



Assateague Island Times

Winter 2003-2004

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Contact Us:

Web Site: www.nps.gov/asis

National Park Service
Barrier Island Visitor Center
7206 National Seashore Lane
Berlin, MD 21811
410-641-1441

Toms Cove Visitor Center
PO Box 38
Chincoteague, VA 23336
757-336-6577

US Fish & Wildlife Service
Herbert H. Bateman Educational
and Administrative Center
Center (VA) 757-336-6122

Maryland State Parks
Assateague State Park (MD)
410-641-2120

Emergency

Maryland
Ranger Station
410-641-3030
After Hours - Dial 911

Virginia
Ranger Station
757-336-6577
After Hours - Dial 911

Thank You!!

The National Seashore staff thanks the many visitors who drop a bill or some loose change into the Barrier Island or Toms Cove Visitor Centers' donation boxes. These funds have made aquariums, exhibits, special programs and many free publications possible.

Memories by the Sea

Assateague Island National Seashore is an inspirational place. For many, their "memories by the sea" will be treasured for years to come. We invite you to record your impressions and create a memory of your own.



- Joelle Zapotosky

Assateague

Silent nights,
A moonstruck gaze.
Waves crashing,
Waves splashing,
Waves dashing on to the shore.

Day's ending,
Tomorrow's beginning,
Time slipping
Time creeping,
Time leaving me wanting more.

I leave alone,
But take a part
Of the beach,
Of the sand,
Of the waves with me.

A small memento,
A tiny shell,
Memories so small
So fragile,
Of something we all can see.

I stretch out on the sand,
The waves tickling my feet.
A day not soon forgotten
A day spent at the beach,
A day we'll all remember.

Hard to keep from thinking
Of when I must depart
Through the fall,
Through the spring,
Through winter and December.

- Tyler P., Age 14

My Assateague

On Assateague Island, from in my car
That's where the wild ponies are
But when I try to look at them
They always seem too far.

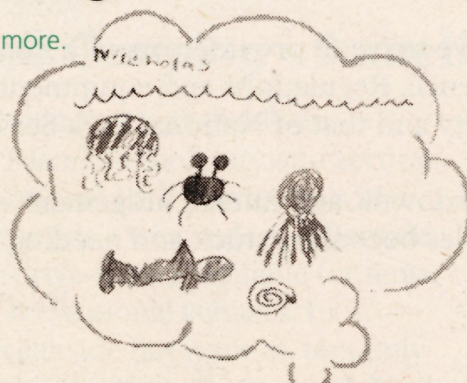
The waves are even sometimes odd
In the way they hit the beach
Surfers go there, kayakers too
It's a special place for me and you.

The stars above are big and bright
We have a telescope at night
To spot the Milky Way with stars so shiney
Even though they're very tiny.

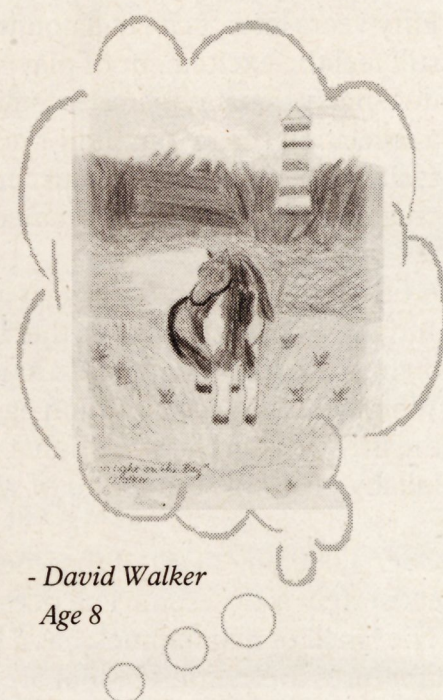
I hear the swirling winds above me.
I hear the rippling grass beneath me.
I see the terns flying above me.

I think that this is a great place to be.

- Juliet Pawelski, Age 9



- Nicholas Shear



- David Walker
Age 8

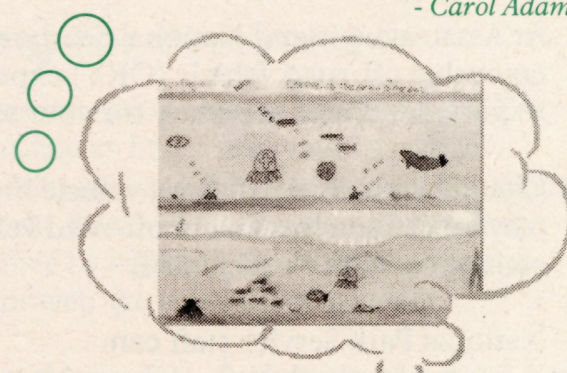
Assateague Dream

I love the wind blowing in my face
I love to see the bay
I love to come to Assateague
Here's where I long to stay.

The rangers and their campfire night
The ghost crabs and the beach
It takes me five hours to get here
Thank God it's within reach.

Leave me here at Assateague!
I don't want to go home;
I'll find a niche in Assateague
And never will I roam.

- Carol Adams



- Alicia Gregas





The Voice of Assateague

Welcome to Assateague Island National Seashore! We hope you enjoy your visit. The theme of this newspaper is "Memories by the Sea." Hopefully, you and your family will create some lasting memories of your own while you are here. Please take advantage of the many programs and activities offered. We'd like to help you have some memorable experiences.

