

Do Horses Have a Sixth Sense?

By Kim Knutsen

Commanche, my horse of a lifetime, had many engaging characteristics, and one of the most endearing was his ability to anticipate my arrival, sometimes by several minutes. Can horses' minds really reach out farther than they can see? When the horse and human are closely bonded, my experience is that the answer is clearly "yes."

My first exposure to his uncanny perception came many years ago when, after a lovely afternoon walk, my 20-year-old best friend suddenly and mysteriously turned colicky, ending up at CEC for a three-day stay. Thankfully, he was ok with IV fluids and no surgery, but on the second morning, when I arrived in the middle of his morning check-up, I learned that he had been standing like a gentleman, but a few minutes before I came into the barn, he grew restless and acted more like a 3-year-old. Over the next few years, other people reported the same thing—that his behavior would change as I got closer to the barn or stall or paddock. Since he was growing older, it was gratifying to see him be more "up" and perky when I was around and, as time passed, to see this behavior become accentuated. Eventually we moved to pasture boarding at CEC, and Dr. Page, while building her house, noted that he would become more active as much as 15 minutes before I pulled into the driveway—in other words, when I was still several miles away. Was he showing off? I'd like to think so. But whatever his motivation, this anticipation of my arrival bound him even closer to me. Commanche lived to be 36, and to the end he somehow knew—even from quite a distance—when his "person" was coming to be with him.