Chapter 4

Data Analysis of Interviews

Pre-research for this project was conducted from May 2006 until May 2015; a period of nine years. During that pre-research period, relationships were formed with Native and non-Native equine “experts.” For this project, the term “experts” is used to signify an individual who has acquired significant horse expertise and knowledge from life-experience, Western academia, Native ways of Knowing (Traditional Knowledge), breed or species preservation, ceremonial training, or Equine Therapy-type training. However, due to protocol issues and/or physical, geographic, or time constraints, not all of these individuals were able or willing to serve as formal research project participants. In addition, some individuals who participated in the pre-research phase of the project recommended others who they felt could offer a significant contribution. The researcher did not have a previous relationship with those individuals.

Formal interviews were conducted with 19 project participants over an eight-month period between March 2016 and November 2016. Each of these project participants has a great deal of expertise in their respective fields, and as a group they cover a wide range with regard to geographic location, background, profession, tribal affiliation and/or ethnicity, and position within their respective communities. This was done in order to increase the likelihood of capturing a more accurate perspective of the history of the horse in the Americas and to identify any patterns and/or inconsistencies. Since the Americas as continents are expansive, the geography and terrain highly varied, and its Native Peoples significantly diverse, it is believed that this wide range of participants offers the clearest opportunity to provide something of value to Western Academia, Indigenous Peoples, and the world.

For example, if the research project focused solely on the oral traditions and history of one Nation with regard to the horse in the Americas, although important, such a study would not likely offer the “full story” that this research project is attempting to piece together. Providing a wide range of perspectives from project participants who are highly qualified and represent an array of disciplines is expected to help better answer the research questions proposed.

Both Native and non-Native participants were chosen. Some are considered “experts” in their fields from a Western academic perspective and others are considered “experts” within their communities regarding their mastery of Indigenous culture and traditions. Many of these
participants have achieved recognition for their achievements and knowledge from both the Western Academic culture and their Indigenous cultures. A handful of project participants are considered “icons” within the equine community, as they have dedicated their lives to the preservation of remaining pockets of North American horse-lines.

Each one of these interviews was conducted in person at locations and times that were selected by the project-participant, as protocol-wise this method of communication is considered to be most appropriate and respectful within traditional Indigenous cultures. In addition, this allowed for the researcher to observe and experience the settings in which these various participants work and live. For example, if these participants happened to be caretakers of horses, I was able to view their herds or horses, see the way in which they manage and care for them, and note the phenotype of these horses. If they were scholars, I was able to see their offices and the settings in which they taught. If they were ceremonial leaders, I was able to experience the settings they choose for these and meet some of the individuals who come to them for guidance and help.

The majority of the project participants were selected during the years-long pre-research process based upon their level of interest, knowledge of the subject, and willingness to participate. As mentioned above, a number of Indigenous Elders who were very helpful in the pre-research portion of this project were unable to participate in the formal interview process for protocol reasons (such as the fact that their traditional knowledge and/or spiritual understanding of the horse is deemed to be “sacred” and, therefore, “private” by their communities so as to prevent further exploitation or ridicule by the Western culture.) In addition, there were seven project participants who did not have any prior relationship with the researcher (other than a telephone call or request for an interview), as they were recommended by other program participants or by people who knew of the research being conducted.

4.1 Project Participants

It is important to note that all but one of the project participants gave their permission to be openly identified within this study. Interviews were conducted in the following locations within the United States: Hot Springs, South Dakota; Piedmont, South Dakota; Linton, North Dakota; Portal, North Dakota; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Laguna Pueblo, New Mexico; Chimayo, New Mexico; Choctaw, Mississippi; Soper, Oklahoma; Anchorage, Alaska; and
Fairbanks, Alaska. Two interviews were also conducted in the Canadian region of Regina, Saskatchewan.

Indigenous project participants self-identified as follows: (2 participants) Mississippi Choctaw Band members, (1 participant) member of the Diné (Navajo) Nation, (1 participant) mixture of Indigenous (Cheyenne and Pequots) and non-Indigenous (French), (2 participants) Oglala Lakota Nation, (1 participant) Kainai or Blood First Nation; (1 participant) Choctaw and Cherokee Nations; (1 participant) mixture of Cherokee and European; (1 participant) Laguna Pueblo; and (1 participant) Métis and Ojibwe. Those who identified as “non-Indigenous” self-identified as follows: (1 participant) Spanish and Italian, but born and raised in Veracruz Mexico; (1 participant) American of Northern European descent; (1 participant) American of Russian and German American; (5 participants) European descent.

Project participants were divided into six categories that helped to designate their area of expertise with regard to equines and the information they contributed to this study. It was determined that creating such categories might enable the researcher to better provide context for the reader, as such life experiences will naturally affect a person’s perspective. It is important to note that many of the project participants qualified for more than one of these “categories.” The categories chosen are as follows: Traditional Knowledge Bearer, Teacher, Academic Scholar, Western-Trained Scientist, Caretaker, and Ceremonial Leader and/or Medicine Person. Of those interviewed eight were classified as a “Traditional Knowledge Bearer,” six were classified as an “Academic Scholar,” four were classified as a “Western-Trained Scientist,” ten were categorized as a “Teacher,” twelve were classified as “Caretaker,” and five were classified as “Ceremonial Leader and/or Medicine Person.” It is possible that there is one more project participant who also qualifies as a “ceremonial leader,” but as the researcher did not know this for sure, he was not added to that category.

The designation of “Traditional Knowledge Bearer” was given to those individuals who hold specific teachings about the horse, understanding as to the meaning of the horse for their People, and/or knowledge regarding the inner workings of the ontology, epistemology, and axiology of their People. Such knowledge was passed down to them by their ancestors, relatives, or community members, and others within their communities often seek them out for teachings, but not necessarily for spiritual ceremony. The individuals who were given this designation self-identify as being from the (2 participants) Choctaw Nation, (1 participant) Diné (Navajo) Nation,
(2 participants) Oglala Lakota Nation, (1 participant) Blackfeet Nation, and (2 participants) who self-identify as being of mixed Native and European ancestry.

The designation of "Academic Scholar" was given to those who have a career path in Western academia. Their areas of scholarly expertise range from Anthropology, Archeology, Indigenous Studies, Education, Bilingual Education, Wildlife Biology, Mental Health, Endocrinology, Genetics, and Equine Reproductive Physiology. Each of these individuals is either currently affiliated with a university on a full-time or part-time basis, or was in the very recent past and intend to be so again in the near future. The individuals who were given this distinction self-identify as follows: (1) Diné (Navajo) Nation, (1) the Métis and Ojibwe Nations, (1) Spain and Italy, and (2) European descent, (1) American of Northern European descent.

The designation for "Teacher" was given to those individuals who serve their communities in a teaching capacity. However, their "classrooms" do not necessarily follow a traditional Western format. In this case, these individuals currently teach or have taught in the following fields or settings: (1) Equine therapy, (3) ceremonial contexts, (1) Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, (1) United States high schools, (4) laboratories and/or graduate-level classrooms, and (6) national and international lectures and workshops.

The designation for "Western Trained Scientist" was given to those individuals who have had extensive experience studying what we know of as "Western science." Three of the four people regularly work in laboratories and have experience with genetics, reproductive physiology and/or endocrinology with regard to equines or other species (in this case, the muskox), while the fourth individual worked "in the field" as an archeologist and anthropologist at Indigenous sites for many years. Although he has since shifted his perspective, this individual was trained to observe, interpret, and categorize his findings from a very Western culture perspective.

The designation of "Caretaker" was given to individuals whose knowledge of the horse largely came from, or is at least heavily supplemented and influenced by, the knowledge gained from actually caring for them physically, mentally, and psychologically on a daily basis. Seven of these individuals have extensive experience observing and caretaking horses in their natural environments, while four of the individuals in this category have experience preserving an entire breed or sub-species. Five of the individuals in this category have experience caring for a smaller number of equines on a daily basis (in situations where the natural herd dynamic is not
provided). In addition, there is one individual in this category who has experience with equine care, but she also has a great deal of experience preserving the muskox. She helps to run a research facility where she is responsible for overseeing the care of muskox and caribou, and she has traveled extensively throughout Alaska and Canada to observe them in their natural habitat.

