National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior

Assateague Island Times

Winter 2004 - 2005

Visitor Guide

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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 (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

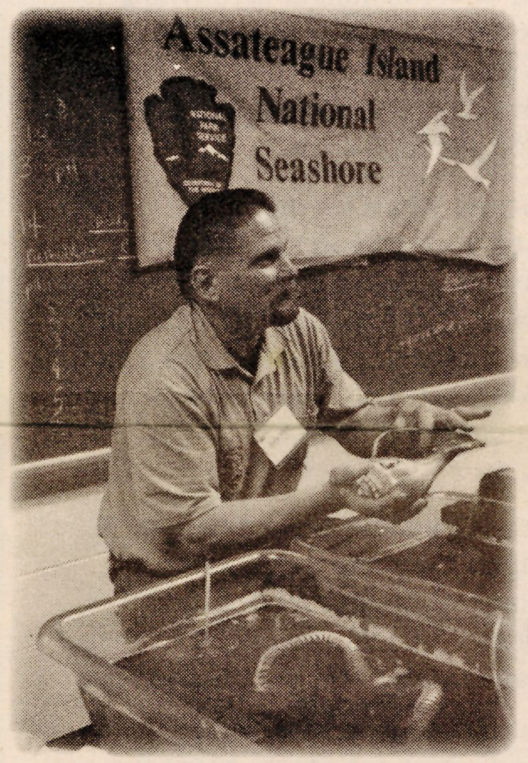
Virginia
Ranger Station
757-336-6577
After Hours - Dial 911

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.

Making a Difference

When people come to Assateague Island National Seashore they are struck by its raw beauty and its rejuvenating power. They can gaze for hours at its crashing waves, soaring birds and its expansive pristine shoreline. Visits are often full of surprises as people encounter wildlife, unusual plants and a terrain built and sculpted by wind and ocean waves. For many this barrier island is an oasis from the stresses of hectic lives. To others it is a place that elicits excitement. Whether you are here for rest, recreation or inspiration, Assateague Island is here for you — making a difference.



"We all have ability.
The difference is how we use it."
- Stevie Wonder

When I was a young child my father used to take my brothers and I to Assateague and Chincoteague. We camped in Chincoteague. Hiking, biking and fishing on my father's boat were our most common activities. Of course we loved the nights we went to the fair.

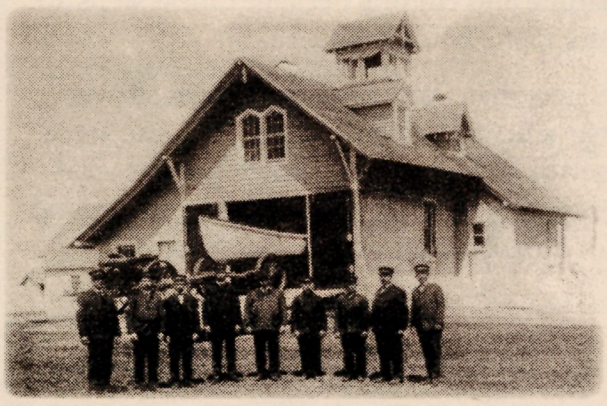
Now, I am a mother of two girls and I wanted to share with them the wonders I found at their age here. I do not have a boat like my father, but we have found a whole new world through the programs on Assateague. This is our 3rd summer visiting and we have finally been to most of the programs. We have all learned so much.

This year my oldest daughter (11) announced that she will bring her children here. I know they will create new memories and have a wonderful time. Though the memories will be unique, in my heart I bet one thing will be the same. They too will close their eyes when they reach the top of the Ferris wheel like their mother and her mother before her.

- Anne Davis

When leaves get blown they go
somewhere pretty
To the place where you can eat
clams that are gritty
Toms Cove is the name that I speak
How long will you stay there?
One day or one week?

- David Walker
age 9



"I will act as if what I do makes a difference."
- William James

Making a Difference

Welcome to Assateague Island National Seashore! We all hope that your visit, whether it's your first time or one of many, is all that you hoped it would be…or even better! Elsewhere in this issue you will find stories of several people who have made a difference here at the seashore. One such person is Rachelle Daigneault, the District Interpreter for the Maryland end of the island. She once told a group of us something worth sharing. On her third visit to Assateague as a young woman, she walked over the dunes from her campsite one cool early morning. Spread on the beach before her were "hundreds if not thousands of monarch butterflies." They were waiting for the sun to dry their wings so they could continue their amazing migration. "That's what solidified for me that this place is where I wanted to work for the rest of my life."

National park areas have a way of doing that. For many people, the parks themselves make a difference. For some, it could be as simple as providing a place of refuge from the ever-busier world we live in; a place to slow down, to live life to the rhythms of the day and season instead of the clock. For others, the parks evoke, then perpetuate, interest in all the amazing elements of our history that, taken collectively, tell almost the whole story of who we are and how we got here.

