



**BlazeAid**

Helping Communities Rebuild  
After Natural Disasters

JULY 2024 - ISSUE 13

# The *BlazeAid* POST

A Quarterly Insight into the BlazeAid Organisation and its efforts to Rebuild Communities Affected by Natural Disasters



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## Mavi's Experience- A Backpacker's Diary

My trip in Australia started 5 months ago in Melbourne. I had a lot of expectations and I couldn't wait to start my new life in that city. After a few months I realized that it wasn't for me.

"Woop-Woop" is a funny slang that Australians use when they talk about places in the middle of nowhere. This is the place; I was looking for where I can start a new experience, far from the big city. I decided to book my flight from Melbourne to Toowoomba. If there is something that I don't like doing, every time I move is saying goodbye to all the people I met and packing my bags. But there is something good in it because at every end there is a new start and I can't wait. The trip was quick even though the distance between Melbourne and Toowoomba is about 1486 km!

I took the bus from Toowoomba to Stanthorpe. During the bus trip I couldn't help myself but admire all the nature we were driving through, which was completely different from the city which I was used to.

I arrived in Stanthorpe after 3 hours on the bus and I was met at the bus stop by John, one of the BlazeAid coordinators of the camp, who was waiting for me.

BlazeAid is an Australian NPO who helps mostly farmers to re-build their fences after natural disasters such as bushfires, cyclones, droughts, floods. Once I made it to the camp, the first thing I saw was a big lake and friendly faces. I was introduced to all the backpackers and other volunteers and then I was shown to my room. After a few hours, the dinner was ready and I was surprised by how good the food was and I loved all the desserts they cooked. This meal gave me the chance to speak to all the Australian volunteers and share all the stories about their travels. Most of the Australian volunteers have their own caravan and the backpackers can complete their 88 days while having access to accommodation which can be provided by the camp. I think this is a good opportunity for people looking for something new where you are surrounded by nature, local animals, while helping the community which is the main purpose. I'm ready to start this new experience and excited to tell you about it!

**BlazeAid**  
**Diary**



# Board Member Introduction - Helen Hickson

*Introducing another valuable board member to BlazeAid - our very own Helen Hickson.*

*Helen has been a social worker for over 20 years, now connected in academic roles to various universities around our country and currently lives near Bendigo in Central Victoria. We are so lucky to have her skills and knowledge as a BlazeAid Director!*

Working fulltime, she is currently learning about how to build and use wicking beds to help improve her veggie garden . “We normally have a hot, dry summer in central Victoria, but the past couple of years, the Summers have been cooler with flooding rains. It’s good for the grass but not so good for my tomatoes! I’ve been learning about heirloom vegetables and the varieties that work best in my backyard. It’s a constant battle of wits to try to produce lovely home grown herbs and vegies and be able to harvest before the kangaroos, possums and fruit bats make their selection.”

**BA: How did you first find out about BlazeAid?**

**Helen:** I worked as a Bushfire Case Manager after the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009 in Kinglake and Flowerdale and I remembered hearing about BA, but didn’t really know what it was. Many years later a friend told us about their experience at a BlazeAid camp and we were keen to find out more. When the opportunity came up to volunteer we jumped at the chance.

**BA: What was your first BlazeAid camp?**

**Helen:** We have volunteered at two camps, Edithburgh in SA and Adelong in NSW, and visited lots of camps. We were travelling around Australia in 2019 when the fires came and volunteered at the Edithburgh. It was a lovely camp and fencing was straight, sandy and rocky and the fire burnt right to the shoreline. Adelong was different because there were steep hills, slippery grass and it gets very cold in the Snowy Mountains in winter. We were at the Adelong camp for 14 weeks during COVID lockdowns with some amazing volunteers from around the country. Some of the highlights were a socially distanced dawn service on ANZAC Day, and watching the spectacular Autumn colours change in the Snowy Mountains in Adelong, Tumut, Tumbarumba and Talbingo.

**BA: Tell us about your interest in volunteering?**

**Helen:** I have volunteered at two BA camps. My husband is Jim Hickson, and we have both been CFA volunteers in our community for 30 years. Jim was a local CFA Captain for 10 years and volunteering is part of our life.

**BA: What things did you do (or still currently do) before you started with BlazeAid?**

**Helen:** I am a University lecturer, teaching social work students about supporting individuals and communities to prepare for natural disaster. I conduct research into community recovery after disasters and provide information for emergency management planners and first responders about what communities need.