Finally, the designation for “Ceremonial Leader/Medicine Person” was given to those individuals who serve as spiritual advisors for their People and/or their communities. These individuals have knowledge and training regarding ancient Indigenous ceremonies (such as the inipi, or “sweat lodge” and the Wiwanke Wachipi, or the Sundance for the Lakota) and/or knowledge about the healing properties of plants, and the inner workings of prayer and healing. The project participants who qualified for this category self-designate as follows: (2) Choctaw Nation, (2) Oglala Lakota Nation, and (1) of mixed Native and European ancestry.

4.2 Application of Methodologies

As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, Critical Indigenous Research Methodologies (CIRM) and Grounded Theory (GT) were utilized in tandem throughout this research project. CIRM were applied in the following ways: this investigation was conducted with the support of Indigenous and/or non-Indigenous Elders from many Nations and communities within the United States, the researcher worked closely with the community members who contributed to this research, and cultural protocols regarding the exchange and presentation of TK were respected. The following courtesies and protocols were extended to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants as required: all interviews were conducted in person at a time, geographical place, and setting that were comfortable, convenient and culturally and spiritually appropriate for the participant; interview transcripts were circulated to each participant for their review once they were completed; any suggested changes and/or additions to the transcripts by participants were made; and efforts were made to obtain the correct spelling for all Indigenous language words and phrases that were used within the interviews. In addition, cultural protocols were respected with regard to the interview arrangements. Examples of this included having another woman present during an interview with a traditional Lakota male Elder; and having family members present and available to support one participant who was legally blind and hard of hearing.

It is important to note that the researcher also made numerous trips to conduct interviews within the boundaries of sacred sites (such as The Black Hills of South Dakota) in order to
acknowledge and conform to cultural protocols regarding the type of knowledge exchange that was occurring between the project participant and the researcher. The researcher also physically visited some of the geographic locations where surviving herds of traditional Native-line horses are being cared for and/or survive in wild conditions. At times, the researcher was accompanied and guided by project participants, expert in the flora and fauna of the geographical area, as well as the behavior, husbandry, phenotype, and genotypes of these horses. These areas included Alaska, New Mexico, Wyoming, Colorado, Oklahoma, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Sasketuan.

In addition to CIIRM, Grounded Theory (GT) was also utilized in an attempt to develop a grounded theory (an explanation based on data collected) regarding the behavior and reactions of both non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples and/or societies surrounding the history of the Indigenous horse of the Americas and the Native Peoples. First, the researcher sought to gather "rich data" from project participants, observations, supporting documents, and detailed narratives. In the book titled Constructing Grounded Theory, Kathy Charmaz explains:

Gathering rich data will give you solid material for building a significant analysis. Rich data are detailed, focused, and full. They reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives ... Researchers generate strong grounded theories with rich data.  

In addition, memo writing and journaling were utilized post-interview to highlight the researcher's thoughts, observations, research context, and feelings about the data received. Lora Bex Lempert's article, titled "Asking Questions of the Data: Memo Writing in the Grounded Theory Tradition," explains the following:

Memo writing is essential to Grounded Theory methodological practices and principles. It is the fundamental process of researcher/data engagement that results in a 'grounded' theory. Memo writing is the methodological link, the distillation process, through which the researcher transforms data into theory. In the memo writing process, the researcher analytically interprets data.  

Finally, initial coding and categorization of data was utilized, as well as concurrent data
generation, collection, and analysis. Judith A. Holton’s article, titled “The Coding Process and Its
Challenges,” explains that coding accomplishes the following:

The essential relationship between data and theory is a conceptual code. Coding gets the
researcher off the empirical level by fracturing the data, then conceptualizing the
underlying pattern of a set of empirical indicators within the data as a theory that explains
what is happening in the data. Coding gives the researcher a condensed, abstract view
with scope and dimension that encompasses otherwise seemingly disparate
phenomena.\textsuperscript{216}

The implementation and utilization of both of these methodologies was critical to support
the type of data generation required to investigate the history of the horse in the Americas and its
relationship with the Indigenous Peoples. Each of these steps described above were critical in
ensuring the following: that project participants felt comfortable and safe in sharing their
knowledge; that any new or unexpected information did not go unnoticed, that any patterns in
data gathered from participants were noted, and that accurate correlations were made. Indeed,
data generated from one interview often led to conducting research on an unexpected topic, and
it helped to guide the line of questioning used in subsequent interviews.

\textbf{4.3 Patterns Within the Data Collected}

One of the things that was most surprising to the researcher was that the majority of the
project participants, including those whom the researcher had not met until the start of the
official data gathering process, had already noticed discrepancies within the dominant Western
culture theory previous to their contribution to this research project. Many of these individuals
had spent their own time, energy, and resources conducting different types of research regarding
the history of the horse throughout their own lifetimes, and some had come to their own
conclusions, which they were generous in sharing.

Of the nineteen project participants, fifteen had given previous thought and attention to
this issue and had concluded that there were horses in the Americas before the arrival of the
Spanish to the Caribbean in 1492. One participant had not given thought to this issue previously,

however, he described a type of horse phenotypically that had “always been there” in the New Mexico area and that was “different than the modern breeds.” One participant provided a description of the traditional Choctaw pony as handed down to him from his mother, however, he did not specifically say whether he had concluded that their horse was brought to them by the Spanish in the early 1500s as history books say. As the two remaining participants were approached not for their expertise on horses but on the muskox (in order to help the researcher develop a theory as to what may have occurred with the horses that were indigenous to the Americas during and after the last Ice Age), the question of whether or not they believed there were horses in the Americas before “first-contact” with the Spanish was not asked.

The personal research conducted by these fifteen participants within their own lives had been stimulated by one or more of the following: noticing discrepancies between the dominant Western culture theory and the traditional knowledge put forth by Native Peoples, receiving direct traditional teachings that are contrary to the dominant cultural claim, having firsthand experience with different breeds of horses, having firsthand experience with evidence that countered the dominant Western cultural claim, and/or having exposure to evidence that was contrary to the viewpoint put forth by the equine industry. When noticing these discrepancies, some of these individuals spent a significant portion of their lives contemplating these issues. Therefore, their explanations, the proof given by them, and the conclusions made are credible and compelling. Due to the high level of expertise held by the participants within their respective fields and the uniquely rich perspective this provides, the researcher will include their observations in their own words. It is important to note that within Indigenous communities, context must always be provided. Therefore, some of these responses may appear more lengthy than normal for that reason.

Within this Chapter, the main issues addressed are as follows:

1.) Whether or not the horse was in the Americas between the time period known as the “Last Glacial Maximum” or the last Ice Age and before the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Caribbean in 1492;

2.) Any phenotypical descriptions of Indigenous American horses;

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217 Eldon Francisco, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, in his home in Laguna Pueblo, New Mexico, August 20, 2016.

218 Harold Comby, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, at a Veterans’ Day pow wow in Choctaw, Mississippi, November 11, 2016.
3.) The project participants’ conclusions about the dominant Western culture theory.

The interview excerpts regarding this issue, as well as the project participant categories and the way in which they self-designate, are as follows:

Caretaker (European ancestry): (Regarding the three possible sources for the curly horse in North America)

"In 1957 [Lyle Joseph Mead] went to the Aishihik Lake area where ... he met the mom of his then wife. She had a pierced nose [signifying her lineage from the] Nez Perce Indians ... And he got 20 horses from them ... So, we had the Nez Perce characteristics but the Athabascan Tribe, basically as far as I understand. Ok, and that’s one. That’s the one that I can contribute to. The other one is of course coming from the steps of Mongolia and coming over Beringia, the land bridge, which I have information on too. And the third is that somehow they were related to the mustangs that were brought over by Columbus, which I totally personally do not believe ... It doesn’t make sense ... And another thing, as you know, they have been finding fossils that predate Columbus and horse skeletons, so I’m not really wanting to go for that third thing at all. But I just thought I had better bring it up." 219

Caretaker (European ancestry): (Regarding origin of the horses in the Americas, and what their behavior might be like if the environmental conditions were changing, such as with the Ice Age.)