The National Park System is much more diverse than many people realize. The 387 units are spread across eleven time zones from Virgin Islands National Park in the east, to War in the Pacific National Historical Park on Guam in the west. It reaches from north of the Arctic Circle to south of the equator; from Noatak National Preserve to the National Park of American Samoa. The units range in size from 0.02 acre Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial in Philadelphia to the over 13 million-acre Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in Alaska. The system manages over 3 million acres of oceanic and Great Lakes water and contains 4,856 miles of U.S. coastline. At over 83.6 million acres, the National Park System provides an amazing variety of opportunities to really make a difference in the lives of the 270 million annual visitors.

The National Park System has also made a difference all over the world. When Yellowstone was established in 1872 it was the first national park in the world. As the system expanded and foreign visitors came to appreciate what national parks had to offer, the idea spread around the world. Occasionally referred to as "the best idea America ever had", national parks and other kinds of protected areas are now found in almost all countries of the world. America's national parks provide a wide range of assistance to these parks. The assistance ranges from technical advice on park planning and operations, to formal cooperative agreements.

Examples of international cooperation for parks reach from the mundane to the sublime. The Association of National Park Rangers took up a collection of used uniforms to send to rangers in Costa Rica. When members attended the 2nd International Ranger Federation Congress in San Jose, Costa Rica in 1997, they met Costa Rican rangers who seldom get paid on time and had little or no uniforms. The "del norte" rangers helped out.

Just as Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is the largest in the U.S. National Park System, when associated with Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, Kluane National Park in Yukon Territory and Tatshenshini Alsek Park in British Columbia, Canada, they make up the largest protected area of wilderness in the world! Each park is an individual entity, answerable to its respective government, but they also collaborate to ensure protection of this one great wilderness, divided by political boundaries.

The National Park Service provides assistance to parks even in troubled parts of the world. Assateague Island National Seashore has hosted two visits from staff of Kolkheti National Park in the Republic of Georgia. They have very similar resources to those of Assateague and seek assistance in park planning. After the last visit, Director Patsatsia and I shook on a "brother/sister" park concept. Our Chief of Resources Management has made two trips to Qatar, as part of an evaluation team to locate the first ever national park there. This tiny, oil-rich, country, comprising a peninsula into the Persian Gulf has undergone unprecedented development over the past twenty years. Along with the "ordinary" development that comes with oil wealth, there is significant military development as a result of its strategic location. The ruling family is concerned that Qatar stands to lose its most precious natural and cultural heritage unless steps are taken soon. It's a different kind of involvement in the Middle East.

National Parks really make a difference! Taken together, these protected places all over the world provide many tangible and intangible benefits to many people. They also serve as refugia for an extensive list of rare, threatened or endangered species. What was once just an idea around a campfire in Yellowstone country has truly made a difference around the world. Enjoy your time in that little slice of a great concept called Assateague.

- Mike Hill, Superintendent
Assateague Island National Seashore

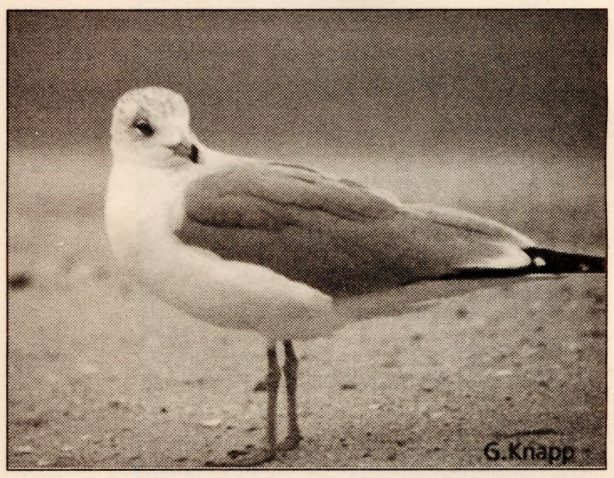
If You Care, You Won't Share

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. 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.



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

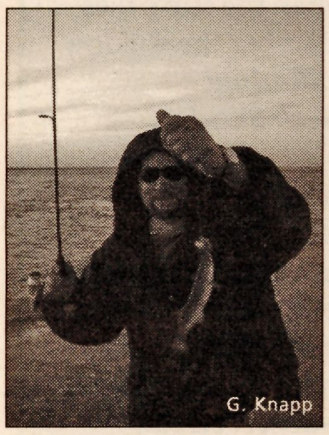
Discover the Possibilities

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 - ½ mile loop.
Life of the Dunes Trail - ½ mile loop.
Life of the Marsh Trail - ½ 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 - ½ mile loop.


G. Knapp

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.

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.

S. Allen

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's non-profit rental in Maryland. 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 a 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.

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!

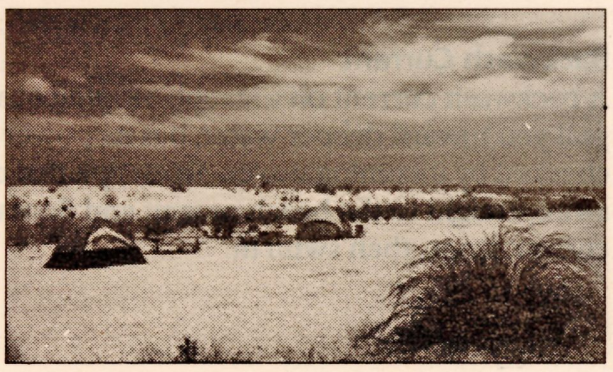
Explore charming Chincoteague and its museums, and NASA's Wallops Island Visitor Center.

