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# Horses in the New World

Around 55 million years ago, small horses, about the size of dogs, roamed the forests of North America. Over time, these horses got bigger and became more like the horses we know today. During an ice age about one million years ago, some of the horses migrated across a landbridge that formed between North America and Asia. The horses spread throughout Asia and Europe. Around 6,000 years ago, European and Asian horses were domesticated by humans. The horses that had stayed in North America went extinct about 10,000 years ago, most likely due to changes in the environment and overhunting by early humans. However, horses returned to North America with the arrival of Spanish explorers.

Spanish conquistadors, including Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, brought horses to the New World during the Age of Exploration in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Horses were essential companions for conquistadors in their quest for conquest and colonization, serving as powerful symbols of European military might and cultural superiority. Mounted on horseback, Spanish conquistadors launched devastating campaigns against indigenous civilizations, such as the Aztec and Inca empires, forever altering the course of history in the Americas.

Native American tribes quickly adapted to the presence of horses in the New World, integrating them into their traditional practices and societies. Tribes such as the Comanche, Sioux, and Blackfeet of North America and the Mapuche of South America became renowned horsemen, mastering equestrian skills and incorporating horses into their economies and cultures. Horses revolutionized indigenous transportation, enabling tribes to expand their territories, engage in long-distance trade, and pursue new forms of economic activity, such as bison hunting on the Great Plains.

Horses hold a central place in American history, serving as vital companions and contributors to the nation's development. From their introduction by European explorers to their integration into indigenous cultures, horses played a crucial role in shaping the course of American history. They revolutionized transportation, enabling westward expansion, trade networks, and communication across vast distances. In agriculture, horses powered farms and ranches, facilitating the growth of the nation's food supply. Additionally, horses were instrumental in military endeavors, from colonial conflicts to the Civil War, providing mobility and firepower on the battlefield. Moreover, horses became icons of American folklore and culture, symbolizing freedom, resilience, and the pioneering spirit. Through their multifaceted roles, horses have left an indelible mark on American history, embodying the spirit of the nation's growth and progress.