

# The dog tree

Harry, at Cooma

Goodnight Barlow

15 June 2004

Dear Members,

You might have heard stories over the past couple of years about people being stalked by wild dogs in the Snowy Mountains. Dogs have a terrible reputation around here because of the enormous damage they are doing to stock—a problem that is definitely getting worse—but so far, tales of them threatening humans have been hearsay.

There's always the possibility this sort of story gets exaggerated, as farmers are keen to get their point across about dogs killing their sheep and lambs. Most of the dogs are coming out of the National Park country and any threat—real or imagined—to bushwalking greenies would work in the farmers' favour, so up until now I've taken such reports with a grain of salt.

However a recent edition of the Cooma-Monaro Express reports two incidents of anglers being stalked by wild dogs in the Tantangara area, and as we all know, anglers don't tell lies. One, Mr Ben Reardon, claims he was stalked by two dogs while fishing near Tantangara in January last. He says the dogs approached him and were only 15 metres away—creeping up behind him with front legs lowered—when he first noticed them. He had to throw 'many rocks' at them before they disappeared.

Reardon also claimed a workmate was surrounded by wild dogs on the Eucumbene River. He had to wade into the river and beat them off with his rod before they lost interest and gave up.

I've never heard of Mr Reardon, but seeing as his name doesn't also appear in the same newspaper's 'In Your Local Lock Up' column that same week, I've assumed he isn't the town drunk and didn't make all this up.

The year before Chris Hole passed away he told me he had been driving on the Long Plain road, way up the top end of the Bidgee, and had seen what he thought was a small mob of sheep in the distance, but once he got closer he realised it was a large pack of dogs. And a few years ago I met a fisherman on the Bidgee above Tantangara who claimed he had just been chased by a wild boar, which isn't all that surprising when you look at all the pig damage in that area.

The damage to the Eucumbene River near Sawyers Hut is even worse, especially since the big fires went through that country. Many stretches of the narrow strip of flat land alongside the river look like they have been neatly and thoroughly ploughed. A chopper pilot who does contract work in the Park recently told me that he often sees a mob of feral pigs and occasionally small packs of dogs in the country between Tantangara and the Eucumbene River. Might be worth carrying a big stick, or a packet of liver treats and a few swedes, next time you go in there.

The Gungarlin River, another favourite haunt of some of us, has also become a popular summer holiday resort for wild pigs, and there are dogs in there throughout the year. If you take a walk into the river in winter you can easily find dog footprints on the snow. Next time you camp up there, try to be awake just before first light to listen to the dogs howling. It's quite an eerie and lonely experience, especially when one starts up in the tussocks only 50 metres away and you think you wouldn't be so lonely if you had the .243 and a spotlight with you.

If you do go in to the Gungarlin, keep a look out for the 'dog tree', a large candle bark gum on the right hand side of the dirt road into Nimmo, just a minute after it leaves the bitumen road to Braemar. At first glance the tree looks like it has long strips of bark hanging down. I don't know how many times I had driven past that tree before



I noticed the strips of bark were actually dead dogs, shot by local farmers and strung up by their back legs with fencing wire. In various stages of decomposition, they look like very long, bony, hairy, hairy pieces of beef jerky.

I once took a bunch of kids up to the Gungarlin for a fishing weekend, and when I got to the tree I reversed the ute with a couple of kids sitting in the back up under the tree and in amongst the dangling dogs...at first they just started dodging the strips of 'bark', until they suddenly realised what they really were, then they all leapt out over the side yelling, screaming and brushing off imagined maggots.

One started to limp later that day and somehow got the idea he might have tick paralysis. The others egged him on with stories about their pet dogs dying in their sleep from tick poisoning, so he didn't sleep a wink that night and was very dopey the next day. The others took his general languor as proof he was in a decline and drew straws for his pocket knife.

Another one got a bit unpopular with his mates because he had a funny smell and they wouldn't

share a tent with him. I took him aside and he reckoned one of the fresher dogs in the tree had dribbled something weird on him when the ute bumped into it, so I had to tell him to go and wash his clothes in the river.

Then one of them found a spider in his tent (admittedly it was bigger than my spread hand) and after that none of them would get in their sleeping bags and they all wanted to sit around the fire all night yakking. They finally caved in around midnight but were very tired and cranky the next day. On the way back to Cooma, any time I put the ute into reverse they would start banging on the roof and fighting over the mobile phone one kid had. I think they all wanted to ring Mum and tell her they would be home soon.

Strangely not many of them came fishing again. That's the trouble with kids today: they just get bored too easily.

Kind Regards,  
Harry

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