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 other 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.



Enjoy a Safe Visit

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

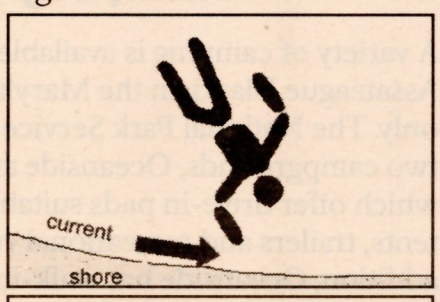
Found throughout the island, poison ivy, with its shiny leaves in clusters of three, can produce an itchy, red rash if you come in contact with the plant's oils. To lessen your chance of contact, stay on all trails and boardwalks. If you accidentally touch poison ivy, immediately wash the affected areas 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.

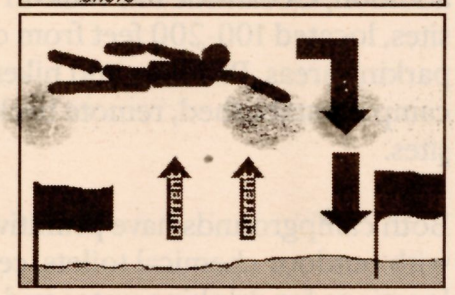
Littoral Current

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.



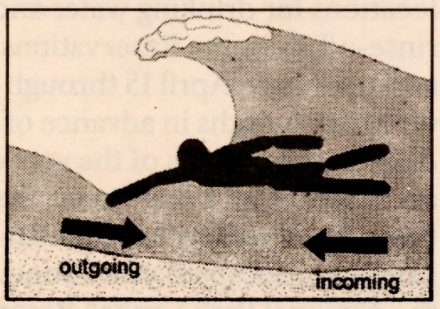
Rip Current

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

Liberally 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

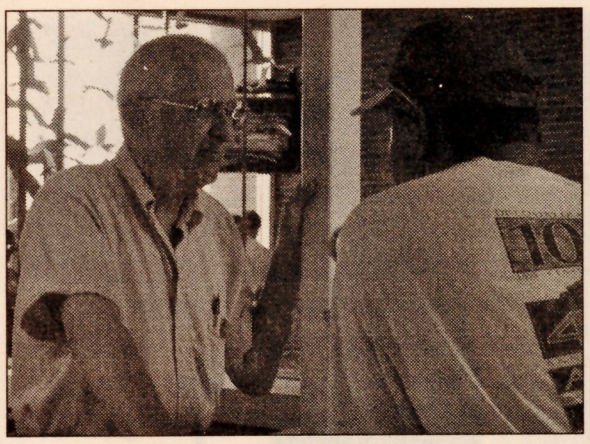
Every year lightning strikes kill or injure beach-goers around the world. If thunder can be heard then lightning is present. These simple steps can help save your life:

- 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, crouch on the balls of your feet and lean forward 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.

Murff

The first time I laid eyes on James "Murff" Murphy he was exploding through the front door of the Barrier Island Visitor Center in the Maryland district. Grinning, he roared across the room, "I'm here to help!" I could tell trouble had just walked into my life...the good kind of trouble. There was no twinkle in this man's eyes; there were fourth of July sparklers going off. Murff would become my very first volunteer hire. In the years that followed, his presence made Thursdays a good day for laughing out loud. Some people have the ability to wring all the available laughter out of the day, splashing it onto everyone they meet so that it sticks like Superglue. If you asked Murff how he felt, he'd say "FANTASTIC!", arms wide, ready to give the world a bear hug and so he did. At least that is how staff and visitors felt.

Though he enjoyed working the information desk answering questions and orienting visitors to the park, it was the touch tank where Murff reigned without rival. Let's face it, sea snails, horseshoe crabs and spider crabs are not generally considered cuddlesome critters. With Murff's gentle attention even the most hesitant visitor center explorer would stretch a finger out for the horseshoe crab or endure the slimy foot of the knobbed whelk resting on an open palm. The visitor center is not a library so the shrieks of



pleasure that accompanied this activity were accepted as both inevitable and invited.

People volunteer in National Parks for countless reasons. Murff volunteered because he loved the island and the Park Service. He always wanted to wear the Park Ranger's broad brimmed flat hat because it represented an ideal of service to the public and to Assateague Island.

James Murphy passed away this past fall. If you are ever at the touch tank and you see the reflection of a tall lanky silver haired gentleman with sparkling eyes and hear the echo of laughter; that will be Murff...He'll be wearing that flat hat.