**BA: What made you want to be apart of the BlazeAid Board?**

**Helen:** I was keen to join the BlazeAid Board as I wanted to support the growth of the organisation to respond to new challenges. I am a member of the Finance Sub-committee and interested in looking for grants and funding opportunities.



Helen Hickson



# Co-Ordinator of the Quarter Debra Ong

We are delighted to shine the spotlight this quarter on Debra Ong - a cherished coordinator whose contributions have been invaluable. Debra's leadership was instrumental in the successful operation and recent conclusion of our Goornong camp in May 2024. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for her exceptional dedication and we are excited for you to get to know her!

Debra was born in Frankston, has been married for 37 years with 2 sons and has just become a first-time grandparent! She resided in Frankston for a period before relocating to various places such as Echuca, Bendigo, Melbourne, and Tasmania. She is now considering a return to Victoria.

Debra enjoyed a working career as a Nurse in different areas, including in the emergency services for approximately 15 years.

When she is not hard at work or volunteering, her hobbies include beekeeping, food preserving, cooking, bad jokes and the fun trivia nights at the BlazeAid camps.

**BA: How did you find out about BA?**

**Debra:** My son volunteered back in 2016 at the Port Sorell camp.

**BA: Where was your 1st camp?**

**Debra:** I was on my way home from travelling and I saw that there was a camp at Seymour in need of volunteers. I spent a week helping out.

**BA: What made you become a Co-Ordinator?**

**Debra:** After the floods in the Goornong area I received a phone call from Melissa and she reached out to me for help. This was my first time Co-Ordinating, it does provide it's challenges but very rewarding. It is really satisfying watching the volunteers

grow from when they first start and know very little about fencing, but then after a few days/weeks they are team leaders sharing their experiences.

**BA: What do you like most about BA?**

**Debra:** I really like the respect and appreciation BlazeAid receives from the farmers when we come in to help. The connection and support we receive is great, and assisting them with their fencing is a bonus. The teamwork in BlazeAid is a big factor, too. Everyone is all together for one purpose, doing what you can do to support and help people. We are all working towards the same goal.

**BA: What does a day look like at BA camp?**

**Debra:** Basically it starts in the morning in the rec room, we prepare for the day. Morning muster, briefing teams, organizing equipment, roster changes, prioritizing work loads. We would contact property owners, farmers and prepare for the days ahead. Our camp was very lucky as we always had someone to cook our meals and they all took pride and dedication to their work in the kitchen.

Fencing was only one job at the camp, it was all the behind the scenes (cooking, cleaning, admin, vehicle maintenance) where all the volunteers helped with that made Co-Ordinating a good experience.

**BA: What did you do differently at your camp?**

**Debra:** We tried to create a little fun at our camp. We would have trivia nights, Aussie Slang nights for our backpackers. They were very enjoyable, we even changed the name of our cars to make it a little light hearted for those challenging times and conditions when visiting farmers and property owners. So we say good bye to Buggsie, Croc and Lookcy, till the next camp.



# Volunteer in the Spotlight

## Ian Logan

We are delighted to introduce a dedicated volunteer, Ian Logan, who is currently contributing his skills at our Stanthorpe Camp. Ian, at the youthful age of 65, has generously offered his time to around 10 different BlazeAid camps across our country.

Ian is a proud father of four boys who reside in QLD, and is eagerly anticipating the arrival of his third grandchild.

When he has the time, Ian's loves a golfing, traveling, and crafting fire drums.

Prior to joining BlazeAid, Ian worked for most of his life as a Boilermaker. Approximately a decade ago, he experienced a stroke while working, resulting in him being legally blind. Despite this challenge, Ian persevered and decided to shift his focus to building fences. His journey with BlazeAid began when he discovered the organisation through the ABC Radio Broadcast, Australia All Over, and in 2021, he volunteered at our Texas camp. Ian values the lasting friendships he forms during his extended stays at camps, appreciating the touching stories shared by farmers and finding fulfillment in being able to assist those in need.

The connections made and the diverse regions explored during his volunteering experiences have enriched Ian's life in ways he never imagined.

At his last camp, Ian said there were a lot of backpackers and Aussie Volunteers, which was a good mix. He enjoyed teaching the younger ones new skills and then in return, they would provide entertainment at night back at the camp.

“Someone would pull out a guitar and that would lead into a sing along. Everyone helped, even when our camp flooded 3 times, no one complained. The morning ‘Organised Chaos’ would always work. Everyone would get breakfast and lunch for the day and after the morning muster the teams would head out to their designated properties and start work. In the afternoons, when we returned to camp, the first thing was to get the fire going, have a sit down, clean your tools for the next day, then tea time and then a catchup with the other volunteers.”