"Well, it’s hard for me to think that there was a world without horses here, and I know that there were ... Having seen a lot of wild horse bands in my lifetime, I have seen just how prolific they can be ... They are survivors, and I am not at all afraid that that the world will run out of wild horses, there will always be wild horses. Because these stallions are so cagey, and they can slip in and jump your fence and breed your treasured quarter mares and ... I don’t think we will ever run out of horses ... Having survived a few memorable winters, myself, I think they had to get the heck out of here, and they can survive on very poor quality feed out on the wild. It’s amazing. Where a cow will starve to death, a horse can paw the snow and eat the grass that is exposed in their track, and one horse will go along behind the horse ahead of it and literally live on what is uncovered by the footprints of the horse that it is following. And I think that what we have on this sanctuary are flint mines that are 12,000 to 14,000 years old. And the people who lived in those flint mines and worked them were — well there were various stories about what tribes they happened to represent. Some of the cliff drawings that are here on the ranch are of horses and they are very ancient drawings, but there is no way really of pinpointing how old they are, but we do know that from all of the tipi rings and the art and what they can put together and what they knew by the stories that have been passed from one generation to another, they can put together quite a bit about the last 12,000 years and here is no reason that if the horse did migrate across the land bridges, which seems to be a pretty sane theory, it could come back just as easily and people." 220

219 Janey Moen, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, in Anchorage, Alaska, October, 18, 2016.
220 Dayton O’Hyde, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, at the Wild Horse Sanctuary in Hot Springs, South Dakota, March 27, 2016.
Continued ... (Regarding a physical description of the “wild horses” that surrounded his uncle’s ranch in Oregon.)

“They were different horses. They tend to be short headed, and not very pretty to look at generally. Although you really found ones that were obviously beautiful, but they tended to be a little jug bellied but with great hearts. And I remember one of our cowboys captured a band of horses of all — they were of all sources, Indian horses that had escaped, and they put some good blood in those horses, but there was one little mustang, that was typical of the mustangs. He weighed less than 900 pounds, and he wasn’t very pretty to look at. He was a pretty hard horse to break.” 221

Caretaker (European ancestry): (Regarding the history of the Lac La Croix ponies and the veracity of the dominant Western culture claim.)

“I remember them telling us they took them off Lac La Croix island, how they rescued them. They told all about how they were always around. The Elders say they have always been around. That they have just always been there. And, you know I just, I believe it ... No, I don’t believe in [the dominant Western culture theory] at all. I believe the Elders.” 222

Continued ... (Regarding a description of the Indigenous Lac La Croix ponies)

“Well, these ponies are very calm ... they want to please. Easy to train. A lot like, I compare them a lot like a quarter horse. They are not spirited. We have had Arabs, you know, all kinds of different horses. Just, strong, tough, very intelligent breed ... there’s just a lot of different things about the horse like, their dorsal stripe, their striped legs, their small hooves but hard ... their pasterns are a little bit different ... they can take the hardy cold. They have extra hair in their ears, long manes. They are just, they were a breed that was bred for Canada. They were meant for tough winters. And they seem to resist flies. They don’t want to come in in the winter time they will stay out. So, they are just a hardy. A very hardy animal ... There is just something different about them. They are very social with people. There is something different about them and I don’t know what it is. They are just so easy. Just easy keepers ... They go through a winter and they come through a winter if they are fed hay fatter coming out of it than they are coming in. They are just easy. They just stay in the bush, they are survivors. They don’t want to come out of the bush. You have to take the hay there. They don’t want to be in the barn, they don’t want to stay in the barn. They want to be outside. They can fur out. I have seen some of them have hair just like bear. Very coarse and they just want to stay together.” 223

Caretaker (American of Russian and German descent): (Regarding his opinion on the dominant culture theory that there were no horses in the Americas before Columbus’ arrival in 1492 to the Caribbean.)

“I think it’s “poo-hoo.” I really do ... well you take for instance, the way I understand it, Charlie Russell, when he started painting, a lot of critics said he didn’t know how to get

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221 Ibid.
222 Kim Shoemaker, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, in Saskatchewan, Canada, June 24, 2016.
223 Ibid.
the structure of a horse correct. However, when Frederick Remington came up in the Northern Prairies he left a paragraph that said:

‘The Northern Bronco was almost always blue or red roan in color no matter how slight. They are the only horse that is square on the quarters and somewhat mulish about the hocks. Although not possessed with the activity of the Texas horse, they are much stouter and more docile.’

Now over a hundred years ago ... there was a total different structure of the horse up in the north country. If they were all coming from the Spanish like they say, why does he compare them to the Texas horse and tell you how different they are? Shouldn’t they be looking real similar, yet? If they are all coming from the same side?" 224

Continued ... (Phenotypical description of the Indigenous American horse, specifically those known as the Nokota horses):

“Well, their structure is different. They are not built like other horses are. Most of them are real short backed and stout looking, you know ... They are very “people-y” horses most of them. They still got a real broad language compared to other horses, but they are slowly losing some of that. They are real easy to work with if you don’t insult their ... instinct. If you insult their instinct and stuff, then you can run into some trouble, you know. But usually if you get them to where they trust you, usually then things are pretty easy.” 225

Continued ... (Regarding genetic work that had been done on the Nokota horses):

“Basically, it said that the old-line horses are extremely divergent from any modern breeds. It didn’t really specify anything but since then they have done DNA ... The first blood type they said, the closest horse that they could find to ... that had some of the genetics in them were the horses from the Iberian Peninsula. Some of the markers I guess they didn’t have on hand. You know, so but now with the DNA, Nordic genetics are showing up. Also, there has been some Irish blood and the Akhal-Teke, were the three major ones that are showing up in the DNA.” 226

Caretaker and Teacher (Laguna Pueblo, New Mexico): (Regarding whether his People had any traditional knowledge regarding the Indigenous horse of the Americas that he is able and willing to share):

“No, we didn’t. The horse was never really regarded as a historical image. I mean, it was regarded as very important, but the only thing that I ever really learned was that if you treat a horse good, he’s going to treat you right also. And believe me that is the truth. As far as any religious aspects, or any historical aspects, no I never really did. What I was taught was that the horse is a companion animal, and I hear legally that’s what he is now.” 227

224 Leo L. Kuntz, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, in Linton, North Dakota at the Nokota Horse Ranch, March 30, 2016.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
227 Francisco, personal communication, August 20, 2016.

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Continued ... (A physical description of an Indigenous horse that he had passed forward to another project participant):

“Oh, I was just talking about the horses that we had around. See, here in the state of New Mexico I guess the number one horse is the Quarter Horse. When the association was established in 1948, and of course it was a well-muscled horse with a very real, refined head. Good looking horse. But around here we had, would you say, smaller horses that weren’t as well muscled; not as good looking. But, they had stamina, I mean you could work with them ... Not big horses, not refined horses but very sturdy and very, you know, horses with a lot of stamina ... I was just describing what we had, you know, a smaller type horse, a more wiry-type horse, yet very gentle, very docile and capable both of being ridden and used, you know, in a wagon team. That kind of horse was what I was talking about ... They were just always around.”

Caretaker and Teacher (mixed Cherokee and European ancestry): (Regarding Native-line horses and Traditional Knowledge regarding the horses in the Oklahoma area of the United States)

“People thought I was off my rocker, but I traded some straight across registered Quarter Horse mares for some little Choctaw mares. And I still have the descendants of those Choctaw horses today. As Darlene says, all I did is reintroduced her to her ancestral horse. The horses that she had and her family had as kids. Her dad actually lived up in the Moyers area for a long time, I guess they were born up there. And that’s where Johns Valley is], known for the little wild Native American horses. As far as anybody knows there’s been a little cell of those horses up in that country forever, you know. And some of these horses went to the SMR registry, to the Brislawn’s, and they thought they were some of the best. Marianne Thompson in Wilcox, Arizona, she had that blood with her Black Hawk horse that came out of that same bunch of horses. And Kitty Brislawn, all of those had horses that came out of John’s Valley.”

