

EQUINE BEHAVIOUR STUDY CIRCLE

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26 April 1982

Dear Mr. Raddall,

I recently published a book review in *EQUINE BEHAVIOR* of Barbara J. Christie's book, *The Horses of Sable Island*. I mentioned in the review your experiences with the Sable Island pony roundups as detailed in *MY TIME* and your novel, *THE NYMPH AND THE LAMP*.

Mrs. Christie has written me to say that your descriptions are not typical and that the ponies would be starved only "2 or 3 days" rather than your report of two weeks. And that if it did happen in your time, this would be an isolated incident due to the change in personnel "who were probably not familiar with the needs of horses." Mrs. Christie studied diaries and letters dated up to about 6 years before your arrival on Sable.

I would very much like your comment on Mrs. Christie's observations. It has been my experience that the worst practices persist in animal handling-- witness the BLM round-ups in the Western states, or the centuries-old round-up traditions of horses in Germany which resemble those of Sable Island as described by yourself.

I enclose a SASE for your convenience.

Yours for the horses,

Sharon Cregier

April 29, 1982

Dr. Sharon E. Cregier,
University of PEI,
Charlottetown, Canada.

Dear Dr. Cregier:

In reply to your enquiry about the shipment of horses from Sable Island in 1921, and Barbara Christie's comments.

Unlike Mrs. Christie I did spend a whole year among the wild horses on Sable Island, and I kept a careful diary. Thus, after all the time gone by, I don't depend on random letters and remarks of other people for my information. Apart from my diary, in the collection of my papers in Dalhousie University Library (available to anyone) there are photographs showing, step by step, the whole brutal process of getting the captured horses from the corral to the ship, exactly as I described them in my books.

The horses were without food, not merely for Mrs. Christie's supposititious "2 or 3 days" but for about two weeks, as my diary attests. One of the photos shows a young man (myself) holding a handful of coarse dry marra grass over the corral fence, and one of those starved creatures eagerly reaching to eat it out of my hand. Need I add that when they were free on the dunes you couldn't get within a hundred yards of them? (I'm told that nowadays the horses are quite tame, foraging about the houses for potato peels and other delicious rubbish.)

The long and hungry delay in the corral in 1921 was caused by rough weather, which made it impossible to bind and load the animals into surf-boats and then get them into a ship lying a mile offshore. Indeed much of this time the ship lay in harbour on the mainland, awaiting a message that the beach conditions were workable. As an operator in the wireless station I saw all of the messages which passed between the island, the ship, and the Department of Marine and Fisheries office in Halifax, beginning with a Department order in late October to round up fifty horses for shipment, and ending with an island message on Nov. 11th stating that 41 had been shipped but owing to rising surf the rest had been left on the beach.

I never blamed the island men for the harsh methods. They were given a job to do and they did it, in the only way they knew. And since it was the only way they knew, evolved over many years of experience with horses, boats and weather, I doubt if what I saw and noted in 1921 was an isolated incident, as Mrs. Christie declares.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Raddall

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5 May 1982

Dear Mr Raddall,

Thanks so much for your letter of 29 April commenting on Mrs Christie's observations re: penning and removal of horses from Sable Island in your day. I sure did appreciate the fact that you don't mince words and will treasure your letter.

Your collection of papers at Dalhousie would be well worth a long look and if things ever get back to abnormal at my desk, I would hope to go there and treat myself to them.

I'm enclosing copies of my review of her book with mention of your work. As you can see, I did not back down and stuck to my guns, including the use of the horses as meat -- their ultimate end, surely, whatever they were originally shipped for.

While at the University of Edinburgh last spring ('81) I met a Nova Scotia girl, Prof Trudy McKay of Genetics, who has spent some of the worst months, November, January and possibly some summer mos. on S.I. She really liked it, despite no bath, no shelter (other than tents) for the researchers, ^{as} and, a horsewoman, ^{she} enjoyed the S.I. ponies enormously, photographing them in poses that Dan Welsh seems to have missed (the Stretch for one -- formerly thought only done by foals).

*Yours for the horses --
Sharon Cregier*

BOOK REVIEW

(Same in INDEPENDENT
EMIRA, ONT.)

Our North American/Canadian editor and co-ordinator, Dr. Sharon Cregier of the University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada C1A 4P3, has sent us the following book review:-

Barbara J. Christie's, The Horses of Sable Island (1980: Halifax, Petheric Press), is an excellent portrayal of the politics, history and genotype of the Sable Island pony. Born in Sussex, England, Mrs Christie combines her wide-ranging experience with horses, and her work as a Research Associate of the Nova Scotia Museum, to present the most original, in-depth study of the history of the Sable Island horses that has yet been done.

Colonial Office papers, diaries, letters, and the author's correspondence with equine specialists and libraries spanning the globe have been integrated into this study. A complete bibliography of her sources would fill many pages.

The Sable Island horses' origins appear to be as wide-ranging as the study's sources. The author argues that the root stock of the Island horses is of the Norman-Breton type, and not—as popularly supposed—of Spanish origin.