Musing on the theme, my thoughts slipped way back to Memorial Day weekends as a child. Growing up in a relatively isolated farming community in Northern California presented me with the decidedly mixed blessing of a large extended family. Over Memorial Day weekend a multifamily caravan headed for the Mendocino coast. We always stayed at Van Damme State Park and we always met the same ranger. What was neat was he usually remembered our names! Of course, the fact that we just about filled up his park may have had something to do with that.

Fifty years later, I can still conjure up the musty smell of a foggy redwood forest. I still feel the excitement of playing kick-the-can or hide-and-seek with a couple of dozen cousins. I remember feeling so important helping Dad put up the tent. It was a revelation that Mom didn't need all the trappings of a household kitchen to make really great meals. A two-burner stove and a fire worked with experience and skill created food that always seemed to actually taste better than home cooked.

A tide-pool walk with a ranger at low tide instilled a lifelong fascination with the sea and the amazing creatures that live in it. A campfire program put on by a scuba-diving club introduced us to a way to visit those creatures up close and personally. When you ran out of salmon eggs, canned corn would fool at least the stupider of the tiny trout in the stream that ran through the campground. Finally, the best lullaby of all was the sound of waves crashing against the cliffs.

Over 3,000 miles east of that memorable place is another, Assateague Island. The ecosystem is different. The ocean has a different name but they're really connected. The smell of marsh muck has a little more bite to it than musty redwood. The creatures look different, but are every bit as fascinating and serve many of the same ecological functions.

So, feel free to make some memories. Canoe the marsh. Swim near ponies (not with them, please). Cook some food with that smoky taste. Take a walk, or a paddle, or a wade with a ranger. Let the sound of the waves put you to sleep. Who knows how long your memories will last?

- Mike Hill, Superintendent
Assateague Island National Seashore

If You Care, You Won't Share

Assateague's wildlife inhabit many different environments. Mammals, reptiles, crustaceans, mollusks, fish and over 250 species of birds call the ocean, beach, dunes, forest, salt marsh and bay home.

Please remember, interaction (including feeding) between visitors and wild animals is strictly prohibited and often dangerous for all involved. If you care, you won't share. Deer, horses and other creatures may appear tame, but they are capable of inflicting serious injury and may spread disease. In the past year two children have been kicked by horses and suffered injuries. For your safety, enjoy wildlife from a distance.



Your actions may have consequences long after you leave. Some animals pick up the habit of begging near roadsides. This can have tragic consequences. *Since 1982, 25 horses have been hit and killed by cars.*

Assateague Island is an oasis of habitat for countless wild creatures in this world of ever-shrinking natural places. Take pictures and memories, but do not take the "wild" from wildlife.

Off-Road Vehicle Update

At Assateague Island National Seashore we strive to provide you with a safe and enjoyable off-road vehicle (ORV) experience. Regulations and equipment requirements are necessary for your safety and that of National Park Service staff.

Changing beach conditions, vehicle breakdowns, and human judgement errors may occasionally result in off-road vehicles becoming stuck and needing assistance. In these instances,

National Park Service staff **can**:

- Assist with removing sand from around the tires
- Deflate tires
- Use traction devices such as boards
- Make a phone call on your behalf to friends/family
- Provide information regarding local towing services

National Park Service staff **cannot**:

- Winch or pull the vehicle out
- Recommend a towing company

Please be prepared when using the ORV zones on Assateague Island. Carry the required safety equipment, adequate food, water and clothing, and know the park rules and regulations.



The Assateague Island Times is produced by the staff of Assateague Island National Seashore. Editing and design by Gretchen Knapp, Interpretive Park Ranger. Funding provided by a donation from Eastern National, the park's cooperating association.



Hiking

Assateague Island has a variety of paved and unpaved trails open for hiking. There are also 37 miles of beach to wander!

Maryland

Life of the Forest Trail - 1/2 mile loop.
Life of the Dunes Trail - 1/2 mile loop.
Life of the Marsh Trail - 1/2 mile loop.

Virginia

Service Road - 7 miles.
Wildlife Loop - 3.2 mile loop.
Woodland Trail - 1.6 mile loop.
Swan Cove Trail - 1.25 miles.
Black Duck Marsh Trail - 1.0 mile.
Freshwater Marsh Trail - 1.0 mile loop.
Lighthouse Trail - 1/2 mile loop.



Surf Fishing

Surf fishing has been a popular recreational activity for generations. With a few basic tips on seasons, conditions, equipment, species and regulations, anglers can have an enjoyable experience and create a few memories. Fishing is prohibited within the lifeguarded beach area. Stop by the visitor center and pick up a surf fishing brochure and current regulations.

Shell Collecting

Shell collecting is a popular way to enjoy Assateague's beaches. To ensure a supply of shells for beach dwelling organisms and future visitors, please limit collecting to one gallon or less of *unoccupied* shells.

When It's Not a Beach Day, Try These Ideas

Enjoy exhibits, touch tables, and bookstores in the Toms Cove, Chincoteague Refuge and Barrier Island visitor centers.

Walk the Life of Assateague nature trails in Maryland and the Swan Cove, Woodland, Lighthouse, Freshwater Marsh and Wildlife Loop trails in Virginia.

