

HOUSE OF THE HOLY LEFT: THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA'S GENERAL MOUNTAINEERING CAMP BELOW THE MIGHTY 3,618-METRE MOUNT ASSINIBOINE IN 1966. ABOVE: THE MAN HIMSELF, BILL HARRISON, CARVING A BACKCOUNTRY BIRD.

# CAMP HARRISON

THEY'VE SADDLED UP WITH FEUZ AND CAIN, HAD IT OUT WITH THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA AND DELIVERED MASSES UP THE MOUNTAINS. EDGEWATER, BC'S LEGENDARY HARRISON CLAN HAS ALWAYS CLIMBED TO THE BEAT OF ITS OWN DRUM.

BY ANDREW FINDLAY

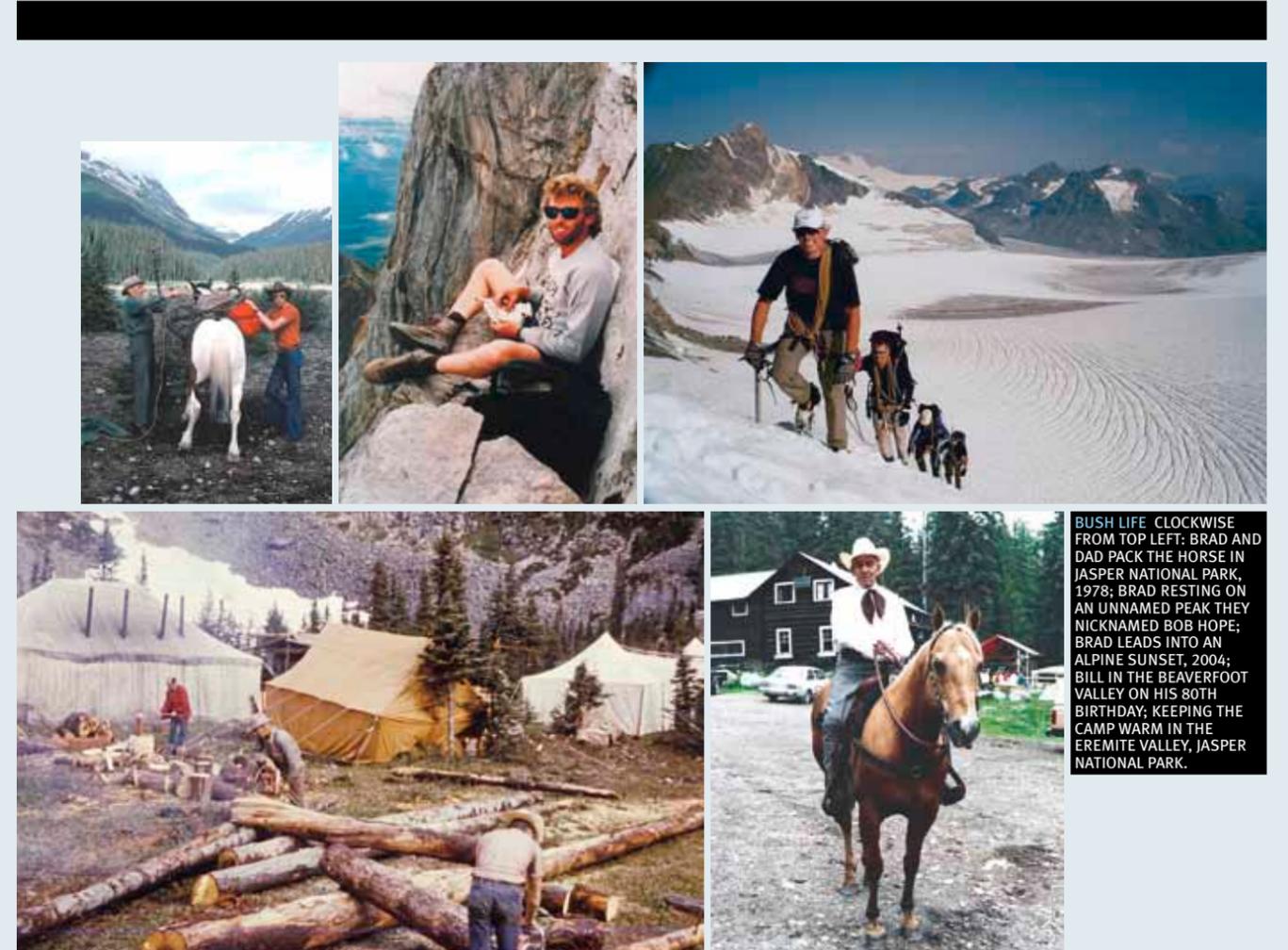
**THERE'S THE ONE** ABOUT the difference between a pizza and a mountain guide. Or the one about a father telling his son a tale of boatbuilding, carpentry and, well, sheep—never mind. I've heard these jokes many times from the same guy. The mark of someone with natural comedic chops is the ability to repeat a joke to the same people and still elicit laughs; the key lies more in delivery than punch line. Chalk it up to Brad Harrison's Irish heritage and decades of spinning yarns to a captive climbing audience tethered to him by a rope or huddled around a 26'er of scotch in a canvas tent while an alpine squall delivers a Biblical pounding. In the tight-knit world of Canadian mountaineering, the Harrison name is legendary, a family of cowboys and climbers. At 57, Brad carries on a tradition of outfitting and managing remote mountain-climbing camps that began with his father Bill, who ran mail by horse and outfitted for Walter Feuz and Conrad Kain, guides immortalized in the dusty annals of Canadian mountaineering history.

