

True Grit: how to make real camp coffee

Apart from the endless assortment of necessities stuffed away in my pack there's one small item that can either make or break any camping trip - camp coffee.

On countless canoeing ventures the thought of a fresh brewed cup of coffee on an open fire was the only thing that kept me going on the last portage of the day. And during winter excursions coffee was a mere survival tool; it became the only thing that could drag me from the warmth of my sleeping bag during those cold mornings.

If you are a camp connoisseur, regular condensed coffee has no place amongst the glowing embers of any breakfast fire. Proper camp coffee is not perked, dripped or instant, not freeze-dried, syruped or filtered. It is not anything but real grounds-and-water-in-the-pot coffee. The ingredients of "true grit" is simple - one generous tablespoon of coffee per cup of water.

Staying with old-time outdoor tradition, the original camp coffee is created from the essentials. To start off you toss over an open fire beans into the skillet green coffee beans into the skillet over a coffee fire, making sure to stir them now and then to keep them from sticking. Once the beans are brown and have excreted their famous aromatic fumes, you wrap them in a piece of cloth (an old shirt is a good stand-by), pound them with a rock until they're pulverized and then brew them right away.

Roasted whole beans can be bought if you don't have access to green beans. And if rock pounding seems a little barbaric, grind the beans before your trip and keep the coffee in an airtight container.

The ingredients of camp coffee, however, are not as important as the way they are added to the pot hung over the fire.

One technique is to first measure the right amount of water in the pot, then bring the water to a hard boil, take it off the heat, stir in coffee and let it steep (covered) alongside the campfire for 10 minutes.

NATURE'S WAY

Kevin Callan

Another method is to put the cold water and grounds together in the pot, then bring the water to a boil, immediately take the pot off the heat and let the coffee steep for five minutes. In each case wrap the pot in the same old shirt you pounded with a rock to entrap the flavor and aroma.

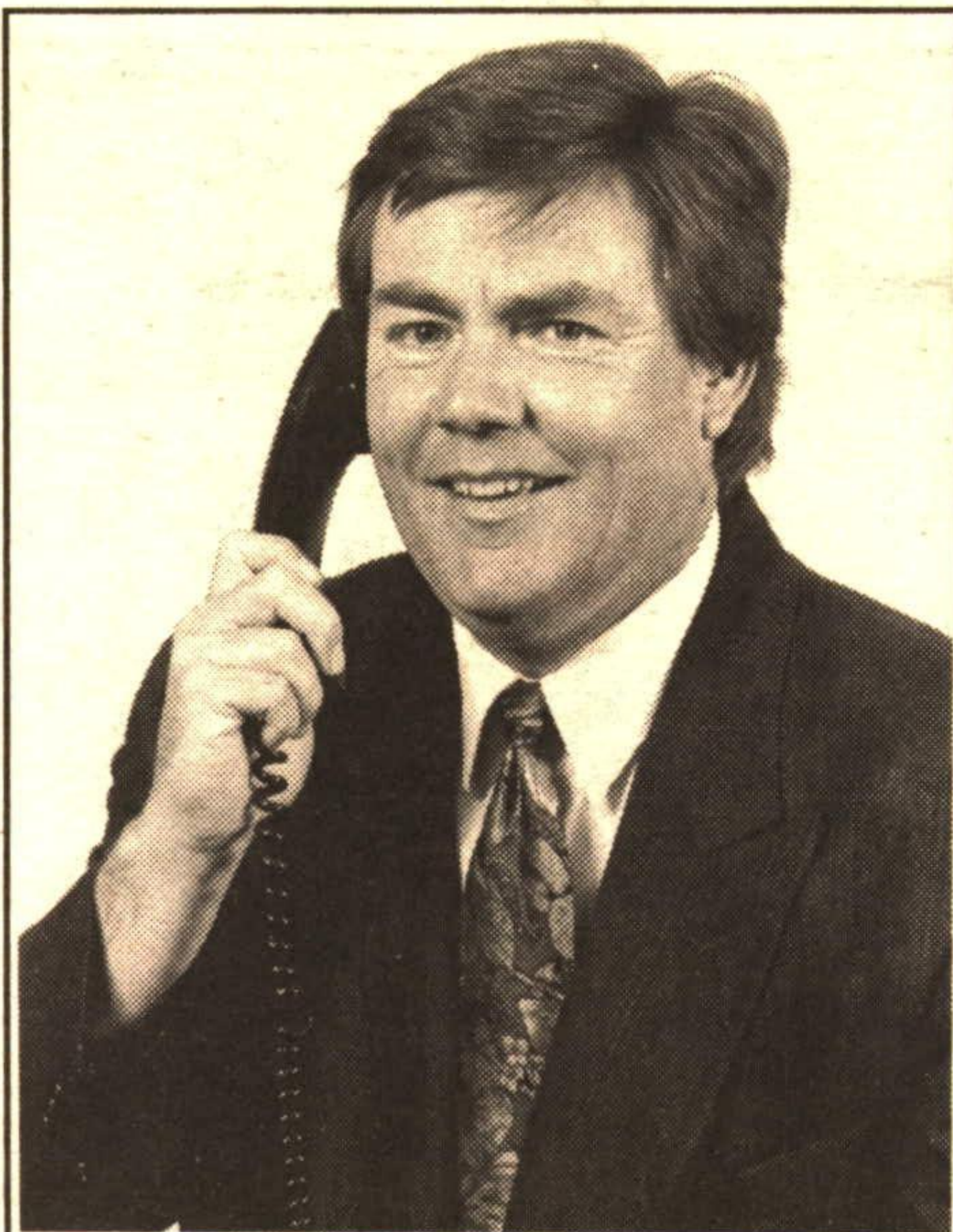
Make special note that in both cases the finished coffee should not be allowed to boil. Oldtimers used to say that boiled coffee tastes like rotten shoe leather.

