

tales in the mud

a walk down pony swim lane





On their way from, and to, Assateague Island, the pony herd passes out of the marsh and up Pony Swim Lane. On the return trip, they leave the carnival grounds, make their way along several streets (and hopefully not through anyone's prized hibiscus)... they leave Chincoteague through Pony Swim lane, leaving their story scribbled in the mud, at least till the next tide.

Pony Swim Lane itself is an odd microcosm of the small world that is Chincoteague Island. Seaward, you see tidal marsh (previous page); landward, the big red trucks of the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Co, and the giant Viking (with his totally inaccurate horned helm) of the Kiwanis flea market; hard aport you see new condos (still, fortunately not all that common on the island); and to starboard, Payne's Sea Treasures, an esoteric collection of shells and Useful Stuff.

The marsh teemed with life, even with thousands of tourists lined up to watch the swim back. The tide was low, and as the ponies' pricked ears dwindled to dots on



Assateague's shore, I looked for more stuff to fill up my memory card with...

squelch!

Yeah, that gooey stuff underfoot. If I had been a tracker with the skill of Strider following those kidnapped Hobbits in Lord of the Rings, what tale would I have read...



Marsh grass, high marsh grass, not the taller grass of the low marsh. The high marsh is only flooded on the highest tides, storm tides, "spring tides" (full moon tides, new moon tides). Here the marsh is nearly dry. It's hard to tell if I'm looking at unshod wild ponies, or shod cowponies.

A slightly wetter swath. A hoofprint has turned up a bit of the underlying sand (golden). Marsh nutrients have turned the golden sand a rich dark color.



Footprint in wet sand. Two, actually, the hindfootprint overlaps the forefootprint as it comes down. This happens in walk or trot if your horse is "tracking up", which means he's using his hindquarters like a good engine on a power boat.



Wet sand hoofprint, my sandal print middle bottom.. The mud/sand varies; gloppy, dry, damp, squooshy, firm, firmish-squooshy. The saltwater cowboys have ridden all over the islands and apparently have the experience to stay out of the deep gluey swallow your horse stuff. If the Inuit had a thousand words for snow, people who lived in salt marshes must have had a thousand words for mud.

Drier sand, the hoof has dug into the golden sand below as the pony sought purchase.



A blurry shod print top left, wet sand. The one next to it has stuck to the hoof, the wad of mud flipped to show the golden sand below.



A plethora of shod hoofprints in wet mud. Still fairly solid mud; they didn't sink far, but you can see how one of them slid a bit.

Below: sometimes I shoot pretty stuff too: a hibiscus in the front yard of one of the condos.