Currently there's no joking, as the drone of a chopper fades and the lanky, perpetually busy Brad stares down a chaotic pile of lumber,

propane tanks, tents and totes on a sandbar near the toe of a glacier in a Purcell sub-range known as the Sugarplum-Hatteras group. His crew of volunteers, me among them, scope the Pirouette Pinnacles, a small enchainment of Bugaboo-like spires high above our soon-to-be-camp, awaiting instructions on where to start clearing a space for the kitchen and dining tents.

This is something Harrison has done countless times before: transporting a mound of gear into the mountains and assembling it into a deluxe camp. Alpine newbies and surly veterans from Toronto, Texas and all points in between have at one time or another passed through a Harrison camp. Raised in Edgewater, British Columbia, north of Radium, Brad Harrison was the runt in a family of six kids, wrangling for his dad Bill before he had even stepped into a classroom. Maintaining the family legacy means something to Brad. "My dad worked with Conrad Kain," says Brad. "He said he was a real gentleman."

That's about as verbose as the elder Bill Harrison got. He was a quiet, hardworking man, with a twinkling sense of humour. If Bill was economical



BUSH LIFE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BRAD AND DAD PACK THE HORSE IN JASPER NATIONAL PARK, 1978; BRAD RESTING ON AN UNNAMED PEAK THEY NICKNAMED BOB HOPE; BRAD LEADS INTO AN ALPINE SUNSET, 2004; BILL IN THE BEAVERFOOT VALLEY ON HIS 80TH BIRTHDAY; KEEPING THE CAMP WARM IN THE EREMITTE VALLEY, JASPER NATIONAL PARK.

with words, Brad can be as gregarious as a circus ringmaster, but they shared an aptitude for industriousness. Anyone who has spent time with the Alpine Club of Canada has a Harrison story to tell. In 1946, Bill won a contract to outfit the club's marquee General Mountaineering Camp (GMC) in the Bugaboos, thus beginning a long relationship between the Harrisons and the GMC. At various times, the entire Harrison family worked together at the GMC. Former Alpine Club of Canada President Cam Roe, speaking at the 2008 Mountain Guide's Ball in Banff, Alberta, for which Brad Harrison was its patron, spoke about how the Harrisons found a way "to work and play together in the outdoors, as well as build a history and legacy that lives and breathes within them."

When Bill Harrison finally stepped down as GMC outfitter, horses were succumbing to the convenience of the chopper. In 1985, Brad stepped up to assume management of the GMC, which had slipped into the red during the troubled economic times of the early 1980s. He wore the multiple hats of roast carver, dish-pit captain, plumber, solar-power technician and transport logistician, while finding time to guide people up peaks alongside the ACMG professional guides. He also juggled an Air Canada baggage-handling career at YVR and part ownership of Golden Alpine Holidays. The elderly Bill passed away in 1993, and Brad continued the GMC legacy until 2010, when a simmering dispute with Alpine Club of Canada brass over camp management and

dollars boiled over. Brad quit. The Harrison's long association with the GMC abruptly ended. "Yeah, that was tough," Brad says. "Our family had been part of that camp for so long."

The acrimonious separation from the club stung, however, the wounds are healing. The GMC continues and so does Brad. After a year-long hiatus, he launched BMC, which stands for "boutique mountaineering camp," but most people assume it stands for "Brad Mountaineering Camp." He missed the mountains and the people.

In a day, the mountain of gear in the heart of the Sugarplum-Hatteras has taken the form of a camp in progress. Beyond being a natural-born storyteller, Brad has that curious ability to motivate people to tackle tedious tasks, like digging shitters in glacial gravel, with smiles on their faces. "I really felt like something was missing from my life during that year off," he says. "I love the simplicity of being in camp compared to the rest of my life. If something breaks I fix it."

Simple isn't how I'd describe the logistics of running a modern mountain camp with solar power, water purification and stringent environmental standards. And let's face it, it's also an ideal opportunity for Brad to test new and old material on a captive audience of new and old friends. More than 50 years since he toddled into his first mountaineering camp, astride a horse with father Bill, he's still going strong, jokes and all.

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