Continued ... (Regarding TK shared with him by a Choctaw man in the area):

“And on his momma’s side of the family, they all came here from Mississippi with the Trail of Tears, and then they had the first La Flor Choctaw’s, Greenwood La Flor brought lots of horses over here. But the story was passed down to them by his father’s side of the family, that there were already horses here before the Trail of Tears, before they were forced ... here in 1831. And I said, ‘Well, yeah, I think it’s a pretty much a known fact that there were Comanche and Kiowa horses and Osage and all that ... in this area, you know. There’s all kinds of documentation by Bonapart de la Harp in 1719 when he came through here ... and went all the way up to the Canadian River and made a circle back. That the horses were here.’ He says, ‘Oh yeah, of course La Flor is a French name and we know all about the French people, but it’s been passed down to us that there were horses here even before them. That, you know, before the Comanche and the Kiowa and all of them brought them into here, that there were always horses here.’ And I said, ‘Well, everything in history would contradict that, you know, saying that there really wasn’t any horses before they were brought here by the Spaniards and all that.’ He says, ‘I know

228 Ibid.
229 Bryant Rickman, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, in Soper, Oklahoma at Chata Isuba Ranch, May 29, 2016.
that’s what they say, but they can’t tell us what our ancestors have told us, you know, and that’s on my daddy’s side of the family.’ He says, which was James Dunlap.” 230

Continued … (Regarding a physical description of the Indigenous American horse, mainly those located in the Kiowachi Mountains of Oklahoma and the Choctaw horses): “They are different in structure, they are different in their nervous system, everything about them. They make you really think more of indigenous animals, you know, just like your deer, elk, and wolves and all that due to their alertness, and their willingness and then their reluctance also to trust people or any situation. But when you work with them properly, they really do have confidence in you. And as we all know, that can be done with a mountain lion, or a bear, a wolf, or anything if they are treated right and treated with respect. The horses in confirmation, they are a smaller stature, but there’s nothing any stronger for their size than these horses. They are more narrow made, they are very sturdy. They are built to withstand long distances, heavy strenuous work, or long distances, whatever it may take. They are survivors. I’ve seen situations where these horses should have died, even where a veterinarian would say that they really should be put down because I can’t see them getting over this. That leg broke, or we’ve had front legs broke on stallions, we have had the rear legs broke on stallions, which happens very, very rare, but at a time when you have 450 horses on 240 acres, things will happen. But most of the instances when there has been one with a broken leg, it’s been where they have been bumped with a car or something like that.” 231

Continued … (Regarding the Native horses’ ability to survive): “They are made the way they are made for survival. And they can take heat, they can take cold, they are narrow-made so they can disseminate the heat. They can get it out of their body a lot quicker than a real thick, heavy muscled-type horse. So therefore, they are able to go for greater distances without stopping. I’ve seen them survive real icy cold weather, not for long periods of time, but one time from December the 11th, I think it was to January the 16th we had a complete ice over and all of our waters froze up and everything, and it amazed me. I had heard Gilbert Jones tell of these stories. Everybody chops ice at times for them to drink. But these horses will go to their watering hole, and if the ice was too thick for them to paw through, they put their nostrils down to it and blow and blow and just keep blowing until they melt the ice. Then [they] suck it up immediately. And when they get that hole about five or six inches deep, then it starts thawing a lot quicker as they blow down in that hole and they get their water that way, you know. Where a lot of our other horses would stand there and [get hypothermia] and not make it … nobody showed them how to do that. It’s something they reach back into their ancestry [to find], just like they go to a stud pile and dig through the snow and ice to actually re-eat the undigested food they already marked their territory with, you know. And so, you say, how do they know to do that? They know to do it through survival. They can survive all odds.” 232

Continued … (Regarding TK passed forward by a local Choctaw man in the region):

230 Ibid.
231 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
“Even the guy I talked about a while ago that had an ancestry that knew the horses were here long before the Trail of Tears. He claimed that it was passed down from story to story on his daddy’s side of the family that there were horses here forever. And I said, ‘Well you can’t mean forever.’ And he said, ‘Forever, as long as there was people there were horses here. They were always back in the mountains, wild little horses always here.’”

Continued ... (Regarding testimony from Gilbert Jones regarding the Indigenous horse of the Americas):

“There was a really big rodeo Quarter horse family that turned several Quarter horses loose about 20 miles from Medicine Springs. [They] had the idea at a time when you could get Quarter horse colts and young horses and all for nearly nothing. He was thinking how they could improve the little mountain horses just like they developed the Quarter horse, and when they turned them loose people were saying, ‘Oh, there will never be anymore [of the mountain horses].’ Well, there was an old man named George Porter that was an old Cherokee/Choctaw and lived up on that Cloudy road and he said, ‘Well, Jones won’t have to worry about those Quarter horses.’ He said, ‘If the first winter don’t take care of them, come Spring these little mountain horses will finish off the rest of them.’ I said, ‘What do you mean George?’ He says, ‘Well,’ and he’s the man who really helped us with our first horses, our first little Choctaw mare and everything, and he says, ‘Well, whatever the ticks don’t kill this winter, those little mountain stallions will finish them off this spring, you know.’ He said, and you know, he was right. There wasn’t many of them left. And I don’t think any of them ever got to breed a mare, you know. And so, the only problem that we have here that we ever had there in the mountains besides by man, was from ticks. And it was a shingle tick, a winter tick, and Gilbert says, ‘Well you know, it was impossible for me to get out there and dust every horse on the mountain.’ He said, ‘I couldn’t do it. Now it’s bad to say, it’s really bad to say,’ but he says, ‘Now Mother Nature has a way to take care of things like that.’ He says, ‘It’s called survival of the fittest.’ He said, ‘Now you can tell the world that the horses Gilbert Jones has got left here is from survival of the fittest. Now by God nobody knows what all they have survived over the years.’ He said, ‘It’s really not a known fact about the Ice Age.’ And he said, ‘These horses were here.’ And he said, ‘Now they can survive the ticks or whatever comes their way.’

Traditional Knowledge Bearer, Teacher, and Ceremonial Leader/Medicine Person (Choctaw):
(Regarding teachings from the Elders on Traditional Horses.)

“I think as far as history of the horses, the Elders knew about it but a lot of times things that used to be taught weren’t taught for a while. But if you really got an Elder and cornered the Elder they would tell you that we did have the horse. We had it way back and it wasn’t the Spaniards that brought it; we had horses.”

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233 Ibid.
234 Ibid.
235 William D. Isaac, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, at the Veterans’ Day pow wow in Choctaw, Mississippi, November 11, 2016.
Traditional Knowledge Bearer, Teacher, and Ceremonial Leader/Medicine Person (*Choctaw*):

(Regarding description of the Indigenous Horse of the Americas in the form of the Choctaw Horse.)

“Well, one of the things when we were going up in our home, we were taught that Choctaw people were special and one of the stories that I can still remember is about Choctaw ponies. These stories were mainly told to me by my mother, who passed onto the spirit world about 10 years ago. And one of the stories that she has told me is that … the horse was painted. I guess it was like a pinto pony. Where she described it as it looks like somebody had painted the horse with a paint brush, and that’s the way that she describes it.”

Caretaker, Teacher, and Traditional Knowledge Bearer (*Kainai or Blood First Nation*):

(Regarding acquisition of the horse and the theory that the Native Peoples of the Americas received the horse solely from Spanish stock.)

“I will tell you a story what my great-grandmother told me. I remember these stories because I was raised by ‘the old ones’ they call it in our language. And basically, my grandmother raised me. And my great-grandma they believe was born in 1880 and she died in 1976 when she was 96 years-old and she told us a lot of stories about everything. And right until the day she died she chopped her own wood. She carried her own water. She didn’t want electricity or running water. She said that was not … who we are. It wasn’t ‘us.’ She was born before the first white man ever came to our settlements, our areas. And she told me a story about horses … *Ponokomitta*. *Ponokomitta* means ‘Elk Dog.’ That’s how we translate it, horses. And she said, way back in the old days a man was leaving for the *Oomspahtsko*, the sand hills, to go and do a vision. When we do visions, we do it for four days and four nights with no food or water. And he walked and walked and walked and walked. And he came to this area that was almost uninhabited because there was no food or water anywhere. And I think we call it the Palace Triangle now in this territory. And after days beyond his quest, he got lost. He didn’t know how to get back. So, he started seeing visions because he was dying. He was dying. No water, no food. And he seen this man riding this animal he’s never seen in his life. He was chasing a buffalo. And that man spearred that buffalo right in the neck and the buffalo dropped. And he went running over there over the bluff to say, ‘Well, this man can save me. Hopefully he can feed me because I am dying.’ When he got there, there was nothing there. But in the ground, he seen this mouse, with this spear grass stuck in his neck. And he goes, ‘What the … what am I seeing?’ All of a sudden over the bluff there he seen these ears popping up, and it came over more and more. And there was this herd of *Ponokomitta*. And he was looking at them and they were looking at him. And this was the time when horses could talk to you. I don’t mean how we talk with our mouth. But, through your minds. They walked up to him and they said, ‘We know you are dying. We are going to help you. We are going to help you and your people. The only thing we say is you take care of us forever. And you love us, and you love us divinely. And we will take care of you forever. And we will feed you and we will help you, clothe you and everything.’ So, he got on the lead horse and that lead horse took him back to the camp because he was lost. And off this whole herd comes with him back to the camp. And when they came in, they seen this man that was gone for days and he brought in all these

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236 Comby, personal communication, November 11, 2016.
horses. That’s how we got the horses. And we called them ‘Ponokomitta,’ ever since then, ‘Elk Dogs.’ So, that’s the story she told me of how we got the horses. I like that story better than anything else and this story, I’ve tried to search for it. This story that was told to me has never been written, and she told that to me . . . And so, we’ve always calmly known we’ve always had the horses. Way before the settlers came. The Spanish have never come through our area. So, there’s no way they could have introduced that to us.”

