

[From Fall 2008]

Intern

When I graduated from college with a degree in English Literature, I planned to use that degree to pursue a career in teaching. And up until about six months ago, I never really thought about exploring any fields outside of education. But at the beginning of 2008, I started researching internships for national parks and refuges, mainly out of curiosity, and because I figured that it might very well be my last opportunity to explore something new before I had to become a "real" adult. When I found the internship for Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, I remembered family visits to the area when I was a child, and I submitted my application, despite having no science, environmental, or wildlife background. I agonized over my cover letter, nit-picked my resume, and then spent a small fortune in postage to make sure my application arrived at the refuge by the deadline. To my absolute shock, I was selected as the interpretive intern for the summer of 2008.

In my first week at the refuge, I led a group of kindergarteners in a marsh exploration program. Let me tell you, for someone who cannot stand the feel of fish, wading into a marsh that is sure to be full of the slimy little critters was an event, to say the least. But in the weeks and months that followed, my internship became more and more an adventure in which I was constantly testing my limits and racking up experiences that were so far out of the norm for me that my friends and family started joking with me, "Who are you?"

At times, I feel as if I have done just about everything I could possibly think of, and then some. I have, of course, staffed the visitor center, answering everyone's favorite question: "Where can I find the ponies?" and I have put together programs on totally foreign topics, such as market gunning. I put my English degree to good use, writing press releases and articles, and I dressed myself in hip waders and slogged my way through Swan Cove Pool to help the biology staff during the Canada goose round-up. My two weeks as the Children in the Woods day camp assistant had me reaching deep into my past as a Girl Scout, dredging up camp songs, as well as the technique for making a perfect s'more. I even had to shimmy under a bathroom stall to unlock a door. To be honest, I have enjoyed every minute (except, maybe, the bathroom door episode). Throughout everything, the staff members here at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge have been fantastic, answering my questions, listening to my concerns, and giving me opportunities that could only make my experience more positive

This is not to say that it has been all work and no play. This summer would not have been half as fun without my fellow interns. From group dinners to our moped biker gang, hours at the beach, campfires, hide and seek marathons, and movie night with the best 80's VHS collection ever, these people (Becky, Sara, Jeb, Taylor, Lester, and Shifty Mike) were there through it all. And even though we have been told that we were boring compared to last year's interns, I am pretty sure we are anything but. You guys are some of the best people I know.

As my summer draws to a close, I'll admit that I still have not touched a fish (some things are just not meant to be). Everything else, however, that I have learned and experienced, will go with me. When I leave Chincoteague in September, I will be heading north to Maine for a fall internship at Acadia National Park. Everyone tells me how great of an experience I will have there, and I know this is true. I'll say one thing though: everyone in Maine sure has a hard act to follow. This summer that I spent here, the memories I created, and the friends I have made will be with me always.

Kristin Jalm, Visitor Services Intern