



# Misty of Chincoteague

## THE LEGACY OF MISTY ON CHINCOTEAGUE ISLAND

I remember being enthralled as a child by Marguerite Henry's children's novel *Misty of Chincoteague*, but when I visited the island of Chincoteague, Virginia, the story really came to life.

The book tells the story of two children, Paul and Maureen Beebe, who work to earn money to buy a pony named Phantom and her foal Misty who escaped the roundup on Pony Penning Day. The children eventually break Phantom and ride her in a Pony Penning Day race, where she wins. But when she sees the herd to which she once belonged, she longs to return. Paul releases Phantom, who rejoins the herd and freedom on Assateague Island.

Henry's story was inspired by a real-life Chincoteague pony of the same name, and the ponies and people surrounding her. Misty was a chestnut and white pinto with a white marking on her side that resembled the shape of the United States.

Henry purchased Misty in November 1946 and took her back to Wayne, Illinois, where for ten years they made public appearances at schools, movie theaters, museums and horse shows. Then in 1957, Henry decided to return Misty to the Beebe Ranch to have her foals. It is said that about 460 people attended the goodbye party in Wayne.

Misty had three foals: Phantom Wings, Wisp O'Mist, and Stormy, who had a blaze shaped like a crescent moon on her forehead and as of 2015, there are more than 200 direct



descendants of Misty, some of which can be seen today at the Chincoteague Pony Centre. Misty herself died October 16, 1972 at age 26.

A stop at the Chincoteague Visitors Center armed us with a map of "Misty's Trail" and information on where to find all things Misty on the island.

### FINDING MISTY IN CHINCOTEAGUE

Marguerite Henry stayed at Miss Molly's Inn in a large upstairs bedroom with white curtains while working on the book that was published in 1947. In a letter to the proprietors of the inn she described, "One night I brought a tiny live seahorse into the room and set him in front of a window in a glass of water. In the morning when I awoke, those purse white curtains were "applied" all over with 1 ½ inch long baby sea horses which had hatched in the night from the father's pouch."

"In embarrassment and haste I gathered father and children up and returned them to the sea. And that is why the final to the book of MISTY is decorated with the sketch of a sea horse." She remembered evenings on the porch, talking over the plot and the events of the day.

Traces of Misty herself can be found throughout the island. For the movie premiere in 1961, Ralph Beebe led Misty down the street and in front of the Island Theatre, where she embedded her hoof prints into cement. Marguerite Henry wrote Misty's name above them. The movie premiered in Hollywood and Chincoteague the same night. Nearby, a bronze statue of Misty that was originally located across from the Beebe Ranch can



be found in the Robert Reed Waterfront Park. An identical statue was placed at Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, Kentucky and a Misty time capsule was buried alongside it, to be opened in 2046.

At the Museum of Chincoteague Island an exhibit features the Beebe Ranch and Misty and Stormy themselves. Their bodies were taxidermied and are on display as the centerpiece of a Misty of Chincoteague exhibit that includes photographs, copies of the book and Misty memorabilia. Misty was foaled on Assateague Island in 1946, swam in the Annual Pony Swim across the Assateague Channel, and lived many of her years at the Beebe Ranch at 3062 Ridge Road.

The Chincoteague Pony Centre and Gift Shop showcases the Chincoteague pony and houses the largest herd of Misty's family's ponies on the island. Watch a 30-minute documentary on the ponies and view a large collection of Misty memorabilia and a Misty family tree.

Much of the movie *Misty of Chincoteague* was filmed at the island's Carnival Grounds, where festivities of the annual Pony Swim and Carnival still continue today, held yearly in July. See if you can find the narrow point at Pony Swim Lane near Memorial Park where the ponies emerge from the water.

There are a number of places to stay in Chincoteague, including charming B&Bs, hotels and rental cottages. We stayed at the Refuge Inn, located just across the bridge from the National Wildlife Refuge and Assateague Island, where a corral houses a number of Chincoteague ponies. Bags of pony food are available for up-close and personal interactions. It



was nice to walk outside and be among the ponies I had read so much about. It's been a while since I read *Misty of Chincoteague*, but after this journey, I think I'll pick it up again. ❖

### RESOURCES

**Chincoteague Island Visitors Center and Chamber of Commerce**  
6722 Maddox Boulevard  
Chincoteague Island, VA 23336  
[www.chincoteaguechamber.com](http://www.chincoteaguechamber.com)

**AUTHOR:** Linda Barrett travels the world looking for interesting stories to write about. This one reminded her of warm childhood memories reading her favorite books under a backyard tree