Scholar, Teacher, and Traditional Knowledge Bearer (Diné or Navajo): (Regarding how and why he began to question the discrepancy between the dominant Western culture version and the Indigenous version of the history of the horse in the Americas, and what his People say.):

“I just think back to those stories that have been shared with me, and I know there’s probably a whole lot more to it than just what was shared ... But you know, our origin stories or emergence stories, there’s the mention of the horse. But often times I always wonder, you know, so they mention the horse, but then when you take an anthropology class or history class, there’s this mention of the introduction of the horse from the Spaniards in the late 1500s. And then subsequently people talk about the Plains culture; how they became a horse culture. And so, you get to think about ... in our origin stories and our emergence stories as Indigenous Peoples, we mention the horse. So, what is that right, that contradiction? So ... at some point I was thinking, and wondering, I need to find that out. I need to find out what is underlying that. So, in one story, for example, in the Third World, when the people emerged into the Third World, things happened with the Diné People. Actually, it wasn’t the Diné People, it was the Holy People. And I’m not going to go into the details, but just some events happened where they had to leave that world because of their actions. And so there was a flood, a great flood that was happening, and so in one version of the story they mention the Sun Bearer who is the diety or the entity that is now what we think of as the sun. How he brought out his horse and he was decorated ceremonially and then he got on his horse and he traveled to the east and then from that point on the sun started to rise. And so, to this day there’s this idea that the sun travels across the sky on his horse. So, again, I wonder ... I guess the question I had was, where did the horse come from? Because if we are being told through Western education that it wasn’t brought until the late 1500s, then why is it coming up in our stories? So, then I talked to some folks about it, Elders ... I read some things here and there. Obviously, that is not always the best source. But just even putting those two together, the written stuff but also the oral tradition, it became clear to me that there were horses ... I talked to again, Elders, these are like clan relatives. Like my grandfather, maybe an older brother, or just going to different presentations where people talked about different cultural knowledge that was shared. Sometimes it was around the horse or horses were mentioned. And one thing that kind of stood out to me, at some point ... I came across ... some Elders [who] were saying that there’s a place out in Arizona somewhere. I can’t for the life of me remember, but I think it’s up there somewhere, there’s Shonto, Rough Rock, Round Rock, up in that area. There’s a lot of red, red rocks out there. That there’s a place where you can see the footprints of the horse ... but what was said afterwards was even more interesting. There were a few older ladies who were

237 Beatie Soop, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, at an academic conference in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, June, 24, 2016.
talking about that as well as the presenter, that as Diné people we know that the horse was always here.\textsuperscript{238}

Traditional Knowledge Bearer, Ceremonial Leader/Medicine Person, and Teacher (Oglala, Lakota): (Regarding whether he has any horse acquisition stories.)

"The only thing my grandpa told me about was on the eastern part of the Wind River Mountains that was called the hub. And the Lakotas, Cheyennes, Arapahos, and the Crows ... Those ... tribes all had their misunderstandings, but they laid down their differences and the Nez Perce brought the Appaloosa from the Northwest, and the Crows have wonderful horses. Cheyennes, Lakotas, Arapahos, the Comanche had some horses and the Pawnee. I never did hear too much about [physical] description but I heard a lot about the Cheyenne horse and the Crow horse and the Nez Perce. And there was some exchange of songs and food and also a time to go outside of your culture and find a wife. That was really encouraged. They [also] really had a profound way of keeping the bloodline pure."\textsuperscript{239}

Traditional Knowledge Bearer and Ceremonial Leader/Medicine Person (mixture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous): (Regarding the Indigenous horse of the Americas.)

"Horses, on the American horses I was taking a course at the School of Mines and Technology. I was taking an Anthropology course, a filler course, there. I want to talk about the Indigenous horses first, because I think that's more important. I was doing my case study on the Zuni's out of New Mexico and Arizona. Primarily I'd say South of Gallup, the Zuni Mountain, the Twins Peaks there where they survived. Kind of had a parasitic relationship with the Apache's for many years there. It was there that I heard about the horses from that study. [The Zuni] said, 'Oh no, we had our own horses.'\textsuperscript{240}

Continued ... (Regarding personal research findings on this issue.)

"And, so, one of the Elders there suggested that I go to the archive center at ... the University of New Mexico there in Albuquerque. At that time, I was living in South Dakota and I was financially not capable of doing that, but I called the university anyway and I spoke to a lady in their Archive Center. I asked her if she had any documents from the conquistadors that had been in the New Mexico and Arizona areas, Colorado, Texas. So, what I'm really interested in is the letters that they wrote home. Not the stuff that they wrote as reports of their command. And this lady said, 'Geez, you're the first person to ever ask me for something like that. Everybody else wants to look at the officer reports.' She said, "May I ask why?" I said, "Well, what I want is the real story. And the real story is never written in the form of a report that goes to a Commander because you are trying to impress the commander. You're trying to get a promotion out of the deal here. So, I want the real skinny. The letter that the officer wrote to his wife back in Spain or Portugal saying, 'We come up against these Natives that are fierce,' You know, and how they handled them. What was going on really there, the emotional state." And, it was in those reports that she sent me, and she sent geez, a hundred and some pages that were all

\textsuperscript{238} Dr. Vince Werito, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 19, 2016.

\textsuperscript{239} Basil Braveheart, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, in Piedmont, South Dakota, September 10, 2016.

\textsuperscript{240} Ted Ebert, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, in Hot Springs, South Dakota, June 25, 2016.
different, little short letters. Some were from officers ... most were written by officers for enlisted guys to send home. But what the enlisted guys didn’t know was that none of the letters that they wrote were actually getting sent home because the stuff going home was the gold and the silver and the spices. There would not be room on board those ships for those. So, those got left behind. That’s what ended up in the archives.”

Continued … (Regarding conquistador experiences with the Indigenous horse.)
“One of the stories they talked about [in those letters] was the only thing that was more feared than the Natives was their horses. The people writing the notes said an Indian was killed, and they didn’t say really ‘Indian’ but a Native was killed, a savage was killed, de-horsed, and the horse continued the attack without him. You know, carrying through our ranks and killing several of our men and several horses. And I thought that, and it was harder to kill the horse. The emphasis there was that it was more difficult to kill the horse. And there were several accounts of this. That the men in the attack were more afraid of the horses then they were of the warriors, or equally afraid of being attacked by the horses. And then, in one of the accounts that I did read from a Commander that he wrote back to the Command, that they were no longer able to proceed further north than they were at in the Colorado Territories. Of course, it wasn’t listed as Colorado, but it was like “Trinidad,” “Pueblo,” and north of Pueblo, the established fort at Pueblo, because they had no more horses ... And it wasn’t the savages taking their horses, it was the stud horses coming into the camp at night and stealing the mares out, cutting them out and taking them. And killing their stud horses. They had to be real careful with their stud horses because if they didn’t pen their stud horses up, corral them up and have security around them, these studs would come and kill them.”

Continued … (Regarding claim from Western academia that there is no “fossil evidence” indicating that the horse in the Americas survived the Last Glaciation Maximum):
“... the reason that there isn’t the bone artifacts left from these animals, is that unless there is a catastrophic, geophysical event that covers up an animal in the early processes of decay, we don’t have fossil remains. And those fossil remains aren’t present because the other animals will, even insects, will come and take that calcium. And within a short period of time that calcium that is on the ground is totally admonished. It’s gone, it’s been absorbed back into nature. So, the bones that are left out on the prairie today, three years from now they are almost gone and in ten years they will be gone. And there will be nothing left of that. So, when they say there is no evidence of horses here, well that’s not true. The word as evidenced by the conquistadors says there was.”

Continued … (Regarding a physical description of the Indigenous horse of the Americas, specifically given by the Lakota):
“Just curly haired with a brown stripe down their back ... and zebra marks on their legs. And that they were articulated, they would scratch their ears like a dog, that’s why they were called the, “Big dogs” because they behaved like a dog. They didn’t have to pick up their rear hoof to scratch behind their ear and turn their head way over or get in a difficult

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241 Ibid.
242 Ibid.
243 Ibid.
body position. That they could scratch themselves like that, just like you’d see a dog scratching behind their ears. So, that was one of the things to watch for. They were more aware of where they were, so they behaved more like a person, not like an animal. They said if you ever want to find one, if you start singing Indigenous songs and doing a ceremony, they will come and dance. They will come right to that ceremony and behave like a [participant].” 244

Traditional Knowledge Bearer, Ceremonial Leader/Medicine Person, and Teacher (Oglala, Lakota): (Regarding importance of the horse to the Lakota Peoples and her family.)