Drive the Assateague to Crisfield 'Beach to Bay Indian Trail.' Discover rich regional history in several museums, small towns and state parks.

Visit the Salisbury Zoo and Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art - both small but outstanding!

Explore charming Chincoteague and its museums, and NASA's Wallops Island Visitor Center.

Ranger-Guided Programs

A variety of ranger-guided programs are offered seasonally to encourage visitors of all ages to enjoy and learn more about the barrier island environment. Check at the Toms Cove (VA) or Barrier Island (MD) Visitor Centers.



Canoeing, Kayaking, Boating

Explore Assateague's water habitat and get a different perspective on your park! Bring your own watercraft or rent one from nearby local companies or the park concessionaire in Maryland (canoes). Canoes and kayaks may be launched from designated areas on Assateague. Careful consideration should be given to weather conditions and tidal currents. Federal regulations require a personal flotation device for each person in a watercraft. Check at the Barrier Island or Toms Cove Visitor Center for more information.

Off-Road Vehicles

There are 12 miles of beach in Maryland and a small section of beach in Virginia open to off-road vehicles. An annual off-road vehicle permit may be purchased for \$70. Specific equipment is required. Be aware of closures during the busy summer season. Check at the Toms Cove Visitor Center (VA) or the Ranger Station/Campground Office (MD) for details.

Biking

Biking on Assateague is great way to explore the island and avoid summer traffic and parking problems.

Maryland

Cyclists may explore miles of paved bike path from the bridge parking lot, west of the Verazzano Bridge, over the bike bridge and along Bayberry Drive and Oceanside Campground.

Virginia

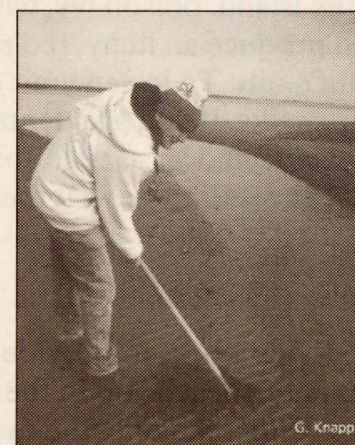
A paved bike path leads from the town of Chincoteague to Assateague Island. Wildlife Loop - 3.2 mile loop.
Woodland Trail - 1.6 mile loop.
Swan Cove Trail - 1.25 miles.
Black Duck Marsh Trail - 1.0 mile.

Swimming, Surfing

Experience Assateague's ocean habitat! During the summer, lifeguard protected beaches are provided in both the Maryland and Virginia districts. Mats, floats, surfing and surf fishing are allowed *outside* of the lifeguarded beach areas. See page 4 for tips to help you safely enjoy your ocean experience.

Shellfishing

Crabbing and clamming are great ways to discover the bays behind Assateague and sample some local seafood. Please stop by the Barrier Island or Toms Cove Visitor Center for the latest regulations.



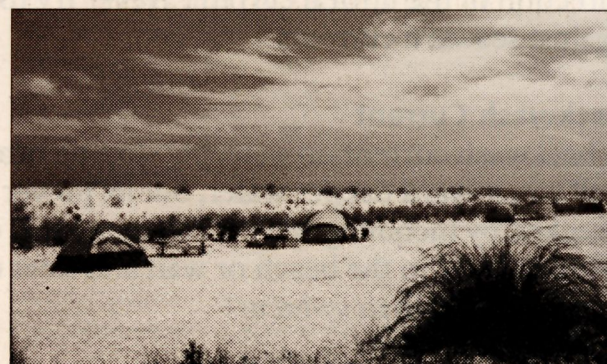
Seashore Camping - Something for Everyone

A variety of camping is available on Assateague Island, in the Maryland section only. The National Park Service provides two campgrounds, Oceanside and Bayside, which offer drive-in pads suitable for tents, trailers and recreational vehicles. In addition, Oceanside has walk-in, tent only sites, located 100-200 feet from centralized parking areas. Paddlers and hikers may also camp at established, remote backcountry sites.

Both campgrounds have primitive facilities with outdoor chemical toilets, central locations for drinking water and outdoor rinse-off showers. Reservations are accepted from April 15 through October 15, up to five months in advance of a camping date. At others times of the year campsites are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Reservations for organized group camps are accepted year round. Contact the National Park Service

Reservation System at 1-800-365-2267 or on-line at <http://reservations.nps.gov>. Additional camping information is available at the National Seashore's campground office by calling 410-641-3030 or visiting our web site at www.nps.gov/asis.

Assateague State Park in Maryland also has a campground that features hot shower bathhouses. There are a limited number of electric hookups. Further state park information is available at 410-641-2120. For reservations call 1-888-432-2267.





Your visit to Assateague will be more enjoyable if you are aware of and prepared to deal with insects, inclement weather, surf conditions and sun.

Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes and other biting insects may be abundant on Assateague May-November. To prevent becoming part of the food chain:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- You can protect yourself from biting insects by using insect repellents on your clothes and exposed skin. Repellents containing 20% to 30% DEET can be very effective. Carefully follow instructions on the container. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that a cautious approach be used when applying repellents with DEET on children (repellents with 10% or less on children aged 2 - 12 and never using repellents with DEET on infants).

