

The Horses of Chincoteague

When I was a child, one of my favorite authors was Marguerite Henry. She wrote about wild ponies that live on the Island of Chincoteague. Chincoteague is an island off the coast of Virginia and Maryland. For hundreds of years, wild ponies have lived on Chincoteague's neighboring island, Assateague. The ponies, like the ones in Henry's book, get to Chincoteague each year by swimming across the channel between the two islands. Locals round up some of the wild ponies from Assateague and swim the ponies across the channel between the two islands. Once the ponies get to Chincoteague, they are auctioned. The ponies adapt well to domestic life, and the culling, or removal, of some of the horses helps keep the wild pony herds healthy. Because I read so many of Henry's books about these two islands, I developed a mental picture of how they would look. All of the beautiful descriptions found in these books helped me create pictures in my mind, and I could just imagine the ponies prancing along the beach and swimming across the channel. I desperately wanted to go there to see the wild ponies.

After much pleading, my parents agreed to take my family on a vacation to visit these islands. We drove through the middle of the night so we could spend the whole next day touring the islands. We arrived before the sun rose. Because it was so dark, no one in my family realized we had parked next to a paddock that held a herd of horses. Just as the sun started to come up over the horizon, we heard the whinnying of ponies and the pounding of hooves. We awoke to ponies galloping across the field. It was just like I had imagined. There was so much I wanted to learn about the islands while I was there, but I really wanted to learn about the ponies. I had an idea of what they were like from the books I had read, but it was exciting to see them with my own eyes and learn everything I could about them.

While my family vacationed in Chincoteague, I learned many things about the wild ponies. The Chincoteague ponies come in all shapes, sizes and colors. Because of their diet, these ponies have very round bellies. When the ponies are in the wild, on Assateague, they live a difficult life. They forage for food in the salty marshlands eating marsh grasses, seaweed and even poison ivy. Because their diet is so high in salt, they must drink twice as much water as typical ponies. Though they live on an island, they cannot drink the salty ocean water; therefore, they must find fresh water inland to drink. Although these wild ponies have difficult lives, they have survived many hundreds of years in the wild.

The ponies are a significant part of the history of the islands of Chincoteague and Assateague. I was so glad I was able to see them in person. The books of Marguerite Henry introduced me to a place I had never before been able to visit. Through these stories, I learned about the beautiful ponies living in the wild and the process they go through when they are domesticated. Without reading Henry's books, I may have never known of the wonders of these islands, and I may never have been so determined to visit. You too can begin learning about these beautiful, wild horses by reading one of Marguerite Henry's most famous books, *Misty of Chincoteague*.

1. Why did the author convince her parents to take her to these islands?
 - A. Because she wanted to see where the author Marguerite Henry lived.
 - B. Because she wanted to see the wild horses described in Marguerite Henry's books.
 - C. Because she wanted to see the channel between Assateague and Chincoteague.
 - D. Because she wanted to ride the ferry between the two islands.

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