- Rachelle Daigneault,
Maryland District Ranger, Interpretation

Bike on the Island and Canoe on the Bay

The Maryland Coastal Bays Program has entered into an agreement with the National Park Service to provide park visitors additional recreation and environmental education services. These activities will promote public understanding and appreciation for coastal bays and Assateague Island National Seashore.

The Coastal Bays Program is launching activities from the former concession stand located on Bayside Drive in Maryland. Visitors may rent bikes and canoes for $6.00 and $10.00 per hour respectively, with special all-day and weekend rates available. In addition, Coastal Bays periodically conducts guided trips. For more information inquire at one of the park's visitor centers or call the Coastal Bays Foundation at 410-213-2297 or email at blair@intercom.net.

The Maryland Coastal Bays Program is a not-for-profit organization. Rental fees help pay for coastal bays programs, water quality monitoring, habitat protection and wetland restoration projects.

Assateague's "Open Door Policy"

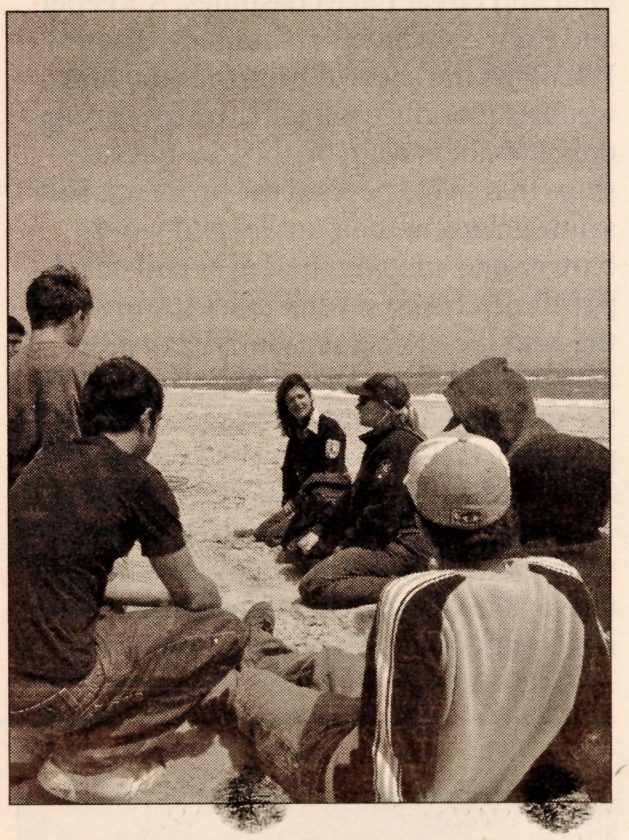
"Someone is here to see you." These are words often heard at my office door heralding the arrival of another Assateague Island enthusiast. They may have announced themselves at the front desk as wanting to "see" me, but I know better. They've come for Assateague.

There are a myriad of ways to fall in love with Assateague and every visitor reminds me of that. Folks who have business with me may come wanting information, but a surprising number come wanting to give something back to the park. It is one of the best aspects of my job; to meet wonderful people who care deeply about the seashore.

National parks do not exist in a vacuum. They depend on public involvement and partnerships. This comes in the form of donations, volunteer time and sharing. Some of the park's partners include organizations such as the Assateague Coastal Trust, which assists with public education and the park's Foster Horse Program. Our "sister" agencies, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Assateague StatePark, partner with park staff to provide learning opportunities for school groups and the public. In addition, the Maryland Coastal Bays Program advocates for healthy bays and offers guided and self-guided canoe and bicycle education programs. Groups like the Assateague Mobile Sports Fisherman's Association participate in educational and public service initiatives. Support comes from colleges and universities that conduct research and assist with data analysis. It also comes from other government agencies, such as the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Department of the Environment, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, NASA and U.S. Geological Survey, all of which directly provide resource management services. Impressively, it comes from dedicated individuals who donate funds, time and their subject matter expertise. Most importantly it comes from average citizens taking responsible action and being good stewards of natural and cultural resources.

If this park is to be judged by the friends it keeps, it must be one of the best parks in the world. The friends of Assateague come not only clambering for fun, but also for an opportunity to contribute. Many not only care about this place, they also care for it. The park's doors of opportunity remain open, and there is always room for one more friend.

- Robert Fudge,
Chief of Interpretation



Local high school students expand the boundaries of their classroom during the Island Makeover Program, a joint effort of the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Rescuing Forgotten Heroes

Sprinting back through the driving rain, the surfman bursts through the side door. *"Ship hard aground, quarter mile north!"* The station crew is already putting on their harnesses as he swings open the giant boat bay doors against the rain and wind. Out into the maelstrom they go, hauling their Lyle Gun (a line-firing cannon) cart towards the shipwreck and its endangered crew. *"You have to go out, but you don't have to come back."* Such was the life of a surfman in the United States Life-Saving Service.

Dashing from his vehicle the volunteer runs through a gauntlet of high weeds and mosquitoes. He struggles with the boathouse lock while hundreds of tiny blood-sucking probisci probe at every pore. Flipping on the fans, he struggles to swing open the swollen main boathouse doors. Finally, he moves the Lyle Gun into position over a sea of sand, ready to rescue the first insect-chased visitor to the U.S. Life-Saving Service Boathouse Museum.

