



PHOTOS COURTESY KAMLOOPS MOUNTED PATROL

Horsing Around

Thirty years of warm welcomes from the Kamloops Mounted Patrol

BY SHERI RADFORD

Equine goodwill ambassadors and their riders make an excellent first impression for visitors to Kamloops

“I’m the old geezer,” Rick Wanless says with a chuckle. “I’m doing this because I love it.”

For 30 years now, Wanless has led the Kamloops Mounted Patrol. This popular volunteer ambassador group greets most of the eastbound Rocky Mountaineer trains when they stop in Kamloops. Despite turning 80 this year, Wanless has no plans to give up the reins. When asked how long he’ll keep doing this, he responds, “As long as I can get on the horse and I’m comfortable. And the horses don’t get too tall.”

At present the patrol has five not-too-tall geldings: an Arabian, a Morgan and three quarter horses. “Training takes place at our place, Hacienda Caballo at Heffley Creek,” Wanless says. His riverside property is just north of Kamloops, and it’s visible from the Jasper train at Mile 128. “There are many obstacles—stairs, teeter totters, etc.” He explains that training the horses requires being “kind but firm.” The horses need to learn how to remain calm around everything from crying children and flying soccer balls to train

whistles and unexpected loud noises. As Wanless puts it, they must “have good manners.”

It can be more challenging to train the riders, who are usually students from places as far-flung as India, Saudi Arabia and China. Many have never even seen a horse before, let alone ridden one. Wanless speaks fondly of a student from Tanzania who came to the mounted patrol last year with no experience on horseback: “It took him four rides, and then he was able to go to town.” One of the other riders is an engineer on the Rocky Mountaineer. Wanless describes him as “quite a young guy—he’d be about 65” and says to keep an eye out for George on horseback one day and driving the train the next.

The horses always enjoy being petted and posing for photos with visitors, and a few of the animals even like to be hugged. As for Wanless, he thrives on caring for the horses, riding them and meeting travellers from all around the world. “You’ve got to do something in life that you love,” he says. It would seem he’s found his calling. **RM**