“As far back as I could remember, my parents on my father’s side got the Afraid of Bear name. It came into being ... just prior to the turn of the century. And they would go and steal horses from the Crow or from the surrounding tribes ... They had “horse families.” And then on the other side, my grandfather, Chief American Horse. The reason he has that name is ... he was tall, and there weren’t any horses tall enough for him. Because his feet, when he’d get on a horse, his feet would always touch the ground. So, he went to Fort Kearney, Nebraska and they had some. They pillaged and they stole horses from them because the horses from the Fort were those real big, tall horses. And so, he brought them back and introduced them into their herds. And because he would do that, they called him, “He would take horses from the White People.” That’s what they called him. “Wasicu Tasunke” is literally a translation of that. “He takes Horses from the White People.” ... So, when my grandfathers’ went to go get horses, they would go as far away as Shoshone country up in Wyoming and Montana, and North Dakota up to Canada. They followed all of those routes. And they would bring and introduce horses into their herds. And so, it was the thing to do. I mean, that was one of the jobs that they had, to always improve the stock.” 245

Continued ... (Regarding whether or not their “traditional horses” were different than the European horses.)

“I would say they were because a lot of our men were very lean and they were very tall ... Particularly my American Horse family. The men are really tall, and I remember Grandpa Charlie, he was a really tall man. But also, my Grandpa Rex, my mom’s dad, Rex Long Visitor Holy Dance. My grandpa must have been about maybe 6’4”. He was tall; they were tall. So, they couldn’t just get on a regular horse because they were not tall horses. What they saw was that the European horses, I guess that the military was using, how tall they were. So, they went after them ... To them, you know, they probably thought that, “Well, if we breed these two together maybe we’ll get a taller horse.” Their horses were not tall from the way I understand it.” 246

Continued ... (Regarding any Creation Stories that might show the importance of the horse and pre-date it to the arrival of the first Spanish horses to the mainland in 1519)

“They said that when the prayers were being said and the directions were being laid out, the “Tate,” the wind. All of the elements coming together. Even in terms of how the

244 Ibid
246 Ibid.
animals that were placed in the circle for the medicine wheel. You have Thunderbird. You have Thunderbird and Lightening in the west, and because they have no form, they say that Thunderbird speaks for them as a form that you can see and it is tangible. And then to the north it's the buffalo. To the east it's the Blacktail Deer, and to the south it's the eagle. And the four relatives have all of these. The Horse Nation was ... I can't think about it in any other way except in the realm of like, royalty ... When we had the lessons coming to us in Creation story, it had to do with the first ones that were here, the four-legged. So, with that horse and the rest of the four-leggeds, they all come. But the horse was the first one. At the beginning, at the top. That they accord that relationship to ... On the horses, they have such powerful medicine that when they accorded the directions, one of the things they talked about was that it was the White Buffalo Calf Woman, when she came and she brought us those colors. They said ... in that direction are the black horses, and then in the direction of the north are the red horses, in the east the yellow, and in the south the white.”

Western-Trained Scientist, Caretaker, and Scholar (Italian and Spanish ancestry, born in Mexico): (Regarding the types of horses he saw growing up in Veracruz Mexico and the three types of horses he observed in the area.)

“I was born in Mexico from an Italian mother. And the first thing that I noticed, because I had a bunch of friends that had farms, was the Mexican horse was two or three types of different horses. The first one I am going to describe is a wild horse I saw when I was a little kid in some of the coffee fincas that we have in the area of Veracruz. I clearly remember one time we were ready to check some coffee plantations and we were on some really basic horses. Boney type of horses, not skinny but they're boney by nature ... Easy going. Certainly, my uncle used to own the farm, used to have like an Andalusian type of horse, totally different horse. A Spanish horse, but his were like “Criollos” we called them “Caballos Criollos.” We were going, passing these patches of jungle and patches of coffee plantations you know, and then I saw these little horses. They looked like goats and I totally feel in love with these things. I [saw] these things watching you like a deer that you see through the woods. And I asked my uncle who was a horse person, my Tio Ernesto, what kind of animal [they were]. He said it’s Ganado Caballar ... It's like “horse-like livestock.” ... And then my explanation is “Ganado” translates like “livestock.” And “caballar,” the word caballar, viene del “caballo,” the horse and the prefix or the ending of “ar” is type. It's “type of caballo,” it's kind of type for livestock but it's wild. So, that's the equivalent of the “Mexican mustangs” is what I was talking about. And this is in the area of Veracruz in Mexico. It was close to a town. The town I remember was Tlacotepeq de Mejia ... Like I say, they're too little, we cannot use it to work or anything like that. But they’re wild there. You can hunt them or something like that, but we don’t hunt them. They just live there. So, that was the first time I understood that there was a totally Native wild horse and this was like in ... 1955, '56, '57. I went looking for these and they were in the brown colors, all the time with stripes in the legs or in the top. Coarse hair ... You can see these things, and if you have enough patience you can be close to them. And I tried to go and see the area they were close to which trees and how big they were. You’re talking about an animal that is less than 13 hands ... And the hoof prints are totally smaller compared to a regular horse, but at the

247 Ibid.
distance you look and they are bigger hooves proportion-wise than the other ones. And the bones were almost like a deer bones. Their awareness was totally different to a regular horse, because a regular horse is grazing and watch you to see where you are. These animals hear anything and they just move faster and they organize in the group moving. Regular horses when they move, they spook and the whole bunch goes together ... they move fast and they put somebody in front that knows where they are going.”  

Continued ... (Regarding the dominant Western culture theory that there were no horses upon the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors and explorers):

“The Spanish horse is not 100 percent responsible for the number of horses in the Americas now. Probably part ... the Spanish horse that came – the Sorraias and the Andalusions – don’t have the gene of paint, or medicine hats, overos, tobianos, and all of that kind of stuff. That didn’t exist almost there, at all. And there are some appaloosa and leopards and stuff like that. I’m totally positive that there were pockets, like in the Sherbet Canyon, the Barrancas del Cobre [Copper Canyon] ... In Veracruz, there are ... canyons in which nobody penetrates ... I mean, in Baja California there are some things that you cannot even get into [with] a helicopter; they cannot land. It’s full of cactus and there are little horses around there surviving. It’s absolutely insane that all the horses there in the United States originally were brought by the Spanish. Those boats that the Spanish brought, they put those horses in harness and on top of that they hang those harnesses on posts, and they bring those animals for around two months that way. Being as infertile the horses are as a farm animal, certainly some can probably mix I am sure. Horses mix. The horses have been mixing for thousands and thousands and thousands of years, and they can mix with something else. There is a really good base of Native American horses in at least Central America and North America. There are these types of horses.”

Academic Scholar, Caretaker, and Teacher (Métis and Ojibwe): (Regarding whether the Indigenous horses of the Americas were here before the arrival of the Spanish in the late 1400’s and early 1500s.)

“So, I have been spending mainly my personal time, when I am not working as a professor at the University to kind of explore and research the [Lac La Croix ponies] and get a better understanding about how to combat the colonial history of this horse ... It’s just shocking that ... when they hear about Indigenous ponies, the first thing that comes out of [people’s] mouth is, ‘That’s not true.’ Right? ‘There weren’t horses here.’ But what I have been finding, as I am doing my own research, is that there are Elders that are discussing the fact that the horses were always here. The Lac La Croix Indigenous Ponies were in the area that I originated, my homeland. And that there are still Elders today that can speak on the importance of them spiritually and culturally for their people. So, I have been researching that, and one of the really amazing radio interviews that documents the importance of the Lac La Croix Indigenous Pony breed is one by Larry Aiken, who is a historian for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and heads the American Indian Studies program at Itasca Community College and he says in his interview (to paraphrase), ‘The

248 Oviedo, M., personal communication, August 20, 2016.
249 Ibid.
Lac La Croix Indigenous Ponies were always here. I want people to know this. This is important that people know this.” 250

Academic Scholar, Western-Trained Scientist, and Teacher (American of Northern European descent): (Regarding the Western academic version of the history of the horse in the Americas and his observations and thoughts about this.)

