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Volunteer in the Spotlight Brett Pywell

Meet Brett: A Dedicated BlazeAid Volunteer

Brett, 63, has been married to Yvonne for 36 years. Together, they have two children and four grandchildren. Brett's career began in 1977 as an apprentice gardener with the State Electricity Commission in the now-demolished town of Yallourn, Victoria's Latrobe Valley. His journey took him through various roles, including working at a golf club and a pastoral company, before he returned to the power industry as a coal miner for over 30 years. Brett's father was a fencing contractor, and Brett often helped him on his days off, continuing the work after his father's passing. Today, the old tractor and post driver are still in use on the family's rural property.

In his spare time, Brett enjoys woodworking, with a collection of exotic timbers drying in racks, ready for his next project. Since retiring in 2019, he has kept busy tending to his garden, pruning, propagating, mulching plants, helping family, and, of course, volunteering with BlazeAid.

Discovering BlazeAid

Brett first heard about BlazeAid from a work colleague who had volunteered at a camp and thought Brett might enjoy it in his retirement. Intrigued, Brett joined his first camp in Buchan a few weeks later.

Why Volunteer?

Growing up in a rural setting with several relatives owning farms, Brett finds it easy to connect with farmers and rural folks, understanding the challenges they face. His background in fencing provides a natural conversation starter. The more camps he attends, the more he enjoys working with a diverse group of volunteers, learning, and teaching new skills.



As a team leader, Brett liaises with coordinators and landowners, manages tools, and works with crews on various tasks. With crew members frequently changing, Brett adapts to new personalities and skill sets. Living close to a BlazeAid storage facility, he also helps out there when he can.

Brett admits that technology is a challenge for him, preferring hands-on work with tools. Each job is unique, with different fencing styles in every area, requiring adaptability to meet landowners' needs.

Commitment to Camps

Brett typically volunteers in two-week blocks, often returning to the same camp multiple times. This allows him to complete projects and build rapport with team members and landholders. When not in a camp, Brett is often shifting trailers from one camp to another or in and out of storage. He also dedicates time to maintaining some of our storage facilities in Victoria.

Before BlazeAid

Before joining BlazeAid, Brett was a member of the Moe SES for several years, dealing with storm damage, minor floods, and bush/snow search and rescue. His commitment to helping others has been a constant throughout his life.

Brett has volunteered at several BlazeAid camps, including Buchan, Heyfield, Bridgewater, Kerang/Murrabit, and most recently, a satellite camp at Raglan.

Brett's dedication and hard work make him a valued member of the BlazeAid community. His story is an inspiration to all who have the pleasure of working alongside him. Thanks for all your help and commitment to BlazeAid, Brett!

WISHES FOR CHRISTMAS

Melissa Jones, BlazeAid CEO

As we look forward to celebrate this Christmas, I extend my warmest wishes to all our BlazeAid volunteers, farmers, supporters, and communities. Your dedication and hard work have made a tremendous impact over the last 12 months, and we are deeply grateful for your unwavering support.

I wish for your Christmas be filled with joy, love, and laughter. Here's to a New Year brimming with hope, health, and happiness!



Gary and Colleen Waterson, Board member

Our Christmas wishes are for no natural disasters, low road fatalities and a joyous Christmas reunion for families and friends.



Jude Turner, Coordinator

My Christmas wish is that in 2025 our BlazeAid community gathers for Auroras and campfires and fun, and not because we are needed after natural disasters. Give us a year off Huey 🙏



Kevin and Rhonda Butler, Blazeaid Founders

We wish all our volunteers a Merry Christmas and a safe, Happy New Year! A heartfelt thank you for your incredible support and dedication throughout the year. Enjoy quality time with family and friends during this festive season. Here's to a fire-free celebration!



Debra and Chong Ong, Coordinators and Board member

Our Christmas wish is for everyone to have a relaxing time with friends and families and no BlazeAid camps needed.