The book touches on the abhorrent practices of the Sable Island round-ups, when the animals were shipped to the mainland for meat, as polo-ponies, as ill-used carters' drudges; and, more rarely, as cherished companions. More detailed descriptions of the starvation running into two weeks to deliberately debilitate the horses, choking, dragging, and flogging of the ponies are available in Canadian historian Thomas Raddell's autobiography, IN MY TIME, and his novel, THE NYMPH AND THE LAMP. Raddell was told by government sources that his round-up descriptions were "highly exaggerated." But Raddell's own experience of the round-ups, and the photos he has, are a more authentic version of the "whole wretched business" than government denials.

Although Mrs Christie's work warns against further oil exploration off Sable Island, it should be noted that the oil companies have a far better record of preserving the ponies' environment than does the provincial or national governments. An important exception was the action taken by the Diefenbaker Federal administration to protect the ponies from commercial exploitation.

Sable Island horses remain an invaluable resource to workers in ecological and ethological studies. Unlike modern managed feral herds, such as the North American west or in herds of the Chincoteague Island, off the coast of Maryland, Sable Island horses retain a full behavioral display. Sable Island horses are not denied the fullest range of herd and family life.

The author correctly points out that bringing ponies to the mainland to preserve the breed will not preserve it as it is now known. Where efforts have been made with other herds in this direction, conformational defects, behavior, and breeding patterns change for the worse in the "civilised" environment.

This 93 page book, available through J.A.Allen (\$4.00) in the U.K. and any bookseller in North America, is a must on the list of any student, legislator, historian, breeder or equine behaviorist. It is a cogent reminder that to protect nature reserves is a human obligation. Not only does such protection benefit future generations, it is also a way, "in a rather faithless age", to give "thanks for this world's treasures."

(Purchasers shd. note that the book was not fully edited before going to press. Many typos remain and some names are mis-spelled: Daphne Machin Goodall; Bouteillier; and on p. 50, the date 1934 shd. be changed to 1834).

* ultimately as meat,

ELM. INDER
10/12/80

Diefenbaker helped to preserve legacy of Sable island ponies

by SHARON CREGLIER

Canada's postal stamp honouring John G. Diefenbaker was issued in June of 1980. The deep blue field and simple profile in white provides a fitting commemorative of a man impressive in political and personal stature. In 1956 Diefenbaker became Canada's first Conservative prime minister since 1935.

True to his past reputation for defending the defenceless — whether working man or Indian — as a young lawyer, Diefenbaker as prime minister continued to seek the well-being of all peoples under the Canadian flag.

Among the lesser known, but no less important, of Diefenbaker's accomplishments as humanitarian and politician, was his championing of wild life. As patron of the

Canadian wild horse society, his real concern and authority helped to ensure that wild horses in Canada's west would be protected against harassment and slaughter.

Responding to a 1960 plea from the Nova Scotia society for the prevention of cruelty to animals, prime minister Diefenbaker quickly authorized an investigation into plans by the federal department of agriculture to remove the famous wild Sable Island horses. It was soon established that the removal of the animals would benefit only an eastern horse dealer interested in peddling their flesh.

Removal of the animals — unused to handling — for any reason would also be fraught with danger. The long, shallow approaches to Sable Island — the Graveyard of the Atlantic — 100 miles off Nova Scotia's Atlantic coast, required barge-like conveyances and offered no security to horses in transport.

The horse-traders could not meet the requirements for humane transport of the animals nor had they expected to have to agree to supervision by humane officers of the animals' removal. The traders' copious crocodile tears about "rescuing starving

Sable Island ponies" died in a trice and no more was heard from them.

With the assurance in 1961 of the prime minister's office that it would now be an offence to interfere with the Sable Island horses, they were given a head-start to safety when oil exploration found traces of black gold beneath the 25-mile long, one-mile wide Sable Island sands in 1967. Fortunately, Nova Scotia and Mobil Oil worked out guidelines for the preservation of plant and animal life on Sable Island.

One of the most thorough studies of the horses was completed in 1972 by Daniel A. Welsh, then professor of biology at Dalhousie university. While no-one will probably ever know precisely how the horses arrived on the island to maintain themselves for 450 years, Welsh's work established that the horses appear to be related to a strain of horses found only in Spain, Mexico and the Ukraine. He found the horses to be variable in size and conformation with bay the most common colour. Forty family herds on the island were supplemented by several herds of bachelors. During his study, Welsh noted that the numbers of horses remain relatively stable between 200 and 300. It is a mystery as to how the animals manage to do this but it takes no hard thinking to realize that this works out to the benefit of the tightly-confined herds.

Thanks to the efforts of the Canadian wild horse society, humane societies around the world, and prime minister Diefenbaker, the feisty, hardy mystery horses remain free to live their wild life, providing a source of study, inspiration and living lecs.

*Preliminary work.
Christies & Welsh
later work refutes
this.*

*no more a mystery
horses killed off by
cold cycles —
starvation*