea gave the island birth, and after thousands of years still nourishes and shapes it. The sea bears sand, the wind drifts it; together they mold a bulwark shielding the mainland shore from the full force of winter storms.

The island's resilient character is most dramatic where the land meets the sea. The beach face changes with each wave's advance and retreat, with each tidal surge, with each vagary of weather. Hidden in the wet sand and nurtured by the food-laden water, clams and mole crabs abound. Shore birds forage the beach in pursuit of these and lesser animals.

Behind the beach, wind fashions the sand into dunes. Beach grass anchors and stabilizes the dunes, trapping sand and building a barrier that buffers the rest of the island from storms. Tolerant of salt spray and shifting sand, beach grass is vulnerable to human feet; trampling it may lead to loss of the protective barrier.

Grassy knolls, or fragment dunes, characterize natural sand buildup. Low spots in the frontal dune system allow a stormy

Sika deer—a miniature Japanese elk—were introduced to Assateague in 1923. Smaller than the Eastern white-tailed deer, which is native to Maryland and Virginia, these shy and elusive animals thrive in the woodlands and marshes of the island.

In autumn, Assateague attracts a concentration of migratory peregrine falcons. These swift and noble birds of prey, now threatened by reproductive failure from pesticide contamination, funnel into Assateague from the Arctic, then follow a narrow corridor down the Atlantic coast. Falconers pursuing the ancient "sport of kings" prize the peregrine, but a seashore regulation that recognizes this bird's current status as an endangered species prohibits its capture on the island.



sea to spend its energy by washing over the island. It was long believed that this storm overwash was detrimental to barrier-island ecology and destructive to the stability of the island itself. It is now recognized that, on the contrary, barrier-island integrity and dynamics are partly dependent on overwash. In some areas, however, in order to protect visitor facilities from overwash, sand fences have been erected to catch windblown sand, thus elevating the frontal barrier.

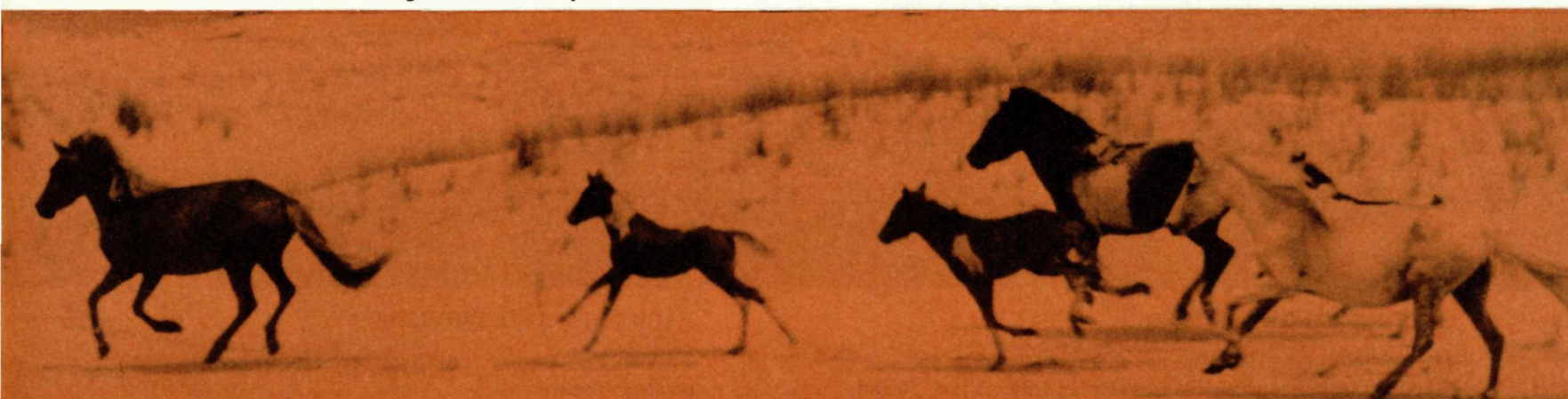
Beyond the dunes the beach grass relinquishes its foothold to a variety of shrubs and trees. Bayberry, wax myrtle, sumac, and other shrubs cap an older, richer, and more stable dune system; pine woodlands with mixed hardwoods occupy scattered tracts of higher ground. These inland zones, sheltered from salt spray by the newer frontal dunes, harbor deer, foxes, rabbits, and birds.