These are the forgotten heroes of the United States Life-Saving Service and the rescuers of their memories at Assateague Island National Seashore's Boathouse Museum.

Founded in 1871 to prevent sailing disasters and rescue shipwreck victims along U.S. ocean and lake coasts, the United States Life-Saving Service was the precursor to the United States Coast Guard. Over 300 stations were built on the Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf and Great Lake coastlines. A Keeper and eight crewmembers staffed stations. Patrolling the shore during the roughest weather months from fall through spring, crewmembers were on the lookout for ships in trouble beyond the breakers. Soft sand sucking at their ankles and wind-blown sand stinging their eyes and cheeks, patrolmen hiked several miles towards the next life-saving station. Meeting the man walking from the neighboring station, the patrolmen would exchange a brass patrol token to prove they had walked their section of beach. Assateague Island was home to four stations, stretching from North Beach Station (near today's Oceanside Campground) to Assateague Beach station, north of the Chincoteague

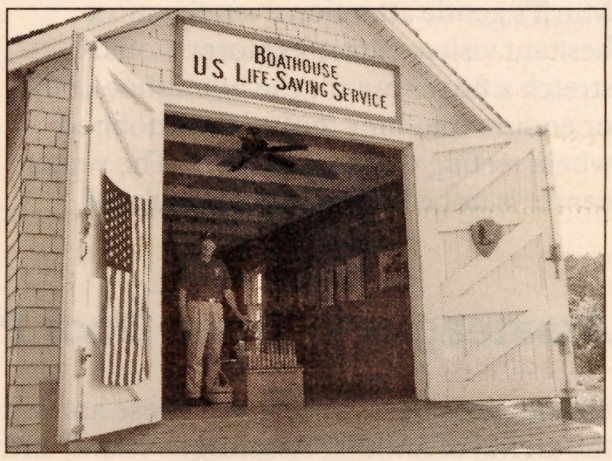
Inlet. Sighting of a ship too close to the shore, a surfman would light a Coston signal flare, to warn the ship away from the treacherous shoals. Martha Coston, who perfected the flare, was one of the first women entrepreneurs in the late 1800's that supported these forgotten heroes.

When a ship came hard aground or began to break up, the beach patrolmen would signal back to the station to activate rescue operations. If the endangered ship was close enough, the life saving crew would haul a rescue cart and its line-firing cannon to the wreck site, fire a line to the ship, rig a rescue pulley system and retrieve the stranded crew through the icy surf before the ship broke up. For ships too distant for line rescue, the crew would row out through the strong storm waves and pick up survivors.

Station keepers conducted and timed weekly drills for firing the Lyle Gun and righting the self-bailing lifeboat. One secret for a quick time in the "righting drill" was to have one man stay in the lifeboat as it was purposely capsized, holding onto all the oars. As the boat righted, and men climbed aboard, each oarsman would re-claim his own oar, with little worry that it had floated free.

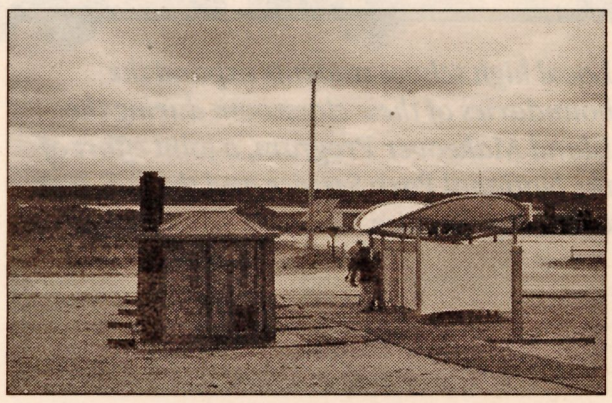
Many survivors owed their lives to the diligent efforts of the surfmen, including seventy-nine men rescued by the Assateague Beach crew off of the *Despatch*, President Benjamin Harrison's official yacht in 1891. Performing valiant duty for over 44 years, the U.S. Life Saving Service is lesser known than the short-lived Pony Express. These brave men's story and their dramatic rescues are largely forgotten today…the forgotten heroes of the coast.

A group of volunteers formed to tell the story of these valiant search and rescue crews in the 1990s. Versed in the history of the U.S. Life-Saving Service and using an actual Lyle Gun, hawser-cutter and breeches buoy, these rescuers of memories tell the story of Assateague's shipwreck travails. This dedicated crew suffers not from the cold, stormy conditions that plagued the surfmen, but from hot summer months and humid days filled with mosquitoes and biting flies. Without this volunteer group, the building would remain closed and its story untold.



Sprinting into the boathouse, sweaty, with mosquitoes humming in both ears, the visitor gasps, "I'd go mad if I had to live here!" Guiding them under the cooling fans, the volunteer offers the summer victim some bug spray and tells them, "Oh, conditions can be *much* worse here. Imagine walking against a hurricane on beach patrol." So begins another rescue of a visitor and the memories of our forgotten heroes of Assateague.

