

Granite's Return to Riding

By Nancy Camp

I want to share Granite's story with you for two reasons. First of all, it is a happy success story. The other reason is that what ailed Granite, and kept him from being ridden for six years, involved a troublesome first rib. As an equine body worker and trainer, I see many horses with this problem and I feel that sharing Granite's journey will help many people recognize similar issues with their horses or horses they know.

Granite came into my life in 1996. He was eight years old and still had black legs and a dappled gray body. He did not pass his vet check with flying colors because his left front leg took a radical turn to the outside at the fetlock. The vet pointed it out during Granite's prepurchase exam as a structural weakness with potential lameness issues, especially if we wanted to jump him, which we did. The only 'behavioral' problem he exhibited in the three days we had him on trial was a tendency to panic when tied and pull back.

From the start of his time with us, Granite showed signs of anxiety when he was saddled and quickly progressed to bucking when mounted. At the time, it seemed an obvious discipline problem to me.

I didn't expect it would take much to resolve it. I got after him whenever he bucked and he quit bucking. But new problems cropped up. Granite had trouble crossing ditches whether on the trail or on a cross-country course, and the slightest downhill incline set him to popping up in the air in frenzied half rears, even if he was being led and not ridden. Again, he was being defiant, right? He had severe dental issues, which helped explain the pulling back when tied, and we addressed saddle fit. Much later we discovered that he also has a malfunction in his throat that requires he be allowed to carry his head low in order to breathe.

A New Enlightenment

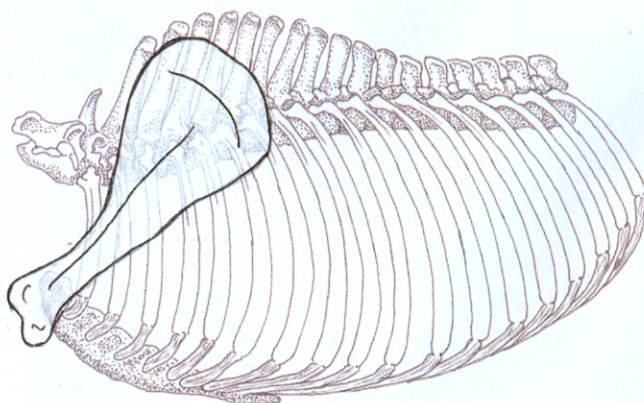
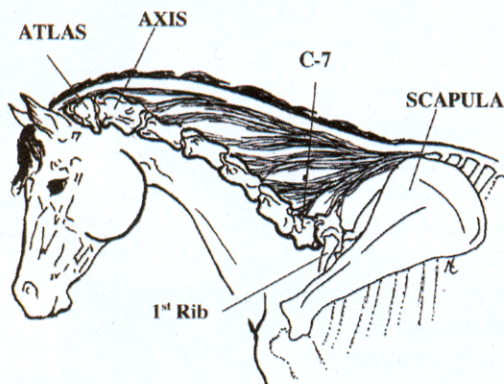
Around 1997, I met a veterinary chiropractor from California who added a new layer of understanding to some of Granite's difficulties. The bucking, she suggested, could most likely be addressed with some chiropractic adjustments geared toward freeing up Granite's first rib.

She was convinced that his reluctance to reach out with his front legs to clear a ditch and his difficulty going down hills were all related to a problem in his shoulder area, most likely around the joint in his spine where his cervical (neck) vertebrae join to his thoracic (back) vertebrae, located in behind his scapula (shoulder blade). She had seen similar so-called behavioral or training problems helped dramatically by chiropractic. That was the beginning of the journey, which led me to a much broader understanding of this problem in horses.

The Signs of First Rib Imbalance

As I said, Granite's troublesome first rib originally caused him to be cinchy and to buck upon being mounted. It also made it difficult, if not impossible, for him to walk down a hill. Stepping up into a trailer was hard, as was backing out. His stride was uneven enough to cause a rider to be concerned, but no one could identify any specific lameness. When he lowered his neck to eat off the ground, it went to the ground in a curve instead of hinging down from the base of his neck. All of these "symptoms" came and went at various times, which made the whole thing difficult to figure out. He finally got to the point that any trailer ride lamed him for no apparent reason. I suspect that having to balance caused the muscles around the base of his neck to seize up.

