



1. **Hyracotherium** (50 Million Years Ago), aka Eohippus ("dawn horse"), two feet high at the shoulder and 50 pounds--is the earliest identified horse ancestor, an inoffensive, deer-like mammal that traveled the plains of North America; four toes on its front feet and three on its rear feet.
2. **Orohippus** (45 Million Years Ago), flourished on the North American plains; slightly enlarged middle toes on its front and hind feet (an adumbration of the single toes of modern horses).
3. **Mesohippus** (40 Million Years Ago), three, rather than four, digits, and this horse balanced itself mainly (but not exclusively) on its enlarged middle toes.
4. **Miohippus** (35 Million Years Ago); slightly larger (100 pound) equid that achieved a widespread distribution across the North American plains during the late Eocene epoch.
5. **Epihippus** (30 Million Years Ago); continued the Eocene trend of enlarged middle toes.
6. **Parahippus** (20 Million Years Ago); first horse to achieve a respectable size (about five feet tall at the shoulder and 500 pounds), Parahippus had comparably longer legs with larger middle toes (the outer toes of ancestral horses were nearly vestigial by this stretch of the Miocene epoch), and its teeth were shaped perfectly to handle the tough grasses of its North American habitat.
7. **Merychippus** (15 Million Years Ago); Six feet tall at the shoulder and 1,000 pounds, [Merychippus](#) cut a reasonably horselike profile, with small toes surrounding its enlarged middle hooves. *Most important from the perspective of equine evolution, Merychippus is the first known horse to have grazed exclusively on grass, and so successfully did it adapt to its North American habitat that all subsequent horses are believed to have been its descendants.*
8. **Hipparion** (10 Million Years Ago); the most successful horse of its day, radiating out from its North American habitat (by way of the Siberian land bridge) to Africa and Eurasia. Hipparion was about the size of a modern horse; only a trained eye would have noticed the two vestigial toes surrounding its single hooves. To judge by this equid's preserved footprints, Hipparion not only looked like a modern horse--it ran like a modern horse as well!
9. **Pliohippus** (5 Million Years Ago); represented a side branch in evolution; the long-legged, half-ton Pliohippus looked and behaved much like the other ancestral horses on this list, subsisting like them on an exclusive diet of grass.
10. **Hippidion** (2 Million Years Ago); after tens of millions of years spent evolving in the America's, Hippidion was essentially the same as today's modern horse (Equus). While the general consensus has been that these horses went extinct from the American continents shortly after the last Ice Age (about 11,700 years ago), new research and evidence shows that remnant horses survived in North America up to the time of the colonization of the Americas by Europeans.

References:

¹Strauss, Bob. "10 Prehistoric Horses Everyone Should Know." ThoughtCo, Mar. 3, 2017, [thoughtco.com/prehistoric-horses-everyone-should-know-1093346](https://www.thoughtco.com/prehistoric-horses-everyone-should-know-1093346).

²Strauss, Bob. "50 Million Years of Horse Evolution." ThoughtCo, Apr. 20, 2017, [thoughtco.com/50-million-years-of-horse-evolution-1093313](https://www.thoughtco.com/50-million-years-of-horse-evolution-1093313).