

## A- THE BASIS FOR BREEDING AND JUDGING FJORDHORSES

### **The History of the Breed**

The Fjord Horse is one of the world's oldest and purest breeds. Breeding took place mainly in the west of Norway so that the breed was also known as "Vestlandshesten".

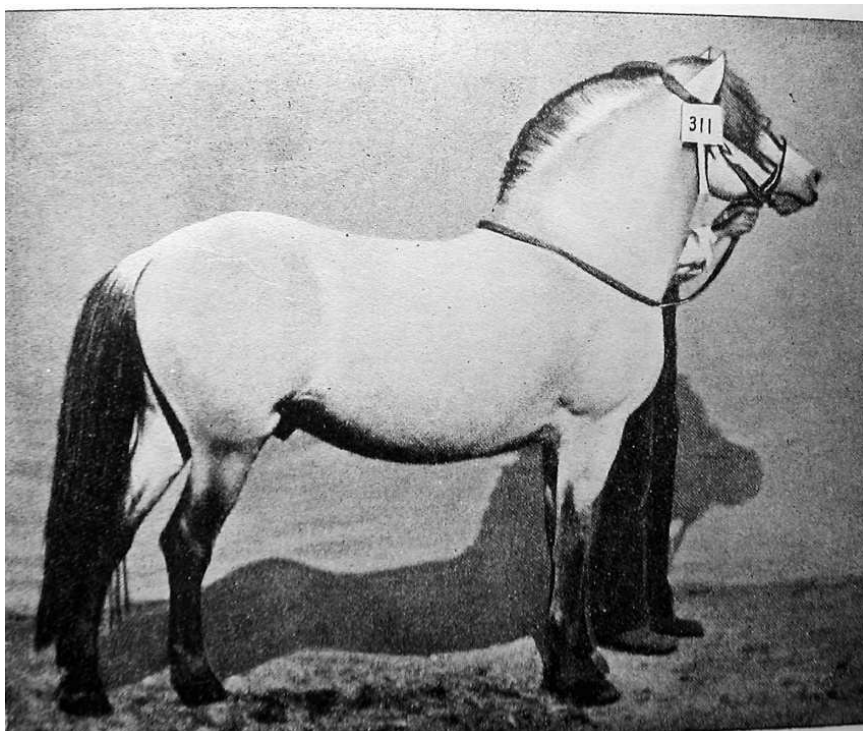
Little is known about the origin of the breed. There are many similarities such as colour and primitive markings (see chapter F) between the feral Przewalski horse and the Fjord. The Fjord is rather like the European wild horse, the Tarpan, now extinct in its natural state. However, the Fjord Horse does not descend from the Przewalski Horse, as the Przewalski has 66 chromosomes, and the Fjord and Tarpan 64.\*

It is most likely that the horse came to Norway from the east. There seem to have been wild horses in the south of Sweden and in Denmark since the last ice age. Archaeological excavations reveal that the horse was domesticated in the Bronze Age, circa 1200 BC. Viking burial grounds show that man had bred the horse for about 2000 years and it appears that the Fjord Horse is a descendant of the earliest horses in Norway. Through the ages there has been a great deal of contact between Norway, Iceland and the British Isles, and horses from these lands across the sea have surely influenced the development of the breed.

The Fjord seems to have varied in size and type from the north to the south of Vestlandet. The Fjord Horse from Nordfjord and Sunnmøre was known to be larger with more bone and with more profuse mane, tail and feathering than the Fjord in Sunnhordland, which was smaller, lighter and more refined. This has led to a feeling that there were perhaps different types of Fjord Horse with slightly dissimilar origins. An example of the lighter type is Rosendalsborken I 8, foaled 1863 in Kvinnherad. As a 20-year-old, he was entered in a show in Germany and made quite a sensation. The types from Sunnmøre and Fjordane are predominant in today's breeding. The most important sire in the history of the breed is Njål 166, foaled 1891 in Stryn. Njål who was a county stallion in Sogn og Fjordane, stationed at Sunde in Stryn from 1896 till he died in 1910, is to be found in the pedigree of every living Fjord Horse around the world today. The Fjord is easy to feed, strong, tough but docile, with a capacity for working long hours, day after day under difficult conditions. This together with its versatility made the Fjord Horse very suitable for work on the small farms in the West Country long before mechanisation began.

\*Source: "Genetica of the Horse" by Anne Bowling and Andrei Ruvinsky, ISBN 0 85199 429 8.

The Fjord was also used for transport between hamlets and ferries. Affection for the Fjord Horse in Norway has remained very strong, especially amongst the farmers of Vestlandet who have appreciated and maintained these attributes up to the present day. The charm, kind nature and versatility of the Fjord make him highly appreciated also today. Many people consider the Fjord Horse as a national symbol.



**Rosendalsborken I 8**