We persisted in trying to ride him because no one could find anything really wrong with him. Our indicator as to whether or not rid-



1a and 1b. These illustrations show the location of the first rib.



2. With clicker training I kept Granite from being neglected during the time he could not be ridden and worked out some therapeutic stretches for him to perform.



3. Granite leaves his feet in place as he reaches from side to side to touch the cones. Different effects can be obtained by varying the height of the swing and the distance to the cones.



4. After teaching Granite to stand tall on the block, I taught him to dangle a leg and release the muscle sling around his shoulders. With his leg loose like this, I find the little circular motions the TTeam work indicates to be very effective.



5. The variations to these stretches are nearly limitless, to say nothing of the entertainment value.

ing was going to be okay was this: If Granite stepped away from the mounting block without issue, he could be ridden for a walk on flat ground. If his first step resulted in a baulk, if he raised his head and locked up, the person on his back had about 30 seconds to bail off. Asking for an additional step would bring on a buck. By this time, I realized that the bucking was not an attitude problem and, whether it made sense to us or not, something was hurting Granite to cause him to behave this way.

In 1999, Granite hurt me pretty badly by bucking before I was even half way into the saddle and we quit riding him. He received monthly chiropractic work and energetic bodywork in a variety of modalities that included craniosacral, High Touch Jin Shin®, and acupressure even though he was not being ridden. I developed a series of stretches for the neck and shoulders by teaching therapeutic tricks with the click and treat method of positive reinforcement. (See photos.)

What Can Cause First Rib Imbalance?

As to what caused Granite to have this troublesome first rib, I don't know. He came with the bucking problem and a tendency to pull back when tied. I believe he may have flipped over at some point, possibly landing on his withers, but I don't know this for a fact. He had severe dental problems and whether they caused the pulling back or visa versa, I will never know. He had that crooked front leg and an imbalanced foot on the end of it. Again, which came first? The restriction in the shoulder that caused him to protect the base of his neck by holding it tightly enough to cause him to load his foot in a way that affected its balance and growth? Or did the imbalance in the hoof have a ripple effect up the leg to the shoulder that then aggravated, or caused, the dental issues?

The bottom line is that I will never know exactly what caused Granite's first rib to become troublesome. Furthermore, Granite's manifestation of this problem was uniquely his own. Awareness of the existence of this problem and being curious about endless individual manifestations of it is my point.

As an equine body worker, I see a lot of first rib issues and they stem from almost every equine activity imaginable. They set up around any activity that causes a restriction to the freedom of movement of the joint between C-7 and T-1. That list includes bad saddles; improperly trimmed, sore, or injured feet; anything that causes limping; martingales and tiedowns; being tied in cross ties; pulling back; halter breaking; dental imbalances (especially hooks that catch when a horse raises or lowers his head); eating out of elevated

feeders; imbalanced riders; slipping on ice or in mud; and looking out over high fences or stable doors. Did I mention hot walkers or even a stiff neck from a vaccination? Really the list goes on, since this part of the equine anatomy succumbs to the various stresses of a horse's body experience. Even conformation faults can cause stress in this joint.

Now here's the rub. Each individual's ability to cope with any or all of these situations in whatever combination comes their way is different. Age, overall health, conformation, even the individual's mental and spiritual balance and whether or not they live with people who acknowledge their difficulties, can all be factors which enter into both the manifestation of the problem and its solution.

Granite's Healing

Granite is one of the smartest, kindest, most generous equine friends a person could ever ask to have, so when he bucked, I suspected something was wrong. It took me 10 years to put all the pieces together and figure out how to help him. He was a primary mover in guiding me to explore a variety of equine bodywork modalities. I learned about chiropractic and acupuncture from a desire to fill his needs and the needs of the other misfits who kept finding their way to me for help. I studied craniosacral, High Touch Jin Shin® and Functional Indirect Technique (FIT), which is an osteopathic unwinding process, partly because I was confounded by Granite's first rib. Because of him I came to realize how common these difficulties are in horses, whether they are being ridden or not.