Ticks and Lyme Disease

Lyme Disease is an illness caused by bacteria transmitted to people through tick bites. In its early stages, Lyme Disease may cause circular rashes, flu-like symptoms, headaches, stiff neck and fevers. In its later stages, the disease may cause arthritis in large joints, meningitis, neurological and cardiac problems. The primary carrier, the deer tick, is present on Assateague Island. While they can be found in any natural area on the island, special care should be taken in high shrub areas, woods and leaf litter. Wearing insect repellent and checking for ticks may prevent bites.



Rabies

Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. Rabies may affect the appearance and behavior of many creatures, particularly foxes and raccoons. Visitors should never approach animals with the intention of offering assistance. Untreated, rabies leads to death in humans. Please report any sightings of sick animals to the nearest park ranger or refuge staff.



Poison Ivy

Found throughout the island, poison ivy, with its shiny leaves in clusters of three, can produce an itchy, red rash if you come in contact with the plant's oils. To lessen your chance of contact, stay on all trails and boardwalks. If you accidentally touch poison ivy, immediately wash the affected areas with soapy water to remove the oil. Remember: "Leaves of three - let them be!"



Surf Safety

The National Park Service works to provide you with a safe and enjoyable experience. However conditions at the beach and in the surf zone can change dramatically in very short periods of time. Understanding the dynamics of typical surf zone currents will help you avoid a potentially dangerous situation. For your best protection use the lifeguarded area. Blue flags mark the boundaries of the lifeguarded area. Ask any lifeguard or check the informational signs for posted warnings or closures.

Littoral Current

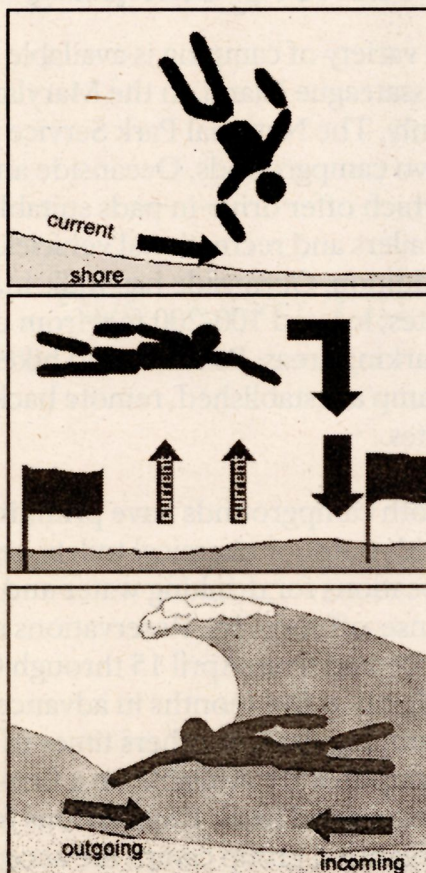
The littoral current is a 'river of water' that moves up or down the shoreline parallel to the beach. It is created by the angled approach of waves. In storm conditions this current can be very swift due to high wave energy.

Rip Current

A rip current is one type of seaward current that will take you out to sea through the incoming waves, sometimes at an angle (offset current). To escape these seaward rips, swim parallel to the beach in the direction of the littoral current. Never try to swim against seaward currents.

Backwash Current

A backwash current on a steeply sloping beach can pull you toward deeper water, but its power is quickly checked by incoming waves. To escape this current, swim straight to the beach or wait and float until the current stops, then swim in.



Sun Survival

While some exposure to sunlight can be enjoyable, too much can be dangerous. Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation in sunlight can result in a painful sunburn and can also lead to more serious health effects, including skin cancer, premature aging of the skin and other skin disorders, cataracts and other eye damage, and immune system suppression.

Limit Time in the Midday Sun

Avoid exposure to the sun between 10 am and 4 pm when the sun's rays are strongest. Remember the shadow rule: Watch Your Shadow. No Shadow, Seek Shade!

Always Use Sunscreen

Liberal apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen of a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15 or higher on exposed skin. Reapply every 2 hours when working or playing outdoors. Even waterproof sunscreen can come off when you towel off, sweat or spend extended periods of time in water.

Cover Up

Wear tightly woven, loose-fitting and full-length clothing. A hat with a wide brim offers good sun protection to your eyes, ears, face and the back of your neck. Wearing sunglasses that block 99-100% of UV radiation will greatly reduce sun exposure that can lead to cataracts and other eye damage.

Beach Safety During Lightning Storms

Every year lightning strikes kill or injure beach-goers around the world. If thunder can be heard then lightning is present. These simple steps can help save your life.

- Obey posted closures.
- Retreat to your car or other shelter and wait out the storm.
- Do not use the showers as you leave the beach during a storm.
- If you are caught in an open area, drop to your knees, lean forward and crouch with your hands on your knees. Do not lie down or put your hands on the ground.
- Sound travels a million times slower than light. When you see a flash, time the seconds it takes to hear the thunder. A 5-second difference between the lightning flash and the thunder means the lightning struck 1 mile away. For each additional 5 seconds the strike is another mile away.



Storm Memories

"It's a big one." That's what I thought as I crossed over the bridge to Assateague Island on the morning of January 4, 1992. Rain driven horizontal by winds over sixty miles an hour whirled the park's speed limit signs like Mardi Gras streamers.