Scientifically speaking, coffee beans contain both flavorful oils and bitter tannic acids. The oils are released at 205 F. (86 C.), just below boiling point. The bitter acids, however, are released right on boiling point or just above.

Of course, if you haven't already guessed, there is a major disadvantage to "true grit" coffee. The grounds are left floating in your cup to grind away at your teeth like sand.

There is a number of techniques invented to help settle the grinds. Adding eggshells to the finished brew helps clear the coffee. I've seen other campers merely tap on the pot to settle the grounds or put a cold spoon to draw them to another object. The most famous maneuver is to grab hold of the wire handle on your coffee pot, swing with the speed of an aircraft propeller, and have complete faith in centrifugal force. This suicidal action will pull the grounds to the bottom of the pot - guaranteed.

Any way you brew it, camp coffee should be enjoyed fresh and hot to help you through the next portage or early morning cold front.



Bill Mckeown

Associate Broker

Mc-Q-Win

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360 Guelph Street,
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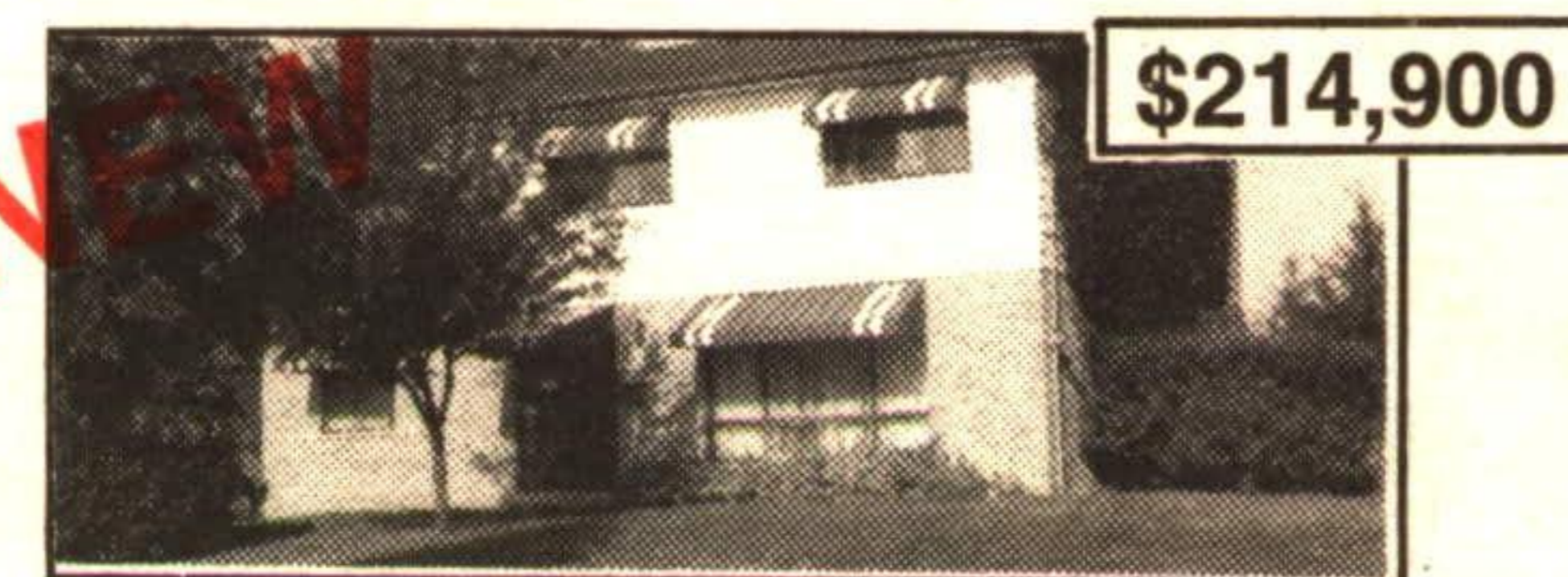
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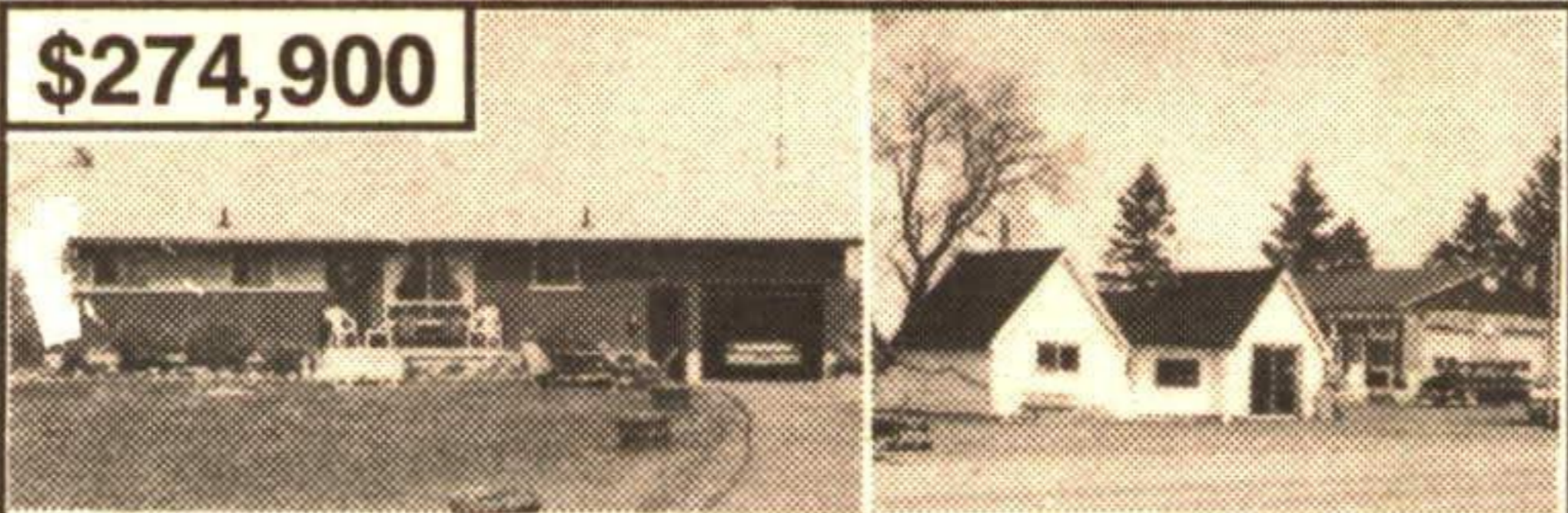
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