Lisa and Bob Abdoo, Coordinators

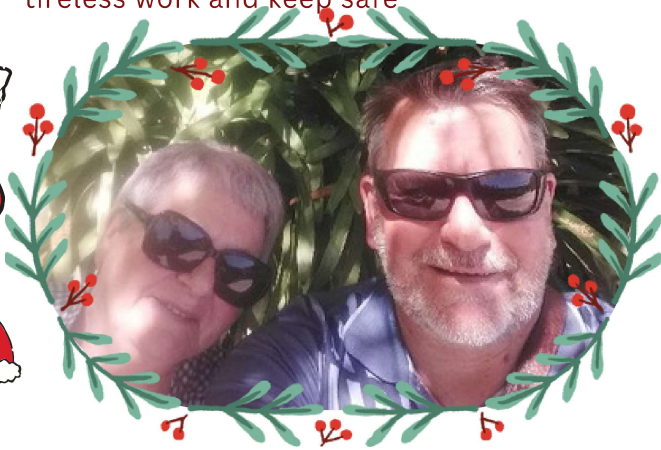
We wish our wonderful Farmers across our wonderful Country a stress-free Christmas & New Year



WISHES FOR CHRISTMAS

Rob and Broni Edwards, Coordinators and Board members

To all our wonderful Blazeaider's we wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and best wishes for 2025. To all our amazing farmers ♥ thank you for your tireless work and keep safe



Debbie Buttler, National Business Manager

To all the BlazeAider's wishing everyone a safe and joyful Christmas! May the upcoming year be free from fires and floods, and may it bring abundant happiness, love, and health to all.



Singleton Team, Singleton Storage Coordinators

Wishes everyone a very happy Christmas and good health in 2025 As we all celebrate our early Christmas lunch mid November after our end of year working bee.



Andrew Gibson, Board Member

Good harvest, not too many bushfires, no fatalities.



Chris and John Male, Coordinators, Vice President and Board Members

Wishing everyone health, happiness and no major disasters for 2025. Oh and if Santa happened to have a spare set of mud flaps for the car that would be appreciated too!



Kerrie Bennett, Coordinator

I hope everyone has a wonderful relaxing and Happy Christmas



BlazeAid Ideas Workshop

On Wednesday 20th November 2024, BlazeAid held an Ideas Workshop/Christmas Party in Kilmore. A great number of BlazeAid Board Members and Coordinators were able to attend, making it an extremely productive event! Those in attendance spent the morning discussing ideas around volunteer attraction and retention strategies, camp logistics, and coordinator roles and training. Some key takeaways from the day were:

Volunteers:

1. How we look after our volunteers in camp
2. Consideration of exit interviews for volunteers
3. Our communications with volunteers
4. How we recruit suitable coordinators
5. How we create fun and enjoyable, yet efficient and effective camps
6. Things that create a camp that is and

Coordinators:

1. Working with volunteers in camp to build capacity
2. Targeting Camping and Caravan Shows to create an awareness of BlazeAid
3. Quality coordinators
4. Training, mentoring and support for coordinators
5. Roles and responsibilities within a BlazeAid camp
6. Utilising volunteers skills and background to assist others
7. Break opportunities for full time and/or long term coordinators.

At BlazeAid, we highly value and actively encourage feedback and innovative ideas from all members of our community. Your insights are crucial to our continuous improvement and success.

You can share your feedback through various channels, including our website, email, or by directly reaching out to any of our Board members, coordinators, or Melissa and Debbie.

Comprehensive contact details for these individuals are available on our website.

We look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your contributions to making BlazeAid even better.



Around the Grounds

Stanthorpe QLD

Stanthorpe camp opened on the 27, November 2023 and closed on the 17th November 2024. 356 Days of hard work, comradery, and team work. We had fun, we learned about adaptability and we met some awesome people along the journey. About 100km of fencing and similar clearing completed, and we learned why they call this area 'The Granite Belt'. We were lucky enough to have lots of volunteers, including 16 different nationalities on site at one stage. We learned to swear in several languages, learned that joy and happiness are not emotions that need words - the look on faces says it all!