As I crept into Assateague State Park and climbed onto their bathhouse/concessionaire building, I began to have second thoughts. Waves blasted against the front and support pilings of the building. Where were the 100 yards of beach and dunes previously in front of this structure? Preservation became the better part of valor. I retreated off the island in haste.

Two miles from the park, the only access road to the island had flooded from the wind driven surge of water, and small cars were stranded. In Ocean City, MD sands covered the Inlet Parking to a depth that covered its concrete dividers. Storm speed bumps appeared on Ocean City's main north/south road as storm surge forced sand and sea foam across Fenwick Island almost to the coastal bay.

Arriving at work the next day, a barricade with a large "Park Closed" sign confronted me. On that day I was assigned to record the storm effects on the barrier island.

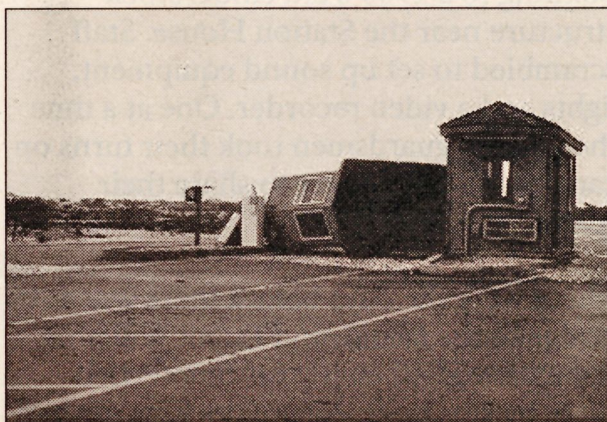


The McCabe house teeters at the edge of the ocean

The biggest home ever built on Assateague Island, the McCabe house was the largest casualty of the storm. Built for Thomas McCabe, the chairman of Scott Paper

Company, the "quaint" 15-room hunting lodge had served as a guesthouse for President Nixon and after it was vacated, became the primary residence for our summer rangers. It would serve as a ranger home no more. The entire first floor had imploded with the storm surge and was swept hundreds of yards bayward. Desks, chairs and even a cast iron water pump were found westward of the house. The second floor tilted dizzily, barely supported by its posts and beams. The McCabe House was condemned, the largest manmade victim of the storm.

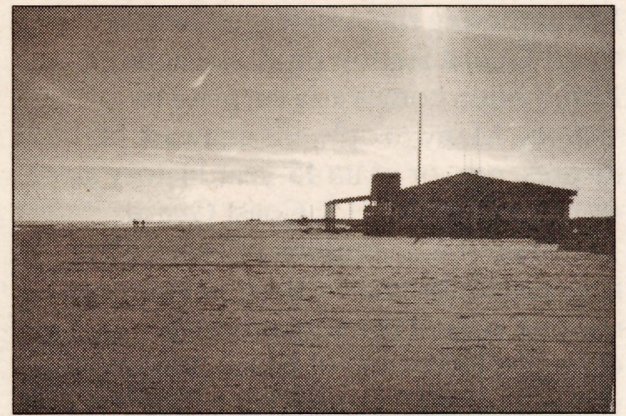
Driving down the main park road through Assateague State Park the steering wheel of my vehicle veered sharply and felt as though I had blown a tire. It became quickly apparent that the road had split down its middle, and one lane had risen several inches higher than the other—earthquake type effects created by a nor'easter. Our parallel bike lane was now the trip to nowhere; huge chunks of it were thrown into the marsh.



Storm-tossed entrance station

The entrance station suffered a one-two punch. One booth had been flipped over on its side by the combination of wind and waves, the other had lost all its surrounding safety medians.

Everyone likes to camp near the ocean when they come to the beachfront, but waterfront camping took on a new meaning after the nor'easter. Our group campground and portions of our family sites sat under a foot of water.



Virginia Visitor Center in its former location enveloped by sand

The Virginia district suffered effects as well. The constructed dune line disappeared and sand from the storm surge swallowed the visitor center.

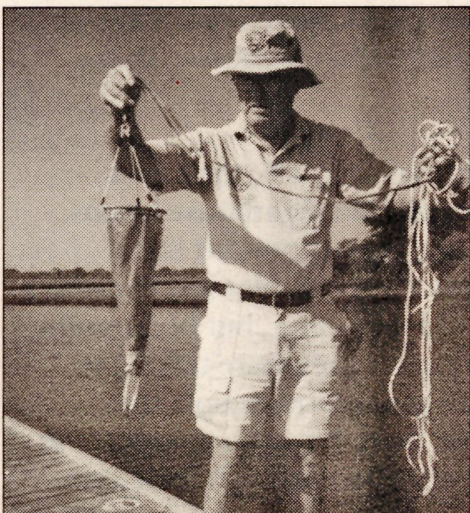
Visitors arriving after the storm to see the effects, came upon the "Park Closed" sign and wandered into the Maryland Barrier Island Visitor Center to ask why. No one could see the destruction to facilities and our safety concerns, so I produced an 18-minute video documenting the storm. It was shown at the visitor center for three months while staff repaired island facilities. The natural areas were never harmed by the storm. The Park Service rethought its wall-like dune line that originally stretched the whole length of Assateague, and only restored it where manmade structures were threatened.

Through the years I have experienced both fear and fascination from Assateague's wildest elements. It has fostered an ability to see nature as more than a point in time. So that even on the most peaceful summer days I am able to recall that Assateague is also a place of wind and fury.