One funny story Ian recalls was at his time in Texas camp.

“We had 3 different teams at Texas all working on one farm. As each team was in a different car, the rule was that the last car out must shut the farmers gate. So being the new rookie, I offered to shut the gate, but couldn't understand why all the crews were waving and giggling at me, as I dutifully did my job. Took me a bit to realise that the gate still had no fencing attached on either side!!

Ian, it's great to see you come back again and again to help those who need assistance. Your time and efforts at BlazeAid are greatly appreciated and it's volunteers like yourself that keep us going. Thank you!





# Around the Grounds

## Daintree QLD

After opening on the 10th Jan 2024, the camp has come to a successful close. Jannine Gerke spent the initial weeks opening and setting up, and Peter Provost took over from Feb till May to coordinate the camp. We have managed to assist and complete 21 properties all up, all the while battling torrential rains! With 18 kms of fencing cleared and 22 kms fenced, we had a total of 36 volunteers come through, 21 of those were international backpackers from 11 different countries. WOW!! What a fantastic effort. Not only helping farmers and property owners with fencing, the camp has managed to teach our international volunteers the game of cricket! This was a great team building exercise and provided the camp with plenty of laughs and healthy rivalry when needed. Pictured on the right is 76 year old Johnny and 22 year old Maureen from the Netherlands. We worked alongside Johnny on his farm for 6 weeks and the bond that these 2 developed was something special. These are memories that will last forever.

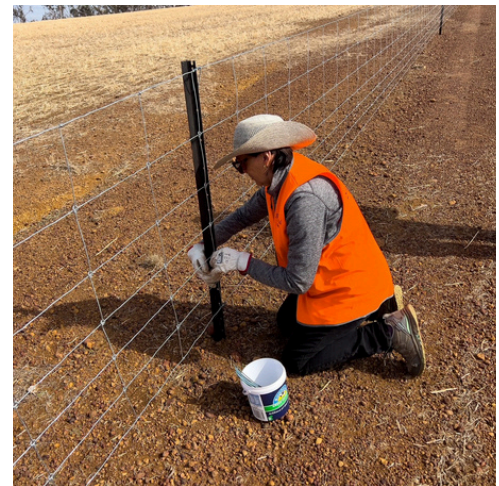


**Johnny and Maureen**

## Kulin WA

Kulin Camp has been active since the 29 April 24. We have 6 farms registered, with an estimated 70Kms of fences to complete. To date we have completed all but 31km.

The team here are amazing and a number of them have been here since we started. Our farmers have spoilt us, with donations of meat, water and lots of cakes and biscuits, as well as 8kg of honey and 12 Dozen eggs! Two of the farmers have also shouted the whole team dinner at the local community run hotel, how lucky are we!! Kulin has a wonderful imaginative bunch of farmers, who have created the Tin Horse Highway, a set of sculptures scattered along the roadsides, made out of disused drums and farm equipment. These works of art stretch for about 25km on the eastern side of Kulin, and there are even more on the western side toward Corrigin. Such a creative sight to see!



## Buangor Vic

The Buangor Camp, set up by Jenny and Sam, first led by Graeme, then Jude, and presently Chance, has been up and running since March 2024. Teams are assisting with rebuilding fences following the Bayindeen/Mt Cole bushfires that hit the area in February 2024. Over 60 properties have registered requiring help with recovery, of which 26 of them have been completed – totaling a whopping 107km of fencing cleared and 62km built thus far. There is still much to do, with the current challenge including bracing for winter as it gets colder with every passing week. The camp also currently comprises almost entirely of backpackers, with 20 of 24 volunteers coming from different parts of the world such as Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, Peru, Tahiti, France, Belgium, Italy, The Netherlands, Canada, and the United States of America.





## Dadswells Bridge VIC

A coordinator faces many challenges and to be a first time coordinator, my challenges have been, to say the least, a challenge! But at the opposite end of the spectrum, the thankyou's have made it all worthwhile.

