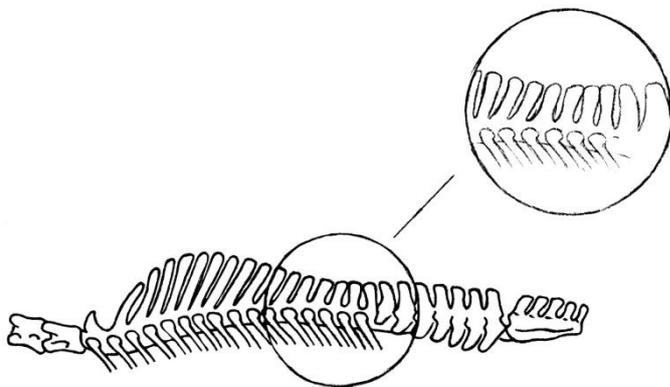


TAKE CARE OF YOUR HORSE'S BACK

One of the most important areas of your horse's anatomy is its back as it is where you sit and if painful or uncomfortable in any way, will effect how your horse feels when riding i.e. from being mildly uncomfortable and **lacking performance** to being very on-edge and dangerous to ride.

Over the horses working life, which in some cases starts far too early when the skeleton is still too weak and immature to carry a rider and a saddle, much damage can occur to this part of his or her body but actually much can be done to help to prevent this damage both in your management system and in our work regime.

Below is a diagram of the horses skeleton for those who are not too familiar with it and it shows the spinal processes which grow upwards from the vertebral column and these bones



need space between them as nature has so rightly provided, so that the horse can

- a.) lift its back comfortably to carry a rider and work underneath its rider and
- b.) to move sideways slightly when the horse turns etc.

Above this skeletal structure shown, there are strong muscles

and ligaments (Longissimus dorsi being the main one). If these muscles and ligaments were to shorten in any way i.e. go into spasm or be made to shorten for postural or management reasons then we are actively causing a situation where we are allowing the muscles/ligaments to pull the spinal processes together thus causing pain and discomfort unnecessarily. The area circled shows this has happened as there is no longer any space between some of these bones and therefore they will start to rub causing pain and leading to sclerosis.

So what can be done

Firstly, in our daily management of our horse we can do a lot ourselves to ensure that we are not shortening these all important ligaments and muscles that run along our horses back by keeping his daily routine as close to nature as we can. He is not a giraffe and therefore has not been given a giraffe-like neck in order to eat the tops of trees and bushes. He/she is a horse which is naturally used to eating from the ground. All hay and feed should be fed from there as many hours spent eating from a haynet tied halfway up the stable wall is creating shortening and tightening in the all-important back ligaments and muscles discussed above.

The drawings on this 2-page article were done by Kirsten Searle, staff member at Moorcroft