- Chris Seymour,
Park Ranger, Interpretation



Portable, solar powered visitor comfort station in Virginia District

Did You Know?

...that in 2005 Assateague Island National Seashore will celebrate its 40th anniversary?

...that Assateague Island National Seashore has been designated by the National Park Service as a Center of Environmental Innovation for its past, present and future "green" practices? The park will continue to conserve energy, reduce waste, use environmentally preferable maintenance products, and design and upgrade facilities to minimize impacts to the natural environment.

...that instead of needing to keep her eggs warm, the beach nesting piping plover will stand over her eggs on hot days to give them shade and keep them from cooking.

Reliving the Past

When people think of Assateague they often think of the seashore's scenic beauty, its wild horses and of its plant, animal and marine species. But few outside the local community understand how people have come to play a big role in the history of the island. Hidden beneath the sand is wreckage and debris from ships that grounded or capsized in the surf. Beneath pine needles and bayberry are foundations of former structures and places where islanders once buried their dead. Perched over cordgrass and salt meadow hay are abandoned piers, hunting lodges and shacks; and stoically standing at the island's southern hook is a former U.S. Coast Guard station, boat house and dock. All are reflections of the past, when Assateague Island meant different things to different people.

Today, park visitors might glance at an historic relic, or read pamphlets and books about Eastern Shore history, but few are able to imagine what it must have been like to land a plane on the Green Run beach, to weather the historic storms of 1933 and 1962, to see the sky blackened by migrating birds or to be entangled in the politics of creating a National Seashore. These are just a few of the stories that were waiting to be rediscovered by a team of three intrepid researchers hired by the National Park Service. Their assignment was to conduct and record interviews with individuals who had insights and knowledge about the history of Assateague Island.

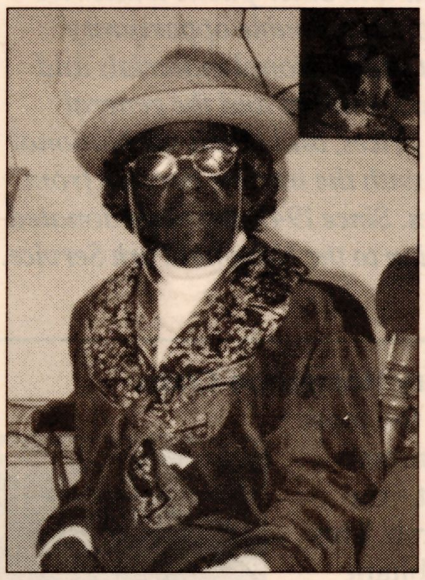
Kara and Richard Funk, former directors of the Barrier Island Center in Machipongo, Virginia, had just completed a very successful oral history project with the park's Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station. To them it was a privilege to be involved with the oral history project. From their efforts they knew future park visitors would, in their words, "...'view' the history of Assateague through the eyes of those who lived it." Pat Russell, from Maryland, came with a background in recording and transcribing oral history interviews. She described her oral history preservation work as "a labor of love," keeping the old stories from vanishing "before the storytellers are gone." Kara, Richard and Pat's work took them to places few park visitors could go - to the homes and haunts of some of the most colorful, knowledgeable and insightful people associated with the island.

In preparation for this project, park staff went through old records and located previously conducted oral history interviews, and in some cases there were some surprises. A reel-to-reel tape was found in an unmarked box. It was sent to an audiovisual specialist at the National Park Service's Harpers Ferry Design Center to be reformatted. When the remastered recording came back it was discovered that it included a 78-minute interview with Miles Hancock, a man now deceased, who remembered being a hunting guide on the island 100 years ago. Miles Hancock was a legendary decoy carver and a renowned marksman. His taped remarks revealed more than just information; listening to them was like reliving the past. "I've seen black ducks comin' from Jersey," he recalled, "we called 'em 'Jersey ducks', they had red feet, big yella beaks. I've seen 'em fly fer' two days jus' bunch after bunch and ya could look anywhere's and the sky were a bunch of black duck jus' goin' south." Later in the tape Mr. Hancock recalled redhead drakes so plentiful in the water that the noise of their *purring* at night kept gunners aboard his houseboat awake.

- Miles Hancock

As weeks passed, the researchers identified and located additional "living treasures," each revealing something new and unexpected. They covered a wide range of occupations, perspectives and interests: Connie Purnell, a former employee of the real estate company that tried to develop the island; Mel Olsen, a retired park ranger who patrolled the park when it was first established; Roy Jones, a former resident of the now abandoned Assateague Village; a community activist, Amine Cosby Kellam, who worked to save Assateague from development; Jay Kirkpatrick, a scientist who pioneered wildlife studies on the island; 94-year-old Chincoteague resident Lloyd "Woose" Reed, who clammed in and around Toms Cove all his life.