The best part of this story is that now, after six years of not being able to ride Granite, he is back under saddle and happy to be so. The keys to his recovery were changing his saddle to the design put out by Balance International; working with Casey Jones, a holistic equine dentist; Doug Frazier, a master of natural balance trimming; and Sid Erickson, a DVM and equine chiropractor from Montana who also studies applied kinesiology. I also worked with Carolyn Libby using vibrational remedies to clear the negative effects of vaccinations, so the rest of my efforts could be effective.

Furthermore, I learned a variety of body working modalities and diligently pursued a solution to Granite's problems. All of these things helped Granite and, in his particular case, I believe the FIT provided the crowning piece to his puzzle. That technique allowed the first rib to find a place of ease. When that happened, things started to change all over the map. Granite's back came up to a degree, his neck started to hinge more freely and, my farrier will attest, that problematic offset foot even made a noticeable shift for

the better. Today, Granite, at age 19, is standing better than he did when he was seven and he hasn't so much as threatened to buck in six months.



6. By allowing Granite to load both front feet with one elevated, a vertical stretch is effected.



7. And here he is. Happily warming up for a trail ride in May of 2007, a full six years since riding him became inadvisable.

I will be forever grateful to Granite for opening the doors that allowed me to better understand this prevalent, first rib issue. The horses I train and see as bodywork clients and those who belong to my students benefit everyday from his guidance. I hope that by sharing his story, I may extend his gifts of insight to a broader audience. ♡

About the author:

Nancy Camp is a trainer, riding instructor, and equine bodyworker. She practices outside the paradigm of traditional horse management and seeks to establish a new, loving paradigm for horse care. She teaches workshops in Clicker Training, and High Touch™ Jin Shin. She also presents EquiMotion, Feldenkrais® Integrated Riding Workshops with Robert Spencer, a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teacher®. For information: www.wholehorsetraining.com

In Essence...

A Series on Various Essential Oils for Animals

By Nayana Morag

This is one of a series of articles that will teach you about individual essential oils and how they can be used for your animals. These oils are all ones I use regularly in my practice with animals.

Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)

Physical and energetic description: Yarrow is a perennial herb growing up to 3 feet high. It has a basal rosette of fern-like leaves and a tall stem bearing a tightly knit cluster of white to pale pink flowers that look like a shield. Native to Eurasia and found in hedgerows throughout Britain, yarrow has naturalised in most temperate zones but the chamazulene (anti-inflammatory chemical constituent of yarrow and the chamomiles that makes them blue) content is highest in the oil distilled in Eastern Europe. Yarrow has been used since ancient times and was reputed to have been used by Achilles (hence the name) for wounds caused by iron weapons. The stalks are traditionally used for reading the I-Ching - a Chinese method of seeking guidance. Yarrow helps to release the energy held around emotional scars and past trauma.

Physical uses:

Wounds, inflammation of any kind, urinary infections, ear infections, allergies, arthritis, skin problems of all kinds

Emotional uses:

Emotional release, fearful anger, behaviour arising from trauma

Principal actions: Anti-inflammatory, antipyretic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, carminative, expectorant, haemostatic, hypotensive

Safety: Generally held to be non-toxic, non-irritant and non-sensitizing; one of the few oils you can use undiluted. Avoid in pregnancy and young children.

Think 'Yarrow' in these conditions: Any animal whose past history is unknown to you especially if s/he is exhibiting behavioural problems; any inflammation; to release the trauma around the site of a wound; any skin condition ♡

Nayana Morag is one of the world's foremost experts in the use of essential oils and other aromatic extracts for animals. Her focus is on the reduction of stress (physical, environmental, psychological) so that animals can re-balance their physical and emotional states and return to optimum health. Essential oils, kinesiology and 5 Element Theory form the basis of her work alongside educating animal owners about their animals' needs and how to communicate with them clearly, which leads to increased health and happiness for everyone. She teaches worldwide and offers a Diploma in Animal Psycharomatica for those who would like to work professionally in this field. For more info go to www.essentialanimals.com or email nayana@essentialanimals.com.