

Keeping Out Dingoes

When Alan Sinclair ("Paddy") Barlow retired last month he left behind a small group of families in Australia's outback to whom he has been boss, father, psychologist and confessor. For twelve years Barlow, 59, was the New South Wales supervisor of a 5,400-mile fence, the longest man-made structure in the world. It was built to keep dingoes away from the sheep.

Paddy Barlow and his wife Beryl live in a modern home in Broken Hill, 580 miles west of Sydney. Most of his time on the fence job - sometimes seven days a week - was spent on the trail.

The wild-dog fence is longer than China's Great Wall, which measures only 3,750 miles. It is divided into three sections: Queensland's Barrier Fence, South Australia's Check Fence and New South Wales' Border Fence. The fence is constructed of steel posts and wire. It stands 6 ft. high and goes nearly one foot underground. Where the barrier crosses lakes, wooden posts are used. Older sections still carry barbed wire on top.

South of the New South Wales barrier live more than 7 million sheep, whose wool is worth about \$160 million per year. Says Barlow: "You just can't have dingoes and sheep industry together." Sheep owners pay a tax to finance the anti-dingo fence. This year 1,100 landowners paid \$615,00 and the state government added \$195,000 more. Parts of the fence date back to the 1880s and at the time the New South Wales government was not willing to pay all the costs.

The enemy is Australia's most dangerous wild animal - aside from man. Perhaps 10,000 members of the *Canis familiaris* - a tough, wild dog that usually hunts alone - live in the outback. The animal has a short, soft fur of a yellowish colour. It is about 1.2 m long, has a bushy tail, pointed ears and stands 60 cm at the shoulders. The dingo says Barlow, is a "smart, sneaky fellow. But if he was good for anything, our grandfathers would have found out about it. He's been tried as a guard dog and a Seeing Eye dog, and he won't work as either."

The fence works well against dingoes. "There is a sheep industry inside the fence; outside there is none. I've never seen a dog go over," says Barlow. Some dingoes will go to any extreme to get onto the other side of the fence, while others take one look at it and walk away. The wild dogs usually try to dig under, says Barlow, joking that "when we catch them, we pull their claws out to stop them from digging."

The great barrier requires much work: rains, drifting sand dunes and fast growing plants can cause serious damage to the fence. In 1974 heavy rainfalls swept away large sections. But there is also the human menace: "terrorists," four-wheel-drive tourists who speed over the sand hills, thinking they have the world to themselves. One worker, injured in a head-on collision nearly a year ago, still has not returned to the job.

When Barlow talks about his old job, he remembers: "Ninety-nine percent of my time I'm just on my own. But when you are out here, you're not lonely. When you go to the city and there's 50,000 people and no one will talk to you, that's when you're really lonely."

With their children grown up, Paddy and Beryl Barlow now have an open road ahead of them. "I've had enough of sand hills," he says, "and there's a lot of Australia I want to see."

(adapted from Time, Sept. 12, 1988)

(595 words)

A. Information about Mr Barlow

- 1 . family name: _____
- 2. first name: _____
- 3. nickname: _____
- 4. age: _____
- 5. family status: _____
- 6. wife's name: _____
- 7. children: _____
- 8. place of residence: _____
- 9. profession: _____

B. Information about the "wild-dog fence"

- 10. total length: _____
- 11. compared to: _____
- 12. different parts: _____

- 13. details of construction: _____

- 14. beginning of constr.: _____
- 15. purpose of construction: _____

- 16. causes of damage: _____

- 17. cost of maintenance: _____

C. Information about the dingo

- 18. biological name: _____
- 19. appearance: (the looks) _____

- 20. character: _____

