

The Ballad of the Irish Horse

National Geographic made a terrific documentary, *Ballad of the Irish Horse*. Featuring music by The Chieftains, it's a loving look at the horse culture of the Emerald Isles:

Over the centuries, horses have captured hearts and minds of the Irish people. Nurtured by the mild climate and rich grasses, the horses of Ireland have always flourished. From magnificent wild stallions to sturdy work ponies and the elegant racing thoroughbreds – Ireland's horses are an enduring part of the country's history, work, and play. A romantic portrait of man and animal for viewers to treasure.



In the west of Ireland lay the hills of Connemara. A rugged unforgiving landscape, where the strong winds from the Atlantic challenges your survival. The Connemara pony is native to this region, which over the centuries has produced and continues to produce a special kind of horse. The Connemara pony is a rugged compact well-balanced riding type, standing on short legs, covering a lot of ground. Some say they were first introduced here by the Vikings. Legend, however, says that galleons from the Spanish

Armada ran aground in 1588, and the Andalusians on board were set loose. The Spanish horses bred with the native stock, refining the local ponies. Whichever theory you accept, for additional strength and stamina, Arabian blood was added in the 1700s. Additionally when selecting a pony from this region breeders also look at the limbs, knees and structure of the horse. They will examine the hind quarters and thighs, and check for the grace and movement in the horse. They were also crossed with Hackneys and Thoroughbreds. However, too much crossbreeding can dilute the breed. For this reason, in 1923 the Connemara Pony Breeders' Society was founded, to preserve the breed type. Today, Connemara ponies are bred worldwide.

Connemara Pony Shows:

Connemara Pony shows are held worldwide, however the most famous of all being the Annual Clifden Connemara Pony Show which takes place every August at the Showgrounds, Clifden, Co. Galway.