*- Chris Seymour
Park Ranger, Interpretation*

"...Today a little more land may belong to the sea, tomorrow a little less. Always the edge of the sea remains an elusive and indefinable boundary."

- Rachel Carson



Don Winslow received the NPS "Northeast Region Volunteer of the Year" award for his outstanding ongoing summer Bay Discovery Programs.

Did You Know?

...that park volunteers and interns provided over 14,000 hours in 2002, staffing information stations, presenting programs, serving as campground hosts and as the park's "Pony Patrol", and educating visitors about wild horses.

...that Assateague Island National Seashore presents curriculum based education programs to approximately 9,000 students annually. Speak to a ranger to find out more about these programs.

...that Assateague Island National Seashore uses Geographic Information Systems and satellite technology to map and locate shoreline changes, endangered species, park facilities and cultural resources.



Rescuing Memories

Encountering the Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station on Assateague Island often comes as a surprise to visitors. Many people are unaware of its presence, or of its 45-year history as an outpost of the U.S. Coast Guard. The Station is a complex of austere but impressive structures. Its appearance is striking against the surrounding changing landscape of beach grass, dunes and sand. Located in a roadless area on the southern tip of the island, Station Number 150 at Assateague Beach, includes a station house, boathouse, lookout tower, and other outlying structures. For 71 years these resolute buildings weathered the test of time. In April of this year four Coast Guard "old-timers" returned to the Station to unlock some of its history. Instead of bringing implements of research they brought with them something more valuable - memories.

Oral history is a term used to describe stories told by individuals about their past. Recording oral histories is the best means to preserve historical jokes, expressions, achievements, adventures, struggles and relationships of bygone days. The National Park Service is striving to do more to preserve oral histories associated with places like the Coast Guard Station. With this in mind, Kara and Richard Funk, a husband and wife team with extensive experience in Eastern Shore heritage preservation, were contracted by the National Park Service to locate individuals and conduct a series of oral history interviews.

The Funks enthusiastically went about talking to local Chincoteague residents and quickly located four individuals who had first hand knowledge of the Station: Edward "Popsicle" Lewis, a former officer in charge of the Station, Kenny Johnson, a former cook at the Station, as well as Frank Williams and Louis Bitner, who served there. A professional National Park Service videographer and a soundman were enlisted for the job. The Station itself was selected to be the backdrop for the interviews. What followed was a day that will long be remembered.



Kenny Johnson prepares to share his memories on film



Assateague Beach Station House and watchtower

Using a National Park Service four-wheel-drive Suburban, the participants were shuttled to the place that had once been their home. The former crew walked about the grounds, bantered with one another, and began recalling what they remembered about each landmark. "That wasn't here in my day," said Mr. Lewis pointing to a 1960's era cinderblock structure near the Station House. Staff scrambled to set up sound equipment, lights and a video recorder. One at a time the veteran guardsmen took their turns on camera. All were eager to share their stories.

These were the days before there was a bridge to the island, and Frank Williams remembered when he was first ferried there by surf boat. After a docking mishap at the boathouse, that caused a "fuss" between the pilot, Bill Daisy, and the officer in charge of the Station, Elmer Lund, Mr. Williams said he was worried he'd made a big mistake in coming to Assateague. The young boatswain threw his sea bag on the dock, scrambled up, and stood at attention. Mr. Lund put his arm around his shoulder and said warmly, "We're tickled to death to have you here, Frank. You don't know how badly we need you. Come on up to the Station. Supper's ready." Mr. Williams said he would never forget how good those words sounded to him on that day, and he said he came to know Mr. Lund as a very fair and kindhearted man.

Popsicle Lewis told how, as a young boy, he liked to visit the Station and how a former Chief, George Pruitt, took him under his wing and inspired him to want to join the Coast Guard. Certainly the presence of visitors must have made life at the Station more distracting. Kenny Johnson told of an old waterman who was a regular visitor who came by to take naps and get free meals. Mr. Lewis recalled how a couple landed a plane at the site to pay a visit. Mr. Williams recalled the USO coming to show movies at the station. The men invited an elderly couple from the old Assateague Village who hadn't seen many "talking picture shows" before.

As many as 12 to 15 men lived at the station and followed a routine of cleaning, maintenance, patrols, watchtower duty and drills. During World War II there were Army horses to ride on beach patrol. Frank Williams recalled that they had "some of the hardest riding saddles you ever saw in your life." One guardsman, he said, ended up with "two great big blisters on his back end." There was little free time, but what free time they did have, was spent playing cards, horseshoes or baseball, clamming, fishing and occasionally using a shotgun for hunting on the refuge. In those days the refuge staff turned a blind eye to many of these hunting activities, perhaps because they wanted to give these young servicemen a break, or perhaps they wanted to be invited to dinner.

In the summers the mosquitoes could be a problem. "We didn't have lotions back in those days," recalled Mr. Lewis. They would cover up with an oilskin hat, netting, long sleeves, gloves and boots to keep from getting eaten up. In the winters there were some serious nor'easters that hit the island. During storm conditions many duties were curtailed, but not the watchtower duty. It sometimes became necessary to take to sea in the most inclement conditions when boats were spotted on the shoals. But listening to the former Coast Guardsmen it was obvious they took it in stride. There was nothing they liked better than helping those in need or distress. "I loved lifesaving," said Mr. Lewis. "You felt like you were doing something good for everyone you dealt with."



