

The Great Australian Fence reading passage

The Great Australian Fence

For over a century, sheep ranchers in Australia have been at odds with the dingo, Australia's wild dog. To preserve their livelihood, the farmers erected a wire fence—3,307 miles of continuous wire mesh stretching from the coast of South Australia to the cotton fields of eastern Queensland, just short of the Pacific Ocean.

The Fence is Australia's equivalent of the Great Wall of China, except it is much longer and was built to keep away hostile invaders, in this instance, hordes of yellow dogs. The empire it protects is that of the woolgrowers, sovereigns of the world's second-largest sheep flock after China's (some 123 million head), and guardians of a four-billion-dollar wool export enterprise. Never mind that an increasing number of people-conservationists, lawmakers, taxpayers, and animal lovers argue that such a barrier would never be permitted today on ecological grounds. With portions dating back over a century, the dog fence has become, as conservator Lindsay Fairweather ruefully concedes, "an emblem of Australian frontier inventiveness."

I spent a portion of the Australian autumn touring the wires, appreciating this strange outback monument, and meeting the people whose lives rely on it. It goes by several names in different states: the "Dog Fence" in South Australia, the "Border Fence" in New Mexico, and the "Barrier Fence" in Queensland. I'd just call it the fence.

For most of its epic length, this epic barrier runs like a river across a terrain devoid of rivers until heavy rain has occurred. The circuitous course, primarily dictated by property borders, offers a taste of outback topography: the fence winds through dunes, across salt lakes, up and down rock-strewn hills, thick bush, and over bleak plains.

The barrier keeps towns at bay. Where it runs through a town, it has become a tourist attraction, frequented by bus excursions. It is the traditional boundary between cattle and sheep. Dingoes are shot, poisoned, and imprisoned inside, where they are legally categorized as pests. Sheep and dingoes do not mix, and the fence makes it clear for miles.

What is this monster that, despite the existence of the world's most fanatical fence, threatens a whole business, causing several million dollars in damage each year? Cam's lupus dingo is an invasive species of wild dog related to coyotes and jackals derived from Asian wolves. Skeletal evidence suggests that Asian mariners who arrived on Australia's north coast brought the dingo more than 3,500 years ago. The adaptive dingo expanded quickly and became the main predator, eliminating all of its marsupial rivals. With a large snout, short pointed ears, and a bushy tail, the dingo resembles a miniature wolf. Dingoes shriek and howl rather than bark. The dingo is Australia's biggest terrestrial carnivore, at around 22 inches at the shoulder, slightly higher than a coyote.

The woolgrowers' fight against dingoes, which is akin to sheep ranchers' wrath against coyotes in the United States, began not long after the first European settlers arrived in 1788, carrying a cargo of sheep with them. Dingoes became criminals when the government set a reward on their heads in 1830. Today's bounty for troubled dogs Killing sheep inside the fence may cost up to \$500. Fences replaced shepherds when pioneers invaded the interior with their flocks of sheep. By the end of the nineteenth century, hundreds of miles of barrier fencing crisscrossed the enormous grazing areas.

"The dingo began as a calm observer, but quickly came to symbolize everything dark and terrible on the continent,' says Roland Breckwoldt in *A Very Elegant Animal: The Dingo*. Dingo populations are said to have multiplied a hundredfold since sheep arrived in Australia. Although dingoes have been exterminated in certain areas of Australia, an educated assessment puts the number at more than a million.

Eventually, government authorities and graziers decided that a single well-maintained fence, built on the outside of sheep country and funded by woolgrower taxes, should replace the tangle of private nets. By 1960, three states' barriers had been connected to create a single dog fence. Private confrontations between wool farmers and dingoes have often served solely to define the fence in economic terms. It denotes the distinction between profit and loss. However, the fence throws a considerably larger ecological shadow since it has become a form of a terrestrial dam, obstructing the movement of creatures within and outside. The environmental consequences are most visible at Sturt National Park. In 1845, The explorer Charles Sturt undertook a failed trip across these areas in quest of an inland sea. A kangaroo sighting was an unusual occurrence for Sturt and other early explorers. They are now everywhere because, in the absence of a natural predator, the kangaroo population has surged within the fence. Kangaroos have become more cursed than dingoes. They have replaced sheep as competitors for water and pasture. As a result, state governments shoot around three million kangaroos each year to prevent Australia's national emblem from overrunning the pastoral regions. Park authorities acknowledge that the barrier is at fault and reply to the influx of kangaroos by stating, "The fence is there, and we have to live with it."

The Great Australian Fence IELTS Reading questions

Question 1-4:

Choose the appropriate letters A-D and write them in boxes 1-4 on your answer sheet.

1. Why was the fence built?

- A. to separate the sheep from the cattle.
- B. to stop the dingoes from being slaughtered by farmers.
- C. to act as a boundary between properties.
- D. to protect the Australian wool industry.

2. On what point do conservationists and politicians agree?

- A. Wool exports are vital to the economy.
- B. The fence poses a threat to the environment.
- C. The fence acts as a useful frontier between states.
- D. The number of dogs needs to be reduced.

3. Why did the author visit Australia?

- A. to study Australian farming methods.

- B. to investigate how the fence was constructed.
- C. because he was interested in life around the fence.
- D. because he wanted to learn more about the wool industry.

4. How does the author feel about the fence?

- A. impressed
- B. delighted
- C. shocked
- D. annoyed

Questions 5–11:

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the reading passage?
In boxes 5-11 on your answer sheet, write

Yes, if the statement agrees with the views of the writer.

No, if the statement contradicts the views of the writer.

It is not given if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

- 5. The fence serves a different purpose in each state.
- 6. The fence is only partially successful.
- 7. The dingo is indigenous to Australia.
- 8. Dingoes have flourished as a result of the sheep industry.
- 9. Dingoes are known to attack humans.
- 10. Kangaroos have increased in number because of the fence.
- 11. The author does not agree with the culling of kangaroos.

Questions 12–13:

Choose the appropriate letters from A-D.
Write them in boxes 12-13 on your answer sheet.

12. When did the authorities first acknowledge the dog problem?

- A. 1788
- B. 1830
- C. 1845
- D. 1960

13. How do the park officials feel about the fence?

- A. philosophical
- B. angry
- C. pleased
- D. proud¹³