“Now, the contention is of course that when they arrived in the Americas, the Native Peoples had no horses. And of course, this was first happening in the Caribbean, where the horse isn’t really a practical animal in any way. However, the horse had continued to exist in the Americas. [However,] at some point, which was always a kind of cloudy, ... nebulous kind of a time period ... the horses of the Americas had been hunted to extinction by Native Peoples. Between that and the warming that followed into the Ice Age, the spread of forests, particularly in the Eastern United States or other parts of the Americas, the environment became less well-suited for horses or large herds of horses. Therefore, as Native People hunted them their numbers dwindled to a point that they would no longer be sustainable and the remainder of these horses died off. We were taught about how Native folks would have massive drives. You’ve heard of the buffalo drives of course. Well, this would happen with horses too. They would run them off cliffs and they would just take what they needed and leave. Of course, that goes against everything we know about the ethics of a hunting people, an Indigenous hunting people. Later I came to talk with people who said, ‘Oh well no, they ran them off but everything was taken.’ It wasn’t just like they took the best of what they wanted and left or that kind of thing. Of course, this is also presuming that all Native groups are running them off of cliffs everywhere, because of course we know there are not cliffs everywhere ... the horses were, like in most of North America. Likewise, the weapons technology that was being used for hunting these horses - considering the postulated population sizes - it would have taken a huge number of people hunting day and night, constantly, constantly scouring the plains and the forest and everything else to try to find these animals. And we all know that when one food source becomes scarce people move onto a different food source. They don’t hunt the other one – the preferred one even – to extinction. And of course, it goes against anything I’ve ever run into as far as the ethical behaviors of not only Indigenous North American horse hunters, but anywhere in the world that I have gone. Everywhere in the world that I have gone, hunter gatherer Peoples who are Indigenous Peoples seem to have the same ethic of hunting. That you don’t take what you can’t use, that you stop taking when the population looks stressed or strained, that you recognize that the population is giving these bodies to you, that the spiritual population behind the life is giving these bodies to you. And so, why would a group devise a belief that said, ‘We want to give it all to you until we don’t exist anymore in a material form.’ And so, it just seemed to me as I was going through anthropology classes and reading about things and so forth, that this seemed more and more dubious.” 251

251 Dr. Mike Koskey, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in Fairbanks, Alaska, October 18, 2017.
4.4 Summary

It is clear from each of these above cited responses that the project participants quoted have identified significant inconsistencies within the dominant Western cultural claim that there were no horses in the Americas upon the arrival of Christopher Columbus and subsequent explorers in the late 1400s and early 1500s. These participants had traditional knowledge and/or teachings to the contrary, firsthand experience and information developed with traditional horses that openly conflicted with this claim, exposure to or experience with equines that did/does not meet the description of the horses brought over by the Spanish, geographical, environmental or scientific evidence that did not support such a conclusion, evidence developed from a combination of the above scenarios, or they simply found significant holes within the Western academic claim because the details or conclusions provided did not align with what they know to be true of Indigenous cultures, environments, and traditions.

This conclusion can be considered credible for the following reasons: many of these project participants are considered “equine experts” or “experts” within their own field, many of them have been immersed within their fields for decades, they represent a broad range of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures with relevant knowledge impactful to their conclusions, they have firsthand knowledge of a variety of geographical and environmental areas throughout North and Central America, and their traditions, languages, histories and cultures have not traditionally been shared with one another. Therefore, it would be impossible for them to have gained these ideas and conclusions from each other; rather they were developed completely independently over long periods of time. In addition, many of them have had extensive training in the Western educational system, the traditional Indigenous educational system, or significant exposure to both. Likewise, many of these individuals have hands-on experience with the traditional native horse and natural horse behavior, which allows for them to more easily identify inconsistencies in books, articles, and academic works that are often written by people with little experience as to the nature of equines, and in particular traditional native horses.

Based on their observations, teachings, and experiences, some project participants came to their own conclusions regarding what they actually believe occurred within the Americas with regard to the history of the horse, or shared knowledge that can be used as clues for researchers. Some of their determinations are as follows:
Traditional Knowledge Bearer and Ceremonial Leader/Medicine Person (*mixture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous*):

"Now, the other thing that I heard was that the reason that the indigenous horse herd of the Americas was almost totally decimated was that when Ponce de Leon came in through Florida, and went out through New Orleans, the diseases that he brought with him not only killed 60 to 70 percent of the human beings that were on that side of the Americas, but it killed 80 to 90 percent of the wildlife there ... the same thing was happening in the south when the conquistadors started coming up into the Americas there out of Mexico. It wasn’t so much that their soldiers where capable of defeating the Natives, it was the disease that was defeating them. Because every time they came in contact in a trade method or even during battle, the survivors took back disease. And the horses were diseased and dying too. And it killed off a great number ... There again I thought they had been wiped out too. From the time I was early age I thought, ‘Geez, grandpa’s and the Unci’s that had talked about horses and told, ‘Before,’ they’d say, ‘Before horse stories, that the before horse stories are actually in between the wiping out of the majority of the horses and then having the horse again, the domesticated horse again. That was the European style horses.’ So, there was a time period that the Indigenous People were virtually put on foot from back in the east because of this. Or no longer had the horse to help them move camp and that kind of thing, much like they used the dogs to do, to move equipment and stuff. So, anyway there was the before horse stories and the after-horse stories. But that was actually the in between time period." 252

Scholar, Teacher, and Traditional Knowledge Bearer (*Diné or Navajo*):

“So, then going back to our history, our stories, our origin stories ... There’s two ways that people talk about it. There’s people who say, “the return of the horse,” but then when you listen to other accounts it’s “when the horse was,” so in Navajo we say, ‘Nidiilya.’ It was found or discovered. So, you wonder, you know, what does that really mean? ... On one hand, one suggests that people knew about the horse, but somehow it was returned to them, would be one way to think about it. On the other hand, the other one suggests that there was a time, we don’t know when, we don’t know if it was 1,500s, 15,000 years ago, or when that horses were found, right? So, that’s what I am saying, you don’t really know which version or what they are really saying. But in our stories, we say the horse was found, and it wasn’t 5-fingered human beings, it was the Holy People who found the horse. And there’s a character in our story who, with the assistance of the Talking God then created the horse. And, there was a horse to the east, the south, the west and the north, and then there was a variation of all of them. And so, then they say the horse was sung into existence. So, now we have not just the story but the horse songs.” 253

Western-Trained Scientist, Caretaker, and Scholar (*Italian and Spanish ancestry, born in Mexico*):

“... The Spanish people are really interesting, because they bring chickens and pigs, certainly they bring sheep and they bring some horses. But some of these animals were bred. You like to look for purity in certain breeds. They have a little bit of the wild hogs. They have a little bit of the wild sheep, because they mix and they flourish. If they are

252 Ebert, personal communication, June 25, 2016.
253 Werito, personal communication, August 19, 2016.
hybrids, that they are fertile they keep going. And in the horses you can do some hybrids that are not fertile, like the mules. But some others in between Equus Asinus and Equus Caballos, there is the mule and those are not fertile but in Equus with Equus they will be fertile and keep producing ... And certainly, you consider the years Columbus “discovered” America. You don’t consider any Vikings or anything like that. You know, if they go to 1492, how many horses you can bring in a year in those boats at that time? How many of those boats were lost at sea? How many horses died in between? To have this [level of] population, its almost illogical to think there were no animals here ... But my opinion is we have an established type of horse in the Americas in different pockets that survived the era of the ice.”  

Continued ... (Regarding the physical barriers between Central and North America and the probability that the first Spanish horses that reached the area of mainland Mexico in 1519 could also be the same horses spotted in the Georgia and Carolinas in 1521.  

“I think the Tapondel Dariem in Panama, those swamps, that’s a barrier. It’s like the Camelidos having a barrier and then you go to Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia. They have llamas, vicuñas, alpacas, huanaeos and stuff like that. Part of Argentina, Uruguay have those things but they didn’t come up because the area Tapondel Dariem, in other words the biggest swamp there in Central America. They never passed through there actually. They tried to make a road to pass there, La Carretera Panamericana, and they tried for so many years and everything sinks ... Well, the chronology and the distance these people need to travel are almost telling you that they were two different events, you know. One with Native Americans and one with Mexico, because I have the tremendous experience to work in Mexico and those Huasteca, in other words to arrive in Mexico they arrived to Veracruz. And to Veracruz to pass all this Huasteca and go to Mexico City you don’t believe the vegetation and the geography to pass through. If they put you to Veracruz and tell you, “Come to Mexico, bring these horses.” It would take you months and months to try to find a route. Then to go all the way to the north is just insane. I mean, it’s insane.”