From left to right, Louis Bitner, Frank Williams, Edward "Popsicle" Lewis, and Kenny Johnson

Watching these men talk, their eyes sparkling bright like lighthouse beams, you could see how important this moment was for them. Not just because it rekindled old memories, but because they seemed to realize they were talking to some future generation-people they would never meet-but who would come to know the Station through their eyes.

- Robert Fudge
Chief of Interpretation



Captured in a Net of Wonder

From the first moment I set foot on Assateague Island I was captured in a net of wonder from which I would never be released. It was 1969 and a rough unpaved road led into the National Seashore. Campsites were plentiful and in a moment's walk down the beach I could find solitude and quiet. These days 2 million visitors come to the island during a year and I now work here as the Maryland District Interpreter. I love this island and can testify to the fact that there are still places to escape to if you are willing to float and paddle on the bay.

Like most visitors, I was originally drawn to the ocean side of the island. I worshiped the sun and fun in all the traditional ways, soaking up contentment while fishing, hiking and scavenging the beach for shells. But when I need to shake off the clatter of cars, calls and computers there is no better place than Chincoteague Bay. Each time I paddle away from the Old Ferry Landing parking area I feel the same sense of anticipation. What will this time on the water bring with it?

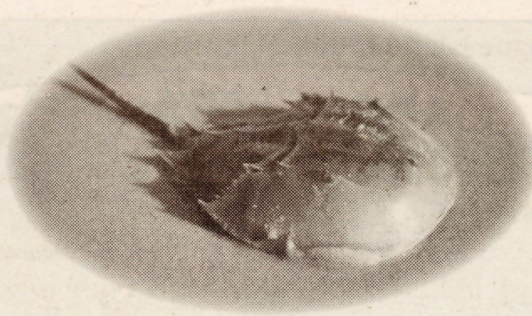


Paddling south and following the edge of the saltmarsh, I explore channels and guts. These are the best places. Bay and land meet and merge, a cultural exchange caused by daily tides. Egrets and herons feed in landlocked mudflats where a seafood buffet has been offered up by the high tide. Watching these elegant birds feed is something like spying on the secret lifestyles of the rich and famous. I'm outclassed. Not so with the diamondback terrapin loitering on the shore right in front of me. Startled by the slight splash of my paddle she makes a foolish looking rush for the safety of the water where she is transformed to a creature of poise and agility. She is too curious though to go far and eventually pokes her head out of the water to see what this intruder might be up to. How can I keep from smiling as she challenges me to a game of hide and seek? She wins and receives an ovation as waves clap noisily against the salt marsh shoreline.

Moving on and further away from the developed areas might make a paddler feel uneasy and even vulnerable. The din

of modern living fades and is replaced by natural sounds and aromas. There are undeniable rhythms here. The rocking boat reminds me that the bay is nursery to the ocean. Life and death struggles take place in deceptive tranquility. Many of the young born here will serve as food to other creatures also intent on survival.

A startling image emerges out of the calm. Do I see twin shark fins in the water ahead of me? No! These are the fin tips of a single cownosed ray swimming towards the kayak, diving in a swirl of water, passing beneath the craft to appear on the other side, causing a thrill of excitement to flash through me. What lives beneath this boat? I have to get my feet wet. Wading, since childhood, has been one of my favorite pastimes. There is always something new to experience in this shallow underworld. It is a place filled with mystery and intrigue yet familiar all the same. Most creatures here take on the dull colored appearance of their surroundings, but dull they are not. Looking carefully reveals the clandestine activities of some of the bay's residents and I quickly catch a glimpse of a shadowy figure sneaking past my feet. The horseshoe crab is my favorite creature so I'll have to snatch it up from its single-minded sprint along the sandy bottom. No hazard here. Horseshoe crabs may look menacing but they are completely safe to handle and comfortable out of the water as long as their gills are moist. The tail or telson is not a stinger and its rows of claws have tender grips so that fragile worms won't be snipped in half before reaching mouthparts at the base of the legs. Placing this living fossil back into the water upside down with legs waving towards the sky allows me to watch a ballet of flapping gills and a synchronized chorus line of jointed legs.



Back in the boat, I can hardly keep my eyes off the water. Blue crabs swim by into the protective cover of eelgrass beds. Red beard sponges provide an unexpected exclamation of color from a place where everything else blends in. Lion's mane jellyfish hover in deceptive complacency waiting for the unwary traveler to meet its stinging nematocysts. I could see these things a million times over and not be bored.

Eventually I must end my explorings and head back to shore. Taking the shortest route, I can enjoy the sheer physical pleasure of paddling the kayak while still conscious of comings and goings around me. Pelicans dive for fish with indelicate precision. Feral horses ignore my passing while they graze marsh grasses. Paddling begins to take on a cadence that feels like the pulse of the bay.