Fingers of open water, known locally as "guts," pierce and lace the band of marsh grass that fringes the western side of the island, thus linking the marsh community with the shallow bays that separate the island from the mainland. This marsh-bay ecosystem, where fresh water from the land mixes with tidal intrusions, pulsates with life. Awesome in its productivity, the marsh is host to a myriad of organisms, from microscopic algae to ospreys. This

MAN ON ASSATEAGUE

Assateague Island has long felt the footsteps of man. Indians hunted and fished on the island, which they knew as the "place across." Early settlers introduced grazing stock. Watermen and hunters plied their trades. Shipwrecks scattered along the island's length attest to a heavy toll of commercial shipping claimed by offshore shoals. Later came a lighthouse, lifesaving stations, settlements. More recently, developers subdivided and sold the land. But a 1962 storm shattered their elaborate dreams and schemes. In 1965, after a comprehensive study by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, the U.S. Congress authorized Assateague Island as a national seashore.

As a unit of America's National Park System, Assateague Island embraces a fabric of natural and scenic values that provide scientific interest, esthetic satisfaction, spiritual refreshment, and superb recreational opportunities. Most visitors are lured by the island's sparkling beach, with its gently sloping bottom, mild surf, and moderate temperatures. But the forests and marshes also invite discovery. The seashore's recreational value depends on the integrity of its natural assets, and use of the island must always be tempered with awareness of natural constraints that exist here.



ASSATEAGUE ISLAND

PETS PROHIBITED IN VIRGINIA

FUTURE PLANS

Development of Assateague Island National Seashore will proceed cautiously. Planning must recognize the fragile nature of a barrier island and the environmental implications of visitor pressures. Management must balance recreational use with resource protection, to insure that man's activities are consonant with nature's restraints.

The island will be carefully zoned to sustain various kinds and intensities of recreational uses. Several sites will offer day-use and limited overnight facilities. Other zones will appeal more to visitors seeking solitude and respite from a crowded and noisy world.

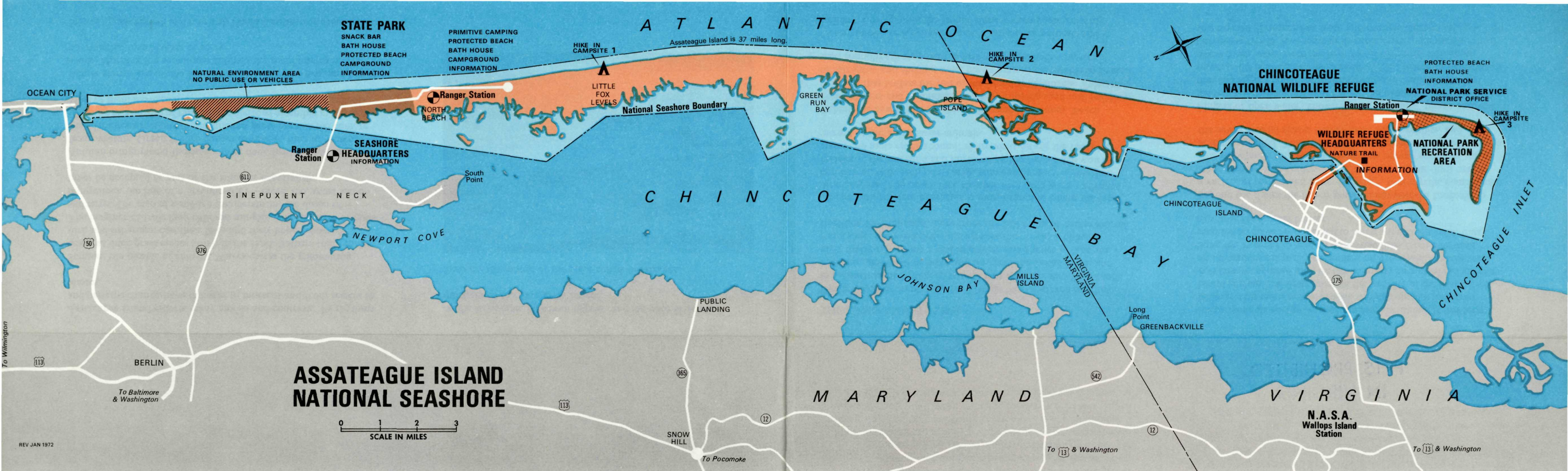
Above all, the island will be managed to provide recreational opportunities that will encourage you to renew your ties with the earth.

YOUR SAFETY. Do not allow your visit to be spoiled by an accident. Efforts have been made to provide for your safety, but there are still hazards which require your alertness and vigilance. Exercise common sense and caution.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents,
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20402 — Price 10 cents



GETTING TO THE ISLAND

The two ends of the island are not connected by road. The Maryland section is accessible from Ocean City via U.S. 50 and Md. 611. From points north and south take U.S. 113 to Berlin, then follow Md. 376 east to 611 and turn south to Assateague. To reach the Virginia section take Va. 175 eastward from U.S. 13 and follow the signs through Chincoteague to Assateague.