Continued ... (Regarding personal experience trying to pass this route on horseback): “I used to be in a group of people that we used to go on horseback from Chihuahua all the way to Zacatecas. It took us weeks, and if we don’t want to be on the highway, it was almost impossible to pass through those sierras ... Some of those people in the group were great-grandsons of Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata, and to pass through those sierras they need to have somebody who knows how to pass. They use the trails of the wild animals that were there. Some of those trails that we used to go to Zacatecas were called “coyote trails.” They were really narrow and they were from wild animals. They were not a good size to pass a horse. So, in some instances you have to come down from the horse and use your machete just to make enough space to pass and there are logs in the middle, and there are creeks and there are rivers. You don’t know how the river goes and you go two or three kilometers up, two or three kilometers down and you don’t even

254 Oviedo, personal communication, August 20, 2016.
255 Thornton, “490-year-old Spanish documents Describe an Irish Province in South Carolina.”
256 MacNutt, De Orbe Novo: The Eight Decades of Peter Martyr D’Anghera, 259.
257 Oviedo, personal communication, August 20, 2016.
know how to pass that thing. And from Veracruz up north, you are going to have in those Huastecas so [many] rivers and waters ... And there are some rivers that I don’t even know how they pass, like the Papahuapa. So, it’s impossible to move horses in three or four or five, six years through there. It’s not like you have 911 or you have your cellphone, or somebody can come and help you in a helicopter, or ... bring an ambulance. These people were surviving on their own. I don’t mean that they didn’t move, but they didn’t move that fast to make the chronology that you put there.” 258

Continued ... (Regarding other dangers that the Spanish may have encountered on their journey from Central America to North America based on his personal experience):

“I mean when we used to do these cabalgatas [calvacades/processions] from Chihuahua to Zacatecas, we used to go with the horses and there are wild horses or a horse in the pasture and they follow. I mean, they’d get scared because sometimes here would come a band of horses, and there is one dominant stallion and they don’t want you in their territory. There are some young stallions looking for a band and they follow you, so if a person rides enough horses like I did in my time, you know that it doesn’t matter if the person is on top of the horse. If the mare’s in heat, the stallion can jump on top of you and the mare. And you can be on the stallion and you can be on top and the stallion is going to jump on the mare. That tells you that they don’t care too much about humans when they’re doing their things. And we used to go (Chihuahua is a huge state) all the way down to Zacatecas. That took us weeks and we encountered all kinds of different wild horses and they follow and they follow for days. Then you tie those animals in the night real good and you mañarlos [hobble] in order that they don’t escape. And you’re really worried because if those animals escape and you cannot get ... back to civilization. I mean, that’s where those people passed through. Then how many hours? I work in different ranchos, that you cannot get to because there’s no road. And I get on horseback going to some properties when the light goes down, and man, the horses know the road and then you just trust the horse and just put the reins there and do whatever you want on top of the horse ... And I tell the person that knows the road and the horse that knows the road, just mark the horse with some white on the back of your saddle or something. I can at least know where we are going. Because if the animal stops, you cannot see anything. And if you start putting lights, the animal starts getting spooked. They don’t adapt. It’s not like a car, ‘Where’s the light?’ You cannot guide a horse like that. So, that’s another thing. Going on horseback, it’s limited to light.” 259

Academic Scholar, Western-Trained Scientist, and Teacher (American of Northern European descent):

“And so, the explanation that I have been exposed to over and over again in my academic education, it just doesn’t fit with the patterns that I see elsewhere in the world. It makes little sense that ... all Native People, all over the Americas contributed to hunting the horse to extinction. Likewise, seeing the capacity for horses to exist in Arctic environments and in desert environments and so forth, it seemed unlikely that climate change could have caused all horses in all of the Americas to go extinct and yet not in Eurasia and Africa. Likewise, I think that ... [if] a disease infected and wiped out all of

258 Ibid.
259 Ibid.
the horses in America, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, then where's the evidence? Where's the physical evidence? That shouldn't be hard to find in fossilized and other remains of horses. There should be an obvious movement of equine death that can be seen in the archeological and geological record ... I'm not saying it's not there, but I have never come across it in anything I have read or any people I've talked to about this. And so, I came to the conclusion that well, Europeans landed in the Americas knowing that horses were power. And so immediately began to take control of horse herds, or the people and/or the people who controlled those herds.”

Caretaker (*American of Russian and German descent*):

“I don’t really think that the horse totally disappeared off this continent, and ... I think the Vikings came a lot sooner and brought horses then. I think there might be a possibility that those horses mixed with the old, old line horses. Same with the Spanish horses. I just don’t believe that the [Indigenous horse of the Americas] disappeared.”

Two of the five conclusions provided above indicate that there were periods that the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas “had the horse,” periods when it was not as prevalent or present, and a period when it was “returned to them.” Whether this period “without the horse” is aligned with an “extinction” brought about by the last Ice Age period (between 13,000 and 10,000 years ago), a massive population decline brought about by European-bred disease, or a population shift due to a southern migration of the horse in order to escape colder conditions, is unclear. Likewise, it is unclear whether the period that it was “returned to them” coincides with the Spanish horses arriving in the Americas, as Western academia claims, or a natural migration north as the climate shifted.

However, since more modern data, such as the geographical study published by Russell, *et al.* proves that the glacier during the Last Glacial Maximum only covered the northern portion of North America, and that “the Appalachians remained free of glacial ice throughout the Pleistocene time” and so many project participants testified as to the hardiness and strong ability to survive that these horses possess, the theory that the horses migrated as a response to changing conditions rather than becoming extinct, is more likely.

The following excerpt, provided by a project participant (Academic Scholar, Teacher, and Western-Trained Scientist) who has studied muskoxen in the Alaska and Canadian regions for many decades explains the following:

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260 Koskey, personal communication, October 18, 2016.
262 Russell, *et al.*, “A Warm Thermal Enclave”
263 Ibid., 191.
“If you look at horses and more migratory animals... there were refugia ... Areas where special environmental circumstances have enabled a species or a community of species to survive after extinction in other areas. So, the glacier comes down and covers all this habitat, wiping out all these species. But for some reason, these little pockets don’t get covered by the glacier, they are called refugia. They are like islands ... the last Glacial Maximum refugia. And people survived in these places ... It doesn’t have to be defined by a glacier. It’s basically like island biogeography where you don’t get any flow of genetics extending along a continuum. Especially a species that migrates. You know, if you stop that then the animals will change and adapt. Not quickly, and not always ... There’s a whole ecology surrounding refugia and the evolution behind it.”

In addition to this, her colleague (Academic Scholar, Western Trained Scientist, and Teacher) who has been a wildlife biologist and paleontologist for decades, explains the “expansion of the glaciers is a really slow process ... it takes thousands and thousands of years ... and the same with the retreat of the glaciers.” Therefore, the Indigenous horses of the Americas would have certainly had time to notice the impending environmental shifts, migrate, and find appropriate safe havens, or “refugia.”

As noted above, one participant has had the very unique experience of living in the Veracruz, Mexico area and regularly traveling via horseback through the terrain that the Spanish conquistadors and their horses would have had to traverse to move their animals back and forth between continents. His firsthand account of how arduous this journey is, the length of time it takes, and the dangers that the Spanish would have encountered, is very compelling.

The remaining three participants concluded that the Indigenous horse of the Americas survived the Ice Age. Two cite “intermixing” between Indigenous American horses and imported European horses (such as Spanish and/or Viking) as a likely occurrence, and the third believed that the conquistadors and early explorers were aware of the horse in the Americas, and were intent on controlling it and the Native People with whom they lived.

From the in-depth information project participants provided within these interviews, it is clear that the discrepancies between the dominant Western cultural claims regarding the history of the horse in the Americas have puzzled and confused many people across academic disciplines and professions for long periods of time. Indeed, for many Indigenous Peoples, this version has nothing in common with the traditional knowledge (TK) that was handed down from

264 Dr. Jan Rowell, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, at the Large Animal Research Station (LARS) in Fairbanks, Alaska, October 18, 2016.
265 Dr. Pam Groves, interview by Yvette Running Horse Collin, at the University of Alaska Museum of the North in Fairbanks, Alaska, October 17, 2016.
generation to generation for thousands of years. Here, project participants share their observations, experiences, perspectives and opinions regarding this subject and highlight many excellent points that deserve consideration and the attention of Western academia.