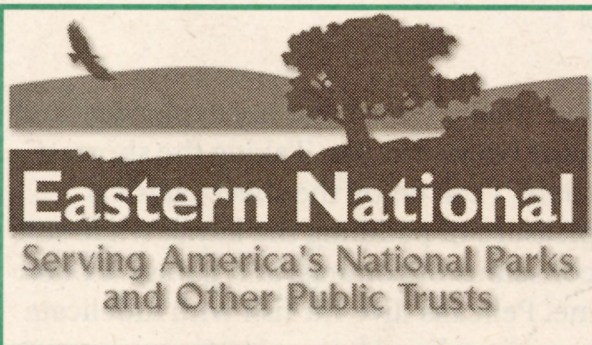
When I get back into Ferry Landing it is bustling with activity. Crabbers are on the dock, a volunteer is demonstrating raking techniques to novice clambers, and birders are scanning the area for new additions to their life lists. Cars are pulling in and out of parking spaces. Now standing in the midst of this I fill my lungs with the pungent aroma of the marsh, and identify the tingle of salt residue and mud drying on my skin. My heartbeat appears to have taken on the rhythm of bay waves breaking on the shore. I have returned to where I started.

- Rachelle Daigneault
Maryland District Ranger, Interpretation

The National Park

To connect the people to the place
To ensure they return
To ensure that they care
To hope for action.
And in this mysterious place
you call a National Seashore,
to leave only footprints
is not quite accurate.
Because footprints wear away
and you will return again.
To find what you left
that time when you were young,
or felt the glow of youth
during a week's vacation,
that will capture your memory
and your soul, summoning.
To come back to the place
where your spirit released.
And you became a part of the Earth.

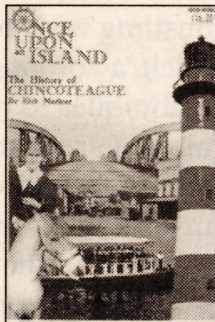
- Alexis Gelb
Interpretive Park Ranger



Eastern National, chartered in 1948, is an association operating in more than 130 national parks and other public trusts. We see our mission as a double opportunity to offer quality educational materials and services to park visitors and the general public at fair prices, and to aid the National Park Service with the income derived from these activities. Since 1947, we have donated over \$65 million to the National Park Service.

Once Upon an Island

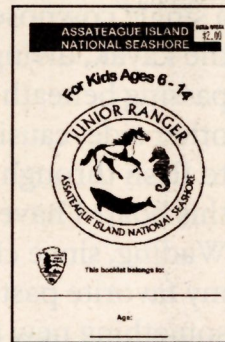
This is the story not of one island, but of several - Chincoteague, Assateague, Wallops - and of their interplay with both the nearby Eastern Shore and with more distant places familiar to islanders who "went to sea" at an early age.
Price: \$16.00



The following items may be purchased at the Barrier Island and Toms Cove Visitor Centers and by calling (410) 641-1443 ext. 246 for a mail order form. Some items are available on-line at www.eparks.com

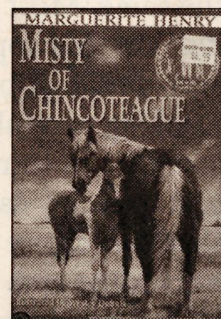
Assateague Island Junior Ranger Program, For Kids Ages 6-14

Make your visit an Assateague exploration and learn more about the seashore. Purchase a Junior Ranger booklet at the Toms Cove or Barrier Island Visitor Center. When you have completed the activities in the booklet and attended two ranger-guided programs, you'll earn a Junior Ranger certificate and patch.
Price: \$2.25



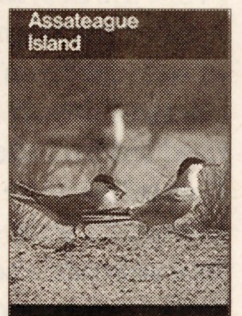
Misty of Chincoteague

Marguerite Henry's classic children's book about the adventures of Paul and Maureen Beebe and their Chincoteague pony Misty.
Price: \$4.99



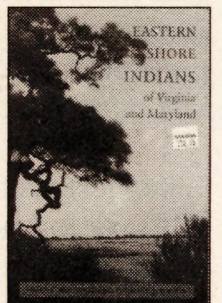
Assateague Island Handbook

The U.S. Department of the Interior presents the authoritative guide to Assateague Island. Features many full-color photographs and presents the full story of the seashore and its impact on the island's many inhabitants.
Price: \$7.95



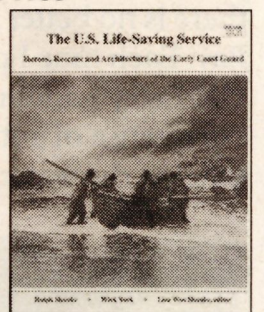
Eastern Shore Indians

The culture and history of Eastern Shore Indians from A.D. 800 until the last tribes disbanded in the late 18th and 19th centuries.
Price: \$17.95



The U.S. Life-Saving Service

The regulations said they had to go out no matter how storm-tossed the sea. They did not say anything about coming back. Their stories are unique and unforgettable.
Price: \$21.95



Foster Horse Program

Support wild horse management and protection activities by becoming a Foster Parent. Participants receive a photograph and information on the horse they "foster" and a certificate in an attractive binder. A \$25 contribution goes directly to education, long-term population monitoring and a contraception program to manage herd size.

Currently, "fostering" a wild horse can only be done in person in Maryland's Barrier Island Visitor Center. The Foster Horse program is managed by Assateague Coastal Trust (ACT). ACT is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the living resources of the Delmarva barrier islands and coastal bays.