ISLAND MANAGEMENT

Three government agencies administer land within the authorized offshore boundaries of Assateague Island National Seashore. Each manages the resources under its jurisdiction within the scope of its basic mission and policies.

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, administered by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife of the U.S. Department of the Interior, occupies most of the Virginia portion of the island. Though the refuge is part of the national seashore, it retains its identity and its character as a sanctuary for birds, particularly migratory waterfowl using the Atlantic Flyway. Fresh-water impoundments and a bayside zone of salt marsh support enormous flocks of ducks, geese, and swans from autumn until early spring. Greater snow geese, the species for which the refuge was primarily established, begin arriving in early November and remain until early March. Summer residents include egrets, herons, ibises, skimmers, and many species of shore birds.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources manages 688 acres at the road entrance to the Maryland end as Assateague State Park. Oriented to intensive recreational use, it offers camping and day-use facilities.

The National Park Service administers the rest of the Maryland section of the island and Toms Cove Hook—the narrow 5-mile finger of sand forming the southern end of Assateague—chiefly for recreational use. A superintendent, whose address is Route 2, Box 294, Berlin, MD 21811, is in immediate charge of the national seashore.

FACILITIES AND SERVICES

National Park Service facilities at both ends of the island are presently limited.

MARYLAND SECTION

Information, exhibits, and publications are available at the visitor center on the mainland end of the access bridge.

Assateague State Park, a 2-mile section of the island opposite the bridge, offers a campground, day-use bathhouses, protected beach, and food services. The State park prohibits pets.

Immediately south of the State park, the National Park Service operates a small primitive campground and day-use facilities, including a bathhouse and picnic tables. Lifeguards are on duty in summer.

Interpretive activities, including conducted walks, recreational demonstrations, and evening programs, are scheduled regularly from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Park rangers present programs to groups, on request, throughout the year.

Road access for conventional cars is restricted, but a sand trail beyond the end of the hard road permits travel by over-sand vehicles. A short spur road opposite the campground leads to an old ferry landing on the bay side.

The two campgrounds on the island do not meet the phenomenal demand for camping facilities, but there are private campgrounds on the nearby mainland. Walk-in campsites for hikers and a campground for organized groups are available on the island by advance reservation.

VIRGINIA SECTION

A paved road extends 5 miles from the town of Chincoteague through the national wildlife refuge to the beach. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife maintains two nature trails and two wildlife auto trails just off this route. Another trail leads to the Assateague Lighthouse. The Bureau also sponsors boat cruises. Information and programs are available at refuge headquarters.

Facilities administered by the National Park Service comprise an information and ranger station, bathhouse, amphitheater for evening programs, picnic area, and campground—available by advance reservation—for organized youth groups. Lifeguards are on duty and interpretive services are available in summer.

A gravel spur road provides access to a 2-mile section of Toms Cove Hook, where beach vehicles are permitted.

There are no public camping facilities at the southern end of the island. Private campgrounds, motels, restaurants, stores, and rental boats are at Chincoteague.

This section of the island is closed from 10 p.m. until daylight except to holders of special permits for fishing or beach parties. Permits are available at the ranger office.



REGULATIONS

Because of the fragility of the island's ecosystem, vehicles of any kind are confined to marked routes. Over-sand vehicles may travel a portion of the beach, but access is limited to designated dune crossings. Only registered motor vehicles are permitted on the national seashore.

When the seashore was established, more than 3,500 individuals owned land on Assateague; some land on the island is still in private ownership. Trespass laws apply. Please respect the rights of landowners.

The wild ponies may appear tame, but they can be dangerous; enjoy them from a respectful distance. Do not pet, tease, or feed them. Their natural foods are more healthful, and if you approach too closely, they may bite or kick.

Pets must be on leashes no longer than 10 feet, or otherwise under physical control. They are not permitted on protected beaches, and are prohibited in all parts of Assateague State Park.

Air mattresses and other flotation devices are prohibited on protected beaches. Their use is discouraged elsewhere because they are considered to be dangerous.

Camping or overnight sleeping is permitted only in designated campgrounds.

Plants and animals all play vital roles in their communities. You may collect a limited number of dead and empty shells for noncommercial purposes. Fish and shellfish may be taken in designated zones. Hunting of certain game species is permitted in accordance with regulations. Otherwise, please leave living things—both animals and plants—undisturbed.