One particularly interesting interview was with 92-year-old Luvenia Spence, a woman who remembered what it was like to live by the shores of Sinepuxent Bay in the 1920s. By working with the Germantown School Community Heritage Center (a local organization devoted to restoring a nearby historic two-room schoolhouse) Pat Russell was able to contact Ms. Spence. As a resident of the South Point area, young Luvenia lived across from Assateague Island in Maryland. Her grandfather had a houseboat and oystered in the bay. Ms. Spence remembered the 1933 hurricane that devastated Ocean City and formed the inlet there, and she described vividly how the new inlet inundated the bay with salt water, causing dramatic changes. Prior to the storm she said she dip-netted scores of crabs from docks; after the storm all the crabs were gone.



- Luvenia Spence

As part of the park's permanent oral history collection, researchers will always have access to these voices from the past, and visitors will soon be able to enjoy highlights from interviews through forthcoming publications, exhibits and audiovisual programs. As nature and time continue to reshape the island, these people's taped memories will remain the same. Observant listeners will hear more than *what* was said, they'll hear *how* they said it. And perhaps while listening to those voices reliving the past, they may feel drawn to someone, someone they will never meet but will always remember.

- Robert Fudge,
Chief of Interpretation

"When I was a small boy on the island there's no refrigeration. Nobody had an icebox or a refrigerator. And most everybody was very religious. Nobody, but nobody, did anything on Sundays 'cept sing. Our parents would cook the Sunday meal on Saturday and in the summertime it got hot there too, and the way we would keep our food from spoiling, as soon as we got it on Assateague, it would be cooked and put up trees in a large bucket with a lid. And in the tree there would be more air. It would be cooler up in the tree than down on the ground surface and that's how we kept food."

Transcript excerpt from a recovered tape of Don P. Bowden, Sr., recalling his childhood on Assateague Island. A seasonal park ranger, Trudy Trumbo, conducted the interview on May 1, 1978.

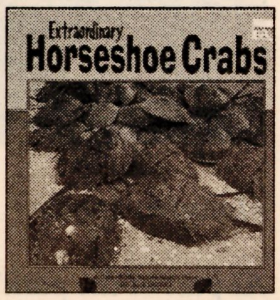
Funding for the Assateague Island National Seashore Oral History Project was made possible by a donation from Eastern National, the park's cooperating association.

Eastern National
Serving America's National Parks and Other Public Trusts

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 $70 million to the National Park Service.

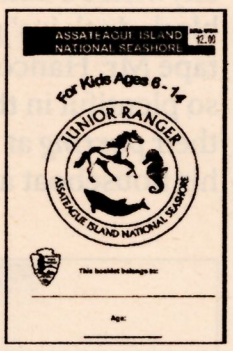
The following items may be purchased at the Barrier Island and Toms Cove Visitor Centers and by calling (410) 641-1443 ext. 246 for a mail order form. Some items are available on-line at www.eparks.com

Extraordinary Horseshoe Crabs



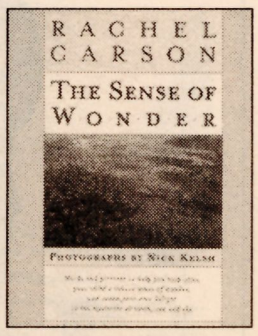
Meet one of the most interesting animals on the planet - the horseshoe crab. This ancient inhabitant of the sea breathes without lungs, chews without jaws and has blue blood. The horseshoe crab's blue blood could someday save your life.
Price: $23.95

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



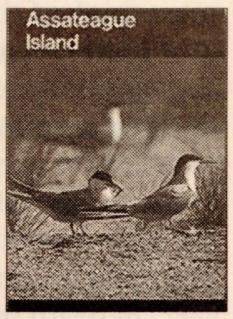
Make your visit an Assateague exploration and learn more about the seashore. Purchase a Junior Ranger booklet at the Toms Cove or Barrier Island Visitor Center. When you have completed the activities in the booklet and attended two ranger-guided programs, you'll earn a Junior Ranger certificate and patch.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

The Sense of Wonder



Words and pictures to help you keep alive your child's inborn sense of wonder and renew your own delight in the mysteries of earth, sea and sky.
Price: $24.95

Assateague Island Handbook

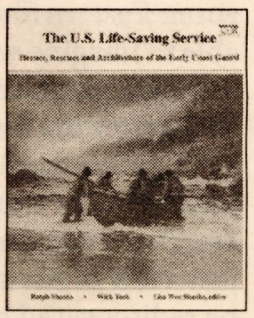


The U.S. Department of the Interior presents the authoritative guide to Assateague Island. Features many full-color photographs and presents the full story of the seashore and its impact on the island's many inhabitants.
Price: $7.95

Attracting Birds to Your Backyard

Discover the pleasures of attracting beautiful songbirds to your backyard. 536 ways to create a haven for your favorite birds.
Price: $16.95

