

PRACTICALITIES

SO YOU WANT TO BUILD A FENCE, DO YOU?

by Pamela Valton (alias 'the little lady')

KEEP the foxes out? Protect the orphaned roos and other wildlife? OK, where do we start? What with? How high? Where from?

After several weeks of looking, enquiring and finding out what others had done we came up with a combination of Wamsley's Earth Sanctuaries' fences, deer farm fences and a little of our own initiative. We chose galvanised pipe for corner strainer assemblies and gate way box strainer assemblies to be concreted into the soil because of termites and water inundation in winter. The wire we chose is 1.9m, 17 wire boundary deer fencing held up by galvanised pickets. Well, after much negotiating we eventually purchased our materials and were ready to start. Just one average bloke and one little lady plus some hand tools and big ideas.

First we ensured a good clearance along the boundary, no easy task, and commenced to dig the holes using a hand auger, in summer due to winter high water table problems, concrete in the posts and erect the box strainer assemblies. Around this time we learned of some old sheep wire netting being removed by a neighbour renewing his fences. We took many trips to collect the old wire - heavy, awkward and dirty. Why? To lay down flat along the fenceline to deter the foxes from digging under to gain entry. Whose job? The little lady's, of course, because the average bloke was still digging those holes by hand!

Next came the pounding in of the metal pickets with a hand post driver (known as a donger by some). On went the ear muffs, up went average bloke on a trestle to reach their height and little lady fetched, carried, positioned and held. By this time both were rather fit and average bloke had muscles to envy. Did I mention that we were fencing 4km? Well we were, and in summer through to autumn, but definitely NOT during the middle of the day!

So, many weeks later and several picnics on the job later we were ready to put up the wire itself. Thank goodness we had invested in a hoist for the back of the ute to lift the wire. Oh, oh! With what could we strain it? Many suggested two tractors pulling in either direction, but since we don't own a tractor that was no good. The little lady suggested that some giant ringlock strainer thingies might work but no-one seemed to have anything like that until ... Yes! - someone had heard of someone who knew someone who thought they might have used some to put up a deer fence. Contact made, and although we offered to hire them, they were loaned to us obligation free.

Now came the interesting part. The rolls of wire weighed 290kg and were 1.9m high. Very tricky, average bloke's muscles and all!

It wasn't too difficult to transport the rolls of wire to the locations, thanks to the hoist to load and gravity to



Just an average fence, built by an average bloke - a.k.a. Christian Valton

unload. It wasn't too difficult to roll it out along the fence line with only the occasional tangle with the old sheep wire. Hooking it up loosely to the steel pickets was tricky but reasonably simple. It was manipulating the wire moving along the tops of the pickets without bending them that challenged us.

So, whilst average bloke pulled and strained on the chains and levers to pull the straining boards to strain the ends of the fence wires together, little lady raced up and down the line lifting the top wire off the pickets moving it along and back onto the pickets following the direction of the strain - 200m one way, 200m the other and back. Each section took one day. By then it was autumn and cooler or it would have taken longer. However, it took the next day to join the 17 wires and prepare the next strip of wire for straining.

The strainers were fantastic but unfortunately required bolting and unbolting, were VERY heavy and required a lot of muscle to crank up the three sets of chains. Average bloke's muscles were looking good but not so his hands. In spite of the leather gloves they were callused and sore from all the wire twisting and fixing at the joins. 36 rolls x 17 wires. You work it out!

Finally all 4 kms of fence was up, but not yet finished. The tie wires to hold it onto the pickets had to be finished as only the middle had been done as we went along. Little lady left that to average bloke - she had had enough! A little later she did help again in securing the second layer of wire at the creek crossings - couldn't have those pesky foxes creeping in that way, now could we? Seven months in all, but now complete.

Yes, the fence looks fantastic and yes, we are proud that we did it, quite alone and completely self-funded. We are also very proud to see displayed on our entrance gate a sign which says 'Land for Wildlife'.

Happy fencing!