I would like to thank every volunteer who stepped into the camp and gave freely of their time, working hard but sharing themselves with all of us too. We laughed together, shared some somber moments and understood how good and sometimes how challenging travelling can be. You can be overwhelmed by the numbers in camp but you can be lonely too. It is important to thank all our volunteers, be they returning experienced volunteers, new inexperienced volunteers or international volunteers working to extend their time to stay in Australia. Thank you all.

We were so lucky to have our camp at the Storm King Dam, Stanthorpe. Scenic, serene and somewhere to chill out in beautiful surroundings. We swam, walked and enjoyed our beautiful environment. Many thanks to the Southern Downs Council for allowing access to the Fred Rogers Reserve on the banks of the Dam. Loved it (mostly), minus 6 in the winter challenged us from time to time but we got through!!

One of our highlights was International nights where teams cooked traditional meals for us from their home country. We enjoyed Peruvian, Italian, Spanish, Irish, Asian and Aussie themed meals to mention just a few. Pizza cooked over the open fire, camp ovens in the fire pit, camp fires and singing, memories we all take away and remember fondly in the years to come.

I would like to thank all involved in the Stanthorpe Camp, Volunteers, Farmers, Council, Service Clubs, and the Showgrounds committee for their initial hosting of us. To our amazing admin support team and Board sincere thanks. Wishing everyone a safe and healthy 2025.

Regards Chris and John
Stanthorpe Coordinators



Hamilton and Meander Valley Camps TAS

During late August to early September 2024, Tasmania experienced a **severe** weather event. Flooding and high winds affected large parts of the State. BlazeAid responded by opening two camps, Hamilton on October 7th and then a camp in Deloraine in mid November. The Hamilton camp statistics show just how hard volunteers worked in such a short time, 11 properties completed 57km cleared and 6km fenced. Meander Valley camp is still open and it is likely to operate until at least mid December and a satellite camp continuing operation until mid January. It is probably no surprise to many BlazeAider's to hear of the community support and generosity wherever we set up. We've had fridges, freezers, tents, mattresses, meals, home baked goodies as well as great conversations and sincere, simple thank you's!

Coordinating a BlazeAid camp is tiring, frustrating, but very rewarding, more than you can measure. You get the opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of all volunteers, farmers and communities. The collective dedication of a BlazeAid team builds community spirit in a positive way, we show by our actions that we care.

Here's what some volunteers are saying about BlazeAid....

BlazeAid makes farmers smile 😊, BlazeAid makes my fellow workers smile 😊, all that makes me smile 😊 - Terry

Discovering communities through the eyes of locals is my favourite part of the BlazeAid experience. -Khrystyna

Love working together with the fabulous & diverse BlazeAid teams a great sense of achievement & helping! -Wendy

What I really loved about BlazeAid was the equal opportunity it gave me to step out of my comfort zone and try new things. It didn't matter what my gender, nationality, or skill level was—I felt supported and encouraged to contribute. The Australian volunteers I met were so kind, welcoming, and eager to collaborate with backpackers like me. -Satchi

A special thank you must go out to Stewart and Vanessa who were there at the beginning of Hamilton, also Cheryl Youkee and Jan Gursanscky who have been there throughout both camps coordinating, cooking and doing whatever was needed at the time. Also, Brendan Meyer who was our dial a fencer remote support for some of our team leaders.

And of course, Melissa, Debbie and Kevin who are never far away and always there for advice and support. Lastly thankyou to all volunteers, BlazeAid would not be able to operate without you putting aside your lives for a while to help others.