Our camp started in March at Dadswells Bridge in the Northern Grampians. Firstly, we had our caravans and tents set up at the Tiny Away accommodation park but after a few set backs, we moved a few kilometres up the highway to Old Dadswells Town. Max and Jenny have made our time at Old Dadswells Town very enjoyable and amusing, and their company has been so welcoming and friendly. Our admin and meals area is at the Public Hall in Dadswells Bridge so a bit of daily travel has been involved between both places. The community has been extremely friendly to us and has constantly supplied us with cakes, slices, casseroles, drinks, and meals at pubs and clubs. The Horsham council very kindly donated the use of a large generator, and supplied the diesel, so our volunteers could run air conditioners or heaters. GMW supplied a water trailer for our drinking water. So thank you one and all. Keith from Horsham has made certain that donations have kept coming in. Dadswells Bridge and Pomonal both suffered through destructive fires in February, with Pomonal losing 40 plus homes. The first time we drove through the tiny streets of Pomonal it brought tears to my eyes. To see people's lifestyle just now littered in amongst sheets of metal and under blackened trees, was heartbreaking. Kids swing sets swinging, but with no seat. We knew it was going to be a challenge! Most of our work was required in Pomonal, but the larger properties were at Dadswells Bridge. Fire will choose its own path, and will also choose which buildings and land that it destroys. Why an untouched building remains in a burnt paddock is a question that has no answer. We have run a happy camp and have had many volunteers return. It is nice to hear chatter and laughter around the dinner table. The supply of meals has been tricky at times, but our volunteers have stepped up and helped in the kitchen, so no one has gone hungry. We have reinstated over 50kms of fencing and cleared over 70kms of fence line. New volunteers have learnt new skills, with our older volunteers being patient teachers. We have had students from Murtoa College out to help us, and those days have been so enjoyable. With "Stan the man" being very popular with all students. Sundays have been a day off for everyone in our camp, with the choice of any other day that the volunteers wish. So our volunteers have enjoyed exploring the many walking tracks and stunning scenery that the Grampians area holds. It's been a long three months and I am looking forward to closing down our camp and putting our feet up, but I will miss the wonderful volunteers and the welcoming community, although we are now honorary members of the local community as we have been here so long. The best part of Blaze Aid is the many lifelong friends that you make, and we have made many.



## Lismore NSW

Lismore Camp closed its doors on 27/05/24 after being established on 20/09/23. In that period, we completed 50 properties, erecting 25.5 km of fencing and clearing 14 km of debris. Our volunteers included returning BlazeAiders with all the stories and experience that go with many hours on fence lines, newbies who wanted to try something different and many backpackers striving for their 88 days WHV extension to qualify for a second year of living in Australia. Our 56 wonderful volunteers contributed 1225 days to assisting farmers and running the camp. Apart from the hard work we enjoyed many social events in camp, including the Melbourne Cup, an early Christmas celebration, and the odd birthday or two. Our farmers, the reason for being here, were a very mixed bag. The 2022 flood had affected them all in differing ways. Some saw the enormity of the rebuilding task ahead of them, dug deep and made it happen while others just didn't know where to start. BlazeAid provided the light at the end of the tunnel for many to make a start, and for others, the hands and expertise to complete much needed fences.





## Nymboida NSW

This camp has been running since January 2024, currently lead by Bob and Lisa Abdo. With 28 unique volunteers, this camp has managed to complete 6 of the 20 properties registered. They have cleared approximately 16km of fencing and rebuilt 12kms. Not only do these volunteers clear and build fences but assist with the necessary haircuts from time to time. Looking good Bob!



## Stanthorpe QLD

Stanthorpe Camp has had a productive time during the month of May averaging over 22 volunteers in camp per day. We are working in some very difficult conditions but very scenic areas. Currently we have 11 nationalities represented in camp so each Saturday night we are having a themed dinner from one culture. Last week it was good old Aussie camp ovens followed by a traditional Aussie favorite dessert, the Pavlova. We have also had Spanish, Italian and this weekend we will have Irish. So much fun to talk about cultural customs, family life at home and future travel plans of our volunteers. As if fencing in the granite belt isn't hard enough some volunteers find the energy to go on Park Runs Saturday morning;



The fencing has been difficult at times (Typical granite belt terrain), but with perseverance we are making inroads. Our camp has been open for 6 months now and we have completed over 30km of repaired and new fences and cleared 44kms. At times its been very slow but our teams are doing remarkable work. As coordinators we are very proud of the way all our volunteers are approaching the laborious work. Another month ends and winter starts but BlazeAid remains our constant as we continue our work and wish all the other camps all the best for the coming months. Take care everyone.



