

'How the Idea of a Portable Sheep Yard Began'

In 1964, at the conclusion of tailing and mulesing 2750 sheep and lambs, the Cahill brothers (Kevin, Brian and Dennis) were unloading the truck of panels, gates and steel posts used to make holding pens for lamb marking, just like thousands of property owners were doing with sheep that could not be handled in permanent facilities.

Kevin remarked to his brothers "This is the last time we are doing this – let's design and build something more suitable for the future."

They retired to the workshop and commenced to draw on the concrete floor their ideas of what could be done.

First the race way was drawn, and then an axle was added, and finally hinged panels completed the basic centre of action similar to thousands of permanent yards across the country.

The next day – "Where do we start and how". For instance, how wide is a sheep race, how high and how long? What do we make the panels out of? Answers were sought and found, and races measured. We decided on 17 inches of race width, and thinking of manufacturing a standard length of pipe, this became the race length with double 30 inch gates for drafting. This meant the lead up to the 14ft race would allow 3 or 4 sheep in the race to assist flow through. The double folding panels against the race determined that the other end double folding panels would have to be offset from the race by about 6 inches to fold back the other way. This presented us with a compact section that could be raised on one end to have an axle placed underneath. The key to completing yards was to use a coil (or two if necessary due to large mobs) of 365 arcmesh to hold sheep. In practice, we found it easier to cut a 100-foot coil of 365 into 3 separate lengths of approximately 33 feet long, put chains on either end to either tie together or roll up, and place on top of the race for transport.

In practice, we dropped an extendable race consisting of a twenty-foot section that rolled out from its outer twenty-foot base unit. This was mounted on stud axles that could be removed to set it on the ground. This outer unit had a walk-up ramp that was dropped into the end of the porta-yards on the drafting gate end, which were raised up to allow this. This gave a forty-foot race that was raised up off the ground by two foot. This makes it easier to wet and dry, and mouth sheep.

The first time being used, it was a complete success.

In 1965, we approached A.R.C Engineering in Welshpool about manufacturing as 365 arcmesh was the basis of the yards' success. Their engineer, Mr Fred Franks, saw the potential and challenged us to patent the idea, and then see them about possible manufacturing them.

Brian set about providing the drawings and after some amendments, Patent Number 280,290 was granted in 1965.

We went back to A.R.C and drew up licensing agreement for A.R.C to build and sell the 'Porta Yard' as it was to be known from their capital city plants in Australia. The life of a patent is 17 years, so for us it was a good arrangement and placed this valuable piece of equipment before all property owners in Australia.

We had a provisional placement in New Zealand but did not find a suitable manufacturer so eventually we let it lapse.

During the life of the patent A.R.C took several parties to court for infringing the patent, but a year or so before its expiry date in 1984 several firms started to manufacture the item to be in on the ground floor.

Take the yards to the sheep was a phrase coined in 1965 and still applies today.

The original set on display has done an incredible amount of work – probably drafted and weighed at least 500,000 pigs and thousands of sheep over a 17-year period in fixed locations. We have an ARC manufactured set used for sheepwork. The halving of panels is the only design departure from the original and now adopted by all manufacturers.

However, we do feel that the shortening of the race length that has occurred with some manufacturers does not encourage a good flow of sheep. In recent times the availability of lightweight tube and box section has been a win-win situation for this type of construction work and costs.

Take the yards to the sheep is as applicable today as it was all those years ago.