-Tasmanian Camp Coordinator,
Debra Ong



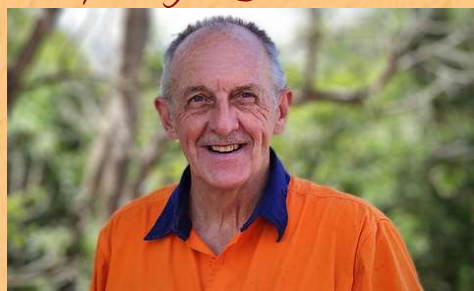
A Poem to BlazeAid by a Victorian Farmer

*Disaster strikes with lightning force, the fire threat could not be worse
Fearful stock in panic run from fire and wind scorched by the sun.
The land is hurt its black and smolders, time for BlazeAid friendly shoulders.
Bewildered by the scale of harm, landowners in need of calm,
See loss of many long-held dreams, red-eyed, bereft of hope it seems,
Are staggered as the help appears, BlazeAid arrives and eases fears.
Who are these people on my farm, with sleeves rolled up and sunburnt arms?
I know them now as friends from far, how truly great Australians are.
When days have passed and hope restored, one seeks to offer some reward.
The way for that I do believe, is one day give as I received.*

A BlazeAid Rap!

'We're BlazeAid Incorporated
Workin' from the bush to the sea,
And our mission?
It's disaster recovery!
Fires and floods destroy farms and land
Our volunteers come to give 'em a hand!
At BlazeAid, what we appreciate most
Are the people who give, lets raise a toast!
People who give time, their energy, and
love
They're heavenly angels sent from above!
Back from the fields with our teams,
Work day is done – farmer's face beams!
Achy bones, weary legs, but hearts are full!
Ready for our home cooked feast – how
cool!
Another task to undertake
Blazeaid works to regenerate!
Planting beautiful eucalyptus trees,
Every bit helps stop rising seas!
Recycling soft plastics into posts
Gifted to farmers who need the most
Doing our bit for climate change
Sequestering carbon, commodity
exchange!
But what we are most proud of
Is the effect BlazeAid has on mental
health.
Those we help, those who give back
Creates resilience and purpose to get
back on track.

VALE Gary Lawrence



It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Gary Lawrence, a cherished member of the BlazeAid family, who left us on the 6th December, 2024. Gary was a dedicated BlazeAid Board member and a exemplary coordinator of many camps, including Lismore, Miles, and Toogoolawah.

Gary's commitment to BlazeAid was unwavering. He volunteered countless months to assist farmers in their recovery after disasters, always ready to lend a hand and offer support. His nurturing spirit extended to volunteers as well, generously imparting his skills and knowledge to those eager to learn.

Gary's legacy is one of compassion, dedication, and community spirit. He touched the lives of many, leaving an indelible mark on all who had the privilege of working alongside him. His contributions to BlazeAid and the broader community will be remembered and cherished.

Our love, thoughts and deepest condolences go out to Gary's wife, Jan, family and friends during this difficult time. He will be greatly missed, but his spirit will live on in the hearts of those he worked with, helped and inspired.

PLAN, PREPARE, SURVIVE

**STAY UP TO DATE WITH
EMERGENCY WARNINGS
AND INFORMATION**

HAVE A FIRE PLAN

WILL YOU BE FIRE READY?



1

Clean your gutters of leaves and twigs

2

Install metal gutter guards and repair damaged or missing tiles on the roof

3

Install fine metal mesh screens on windows and doors.

4

Enclose the areas under the house and repair or cover gaps in external walls

5

Attach a fire sprinkler system to gutters

6

Keep lawns short and gardens well maintained

7

Cut back trees and shrubs overhanging buildings

8

Clean up fallen leaves, twigs and debris around the property

9

Have hoses long enough to reach around your house

10

If you have a pool, tank or dam, put a sign on your property entrance so firefighters know where they can get water

11

Check and maintain adequate levels of home and contents insurance

12

Ensure your home and contents insurance is up to date

**PUT TOGETHER YOUR
EMERGENCY KIT**

**LEAVE EARLY OR STAYING?
PROTECT YOURSELF AND
YOUR FAMILY.**

THANK YOU BRAIDWOOD!