The U.S. Life-Saving Service

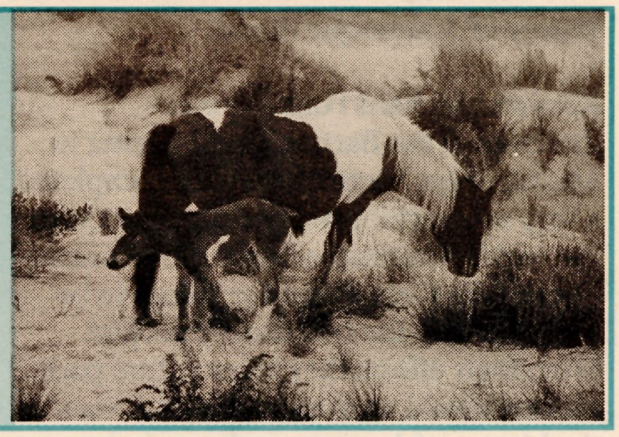


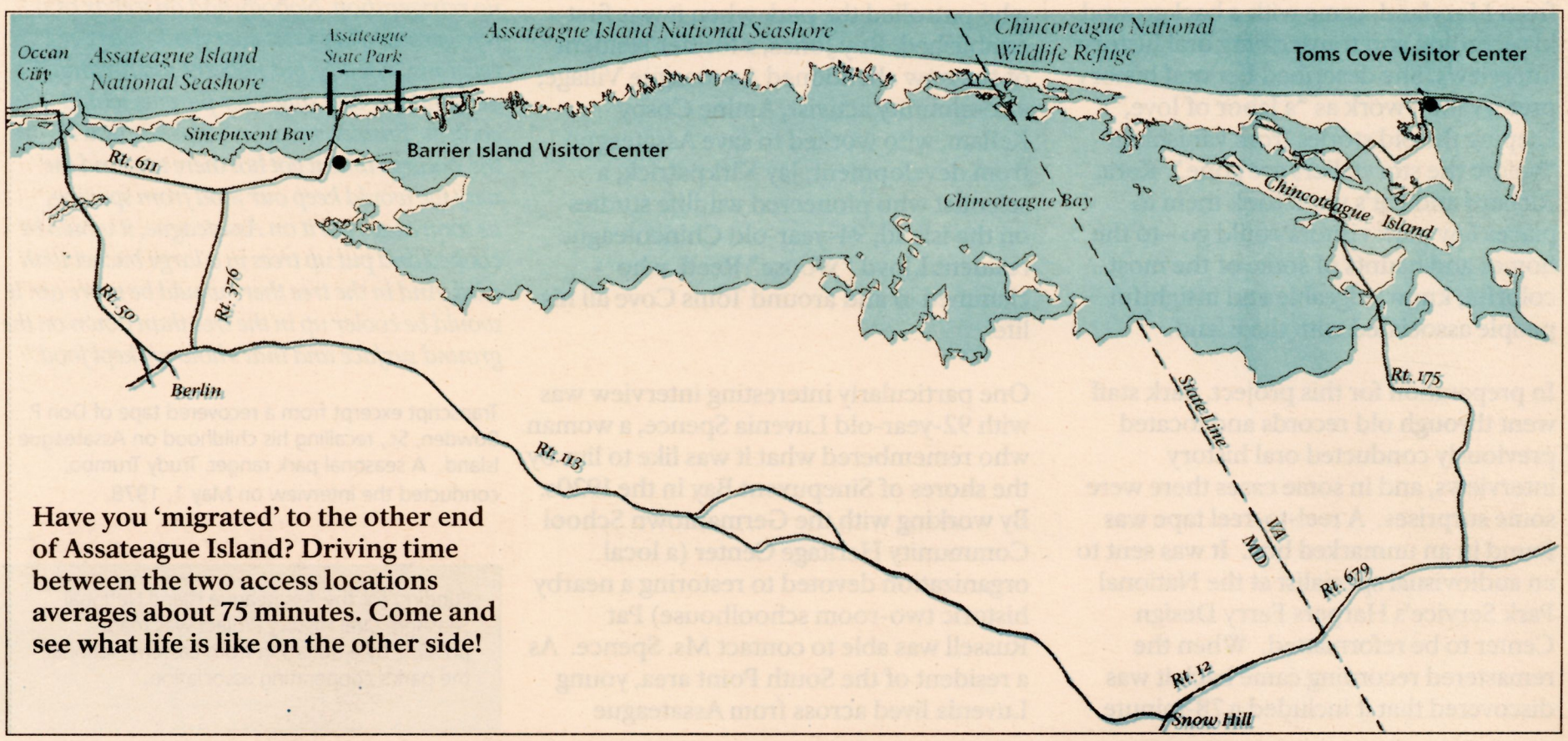
The regulations said they had to go out no matter how storm-tossed the sea. They did not say anything about coming back. Their stories are unique and unforgettable.
Price: $21.95

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 ($30 online) contribution goes directly to education, long-term population monitoring and a contraception program to manage herd size.

"Fostering" a wild horse can be done at Maryland's Barrier Island Visitor Center or online at *www.assateaguewildhorses.org*. 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.





Have you 'migrated' to the other end of Assateague Island? Driving time between the two access locations averages about 75 minutes. Come and see what life is like on the other side!