## Yinnar VIC

With our camp now closing at Yinnar, not only have we been able help the farmers, but we can now take time for ourselves. Every evening the backpackers enjoyed playing games donated by the local neighbourhood watch group. Sometimes volunteers would bring their instruments to play while we sing along to some happy tunes together. We had local footy games outside of our building that we would watch also. After a rewarding week, some BlazeAiders utilised the community organised park run to join the locals on Saturdays. Others would take a walk into town and check out what the shops have to offer, like the cafés, bakery, art gallery and displays. When new volunteers arrived, we would take the time to do a demonstration on some tools used on the farms, to upskill ourselves. Being in a community like Yinnar has been a great experience overall.

A huge thanks to our coordinator Nexi - you have done a wonderful job in running this camp!





# Supporter of the Quarter:



At Brandt, a privately owned and family-run company, we show a steadfast commitment to our customers through a diversified and specialised approach. For nine decades, the Brandt team have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the hardworking men and women we serve, driven by a passionate belief in our company's potential and the success of our customers.

Since the acquisition of Cervus Equipment in late 2021, we have proudly established a strong presence in Ballarat, dedicated to serving local customers with unwavering commitment. Our team at Brandt's Ballarat branch is deeply integrated into the community, actively participating in local initiatives and supporting our neighbours in times of need.

In the wake of the devastating Bayindeen fires, which caused extensive damage on the outskirts of Ballarat, we took immediate action by partnering with BlazeAid, a volunteer organisation focused on disaster recovery. Recognising the critical need for assistance, we donated a tractor to support BlazeAid's efforts in rebuilding the affected area and aiding the local community. This generous contribution underscores our dedication to community support and resilience.

We are proud to support our communities through the impactful work of BlazeAid. Our local branches, like the one in Ballarat, stay actively involved in their communities, taking on initiatives such as re-fencing projects to provide support when it is needed most. These efforts highlight our belief that the success of our company is intertwined with the well-being of the communities we serve.

Understanding that without the support of the community, we would cease to exist, we remain committed to fostering strong relationships with local residents. Our collaboration with BlazeAid reinforces this principle, embodying the spirit of locals supporting locals. Through these efforts, we continue to operate, driven by the strength and resilience of the people we serve.





## Pea and Ham Soup



### Ingredients

- 1 1/3 cups of green split peas
- 2 tbs olive oil
- 2 chopped and peeled carrots
- 2 sticks of chopped celery
- 1 brown onion diced
- 3 cloves of garlic crushed
- 700gm of ham hocks
- 1.5 L of cold water
- sour dough or crusty bread to serve.

### Method

1. Rinse split peas under cold water until water runs clear and drain.
2. Heat oil in a pot on a moderate heat. Add the onion, garlic, celery and carrot and cook for approx 5-10mins until onions soften.
3. Add the split peas, ham hocks and water, then bring to the boil over high heat. Then reduce the heat to a low simmer and cover. Cook for 2 to 2.5hrs until the ham starts to fall off the bone. Set aside to cool slightly, remove ham hocks from the pot and remove the meat off the bone. Chop meat coarsely and leave aside.
4. Blitz the pea mixture with a stick blender until smooth, return the ham to the pot and season to taste. Stir over a moderate heat until hot.
5. Serve in bowls with some bread on the side.

## CHOC CARAMEL SELF SAUCING PUDDING

- 1 cup (150g) self-raising flour
- 1 1/2 cups (330g) caster sugar
- 3/4 cup (75g) cocoa powder
- 60g unsalted butter, melted, cooled
- 1/2 cup (125ml) milk
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 egg
- 200g soft-centred Werther's Original lollies, roughly chopped
- Vanilla ice cream, to serve



1. Preheat oven to 160°C. Grease a 6-cup (1.5L) capacity ovenproof baking dish.
2. Sift flour, 1/2 cup (110g) sugar and 1/4 cup (25g) cocoa into a bowl and stir to combine. Make a well in the centre. In a separate bowl, whisk together melted butter, milk, vanilla and egg. Gradually pour milk mixture into flour mixture and fold to combine.
3. Scatter Werther's over the base of the prepared dish, then pour over the pudding mixture, spreading evenly. Combine remaining 1 cup (220g) sugar and 1/2 cup (50g) cocoa and sprinkle over the pudding, then carefully pour 1 1/2 cups (375ml) boiling water over the top.
4. Bake for 50-55 minutes until the top is just firm.
5. Stand for 10 minutes to cool slightly, then scoop vanilla ice cream on top to serve.

### It's Joke Time!

Why did the pig leave her boyfriend?  
Because he was a real Boar!!



What do you call a cow with no  
legs?  
Ground beef!