WHAT A COMMUNITY! STATISTICS:

Overseen by Dennis and Carol McGrath, the camp and its volunteers achieved some remarkable statistics:

Fencing completed: 249 km's
Properties registered and completed: 265
Pickets installed: 29,332
Strainer posts installed: 1,914
Meals served: 28,881
Costs per meal: \$3.70
Age of oldest volunteer: 82
Age of youngest volunteer: 14
Money spent locally: \$500,113.06
Total value of work: \$1,877,265
Total volunteers: 454
Volunteer days: 9,392
Overseas volunteers: 32
Nationalities represented: 29
Average age: 50.86

In 2020, the Black Summer fires wreaked havoc on the small NSW town of Braidwood and surrounding areas, the Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council gifted BlazeAid with a long term storage facility. Not only did, Bendigo Bank Community Engagement Manager, Nick Fry, keep the keys and assets safe and sound, he also donated his time throughout the last 4 years towards meeting many volunteers who transported BlazeAid's goods (and at all hours!) to help them load, pack and unpack. We salute you Nick and Braidwood Council and Community!

The devastation, destruction and memory of the 2019-2020 Black Summer fires will stay with many, many people. It was one of the most intense and catastrophic fire seasons on record.

On the 6th of January, 2020, BlazeAid listened to and answered the calls of the community and a camp was established on this day at the Braidwood Showground. Local council, QPRC, (Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council) gave BlazeAid instructions to stay there as long as it takes at no cost. BlazeAid finally packed up 11 months later on the 20th of November, 2020. The volunteers became part of the Braidwood community.

Written by Nick Fry
Community Engagement Manager
Bendigo Bank, Braidwood

When it was time to leave, many items could not be returned to BlazeAid HQ in Victoria and QPRC again assisted by using one of their sheds for storage. The shed was stacked with items and at least 10 trailers, many of which were donated by Bendigo Bank Community Enterprise Foundation. The Bank still has very strong connections with BlazeAid.

On Monday the 9th of December, 2024, a BlazeAid truck, driven by BlazeAid Brett, came and collected what was remaining. The truck itself was one of 2 flat top Isuzu trucks recently donated by Isuzu.

After a few hours of meticulously placing items on the truck like a jigsaw puzzle, Brett and the truck bid farewell to Braidwood. The district were so very fortunate to have the efforts of BlazeAid and its team at a time when we needed them most. BlazeAid are still out there, in communities which have been ravaged by fire or flood. In fact, not only is Braidwood fortunate, our country is blessed that its founders, Keven and Rhonda Butler, had the vision to establish an organisation such as this. Unfortunately, there will be another natural disaster, but we do know that BlazeAid will do everything in their power to be there to assist.



Christmas Ice-Cream Cake

Ingredients

- 400g Mixed fruit
- 1/3 cup icing sugar sifted.
- 2tbsp of liqueur your choices
- 1 orange, rind finely grated
- 1 lemon, rind finely grated
- 1 tsp mixed spice
- 2 L Vanilla Ice-cream softened
- 200g dark cooking chocolate chopped
- Cherries for decorating and chocolate shards.



Method

1. Grease a 6 cup pudding basin and line with plastic wrap, allowing it to overhang the side. Combine the mixed fruit, almonds, icing sugar, brandy, orange rind, lemon rind and mixed spice in a large bowl. Set aside for an hour
2. Add the ice-cream to the fruit mixture and stir till combined. Spoon mixture into the prepared pudding basin and smooth the surface. Cover with plastic wrap and place into the freezer to set overnight.
3. Place chocolate in a heatproof bowl over a saucepan of simmering water, making sure the bowl doesn't touch the water. Stir until melted and smooth. Set aside for 10 mins or until cooled and thickened slightly.
4. Dip the base of the pudding basin in hot water and turn the ice-cream cake out onto a serving plate. Spoon over the cooled melted chocolate. Top with cherries and chocolate shards. Serve immediately.



Wishing everyone a Merry Christmas!

BlazeAid HQ and the BlazeAid Board would like to send warm holiday greetings to our incredible volunteers, supporters, and communities!

Here's to a sparkling 2025 filled with joy, good health, and an abundance of love! We appreciate all that you do to keep our mission shining brightly!

