



The BlazeAid POST

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

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Simon Hardy Co-Ordinator of the Quarter

Introducing Simon Hardy: BA Coordinator

Simon was our first Coordinator at Willaura, (Grampians Victoria), setting the camp up for success from the very beginning, after the fires devastated the area.

I am in my 70th year. I was born and raised in leafy green suburbs east of Melbourne and now live in Viewbank, near Heidelberg, so I haven't really moved far. I spent most of my career in IT, consulting to many different organisations.

I'm very happy to be retired but BlazeAid fills the need to keep myself challenged.

I have two children from my previous marriage and have been with my partner, Natalie, for the past 16 years. I have many hobbies, including car restoration and motorcycles. I am currently restoring a 1967 Triumph Spitfire, although there is a lot of work still to be done. More recently I have taken up collecting and fixing vintage watches.

Before BlazeAid I spent a lot of time finishing renovations on my house, a little travel and some time on my hobbies.

After completing renovations of my home, I was looking for some way to contribute to the community, but I knew that I would never be happy packing food in boxes or delivering meals. I wanted to do something more active and the fires that had impacted Gippsland particularly Buchan where I had spent a lot of my youth caving spurred me into action. I'm not sure where, but I heard about BlazeAid and decided to give it a go.

Initially I was very happy just to learn about fencing and make a small contribution to fixing farmers fences.

Through circumstances I was made a Team Leader on my second day with BlazeAid by Patrick Keady who, along with Rhonda, did a great job of coordinating.



During my stints at Buchan, I became a regular TL. Seeing the improvements in farmers mental states through the work of BlazeAid (and other organisations) made me determined to continue volunteering.

Life was hectic in the early days at Willaura as we went from 3 volunteers to over 50 in less than a week. We had a strong team and soon the camp was running well. I like to run camps 7 days a week which is hard on the leadership team but makes the best use of resources and allows volunteers that only have weekends available to be involved. As coordinator I am responsible for all aspects of the camp. Having helpers to look after the volunteers, farm operations, the kitchen and maintenance is critical in a large camp and I had wonderful, committed volunteers doing these jobs. One additional function that I hadn't experienced before was performing many tv, radio and newspaper interviews. It was a very busy time. Now retired, my partner Natalie was also able to join me at Willaura to volunteer for the first time. She spent time in the kitchen and out on the fence lines. When she returned home, she surprised me by buying a new pair of boots. I asked her what these were for, and she told me for the next BlazeAid camp, so I think she might be hooked too!

I have had stints (sometimes multiple) at Buchan, Edenhope, Lockington, Kerang, Murrabit, Boort and Willaura. The camaraderie with volunteers and farmers alone and the satisfaction derived from helping those in need drives my passion for BlazeAid.

My Three Days with BlazeAid

-by Tony Phelps

The Grampians continue to burn, with the dryness and the hot weather making it very difficult to finally stamp out the bushfire. Although mostly inside the National Park, a significant area of the 76,000 hectares burnt into farmland, and in the process destroyed kilometres of fencing. As a result of that, cows, sheep and pasture were left unconstrained, mixing together and in the case of livestock roaming away into neighbouring properties or the Park. This is where BlazeAid steps in, to remove the ruined fencing and then rebuild new fences. The aim is to rebuild the boundary fencing so that the farmers can at least retrieve and contain their own livestock. BlazeAid is an amazing volunteer-powered organisation, and I spent 3 days in their Willaura camp as one of those volunteers.



Crossing over the burnt out mountain pass

Planning with the Farmer

Preparing to run out multiple wire strands

Wire strands tensioned and clipped

BlazeAid is about so much more than simply replacing damaged fences. As you can imagine, when a disaster happens people can be distressed, not know where to start, and feel helpless in the face of so much needing to be done. BlazeAid's purpose is to relieve the poverty, suffering, distress, misfortune, destitution or helplessness experienced by survivors of bushfires and other natural disasters. The small crew I was a part of definitely witnessed this, and the relief and thankfulness that followed fixing essential fences. I won't lie, it was very hard work. The day starts at 6:15am for breakfast, at which we also make our own packed lunch and stack it in our designated crew's eski. Then there's a briefing, which includes safety information (eg. don't wander off, and NO using tractors or quad-bikes). By 7:30am we're in the BlazeAid utes & 4-wheel-drives, each with a trailer of equipment, and on the way to our designated location. We spend all day there, doing whatever is necessary and following the farmer's preferences for how they like the fence constructed. I learnt a LOT about the various types of fences and even how the same type can be put together in different ways. It is very physical work, out in the open and the weather (my last day it was full sun and 34 degrees!). Around 3-4pm we head home, have a shower and a brief rest, and then dinner is put on at 6pm. At around 7pm, everyone has a debrief - each crew leader recounts what was achieved, volunteers leaving are thanked, and volunteers arriving are welcomed, important notices are announced. It is such a friendly and light-humoured way of doing things.

While I was there, Chelsea Bunz and Dutch Cafe Poffertjes food vans drove up from Warrnambool to offer BlazeAid food for 60 people for free. The following evening, the Sikh Volunteers drove up from Melbourne to do the same thing. All of them packed up and drove back home after they'd fed us all. Fabulous generosity and community spirit. Many companies and organisations support BlazeAid with in-kind, free or cheap supplies and services. The Willaura camp was situated at the footy ground, using their kitchen and the communal space for tables and chairs. Everyone camps there, preferably in their own swag, tent or caravan although there are some 'pods' - packable small rooms with just a bed. One of the interesting aspects about BlazeAid is that backpackers with working visas who have to work 88 days in Australia before they are free to head off as tourists can have their time at BlazeAid count towards the 88 days. Similarly, they are registered with CentreLink for volunteers to meet their job-search requirements (minimum 2 weeks though).

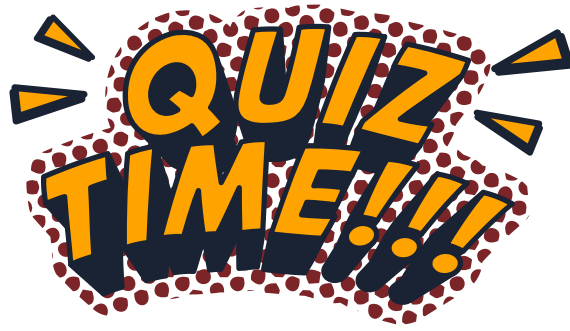
L-R-me with Kylie Butler (daughter of BlazeAid founders), Melissa (BlazeAid CEO) & John Lillico (volunteer)



The Sikh volunteers preparing dinner

I would say we had about 60% grey nomads, 20% backpackers, and 20% volunteers like myself offering a few days of assistance in between normal working life. It was a highly diverse mix of people of all sorts of ages, professions, & experience, male & female. Each person is free to choose to do fencing or help at the camp. Each day all available fencers are allocated to a team which is allocated to a farmer who directs the team to what's needed first. I came back tired with sore muscles, a very useful education in fencing, and a massive sense of satisfaction after seeing a few km of new fencing put up where previously there was none. We did well, as did all the teams. It was quite amazing how much distance we could cover in a day - my phone telling me I walked over 10km, up and down stringing things out and attaching clips and whacking in posts. If you get the chance, it's an experience and a contribution I highly recommend.

-Tony writes for the local Winchelsea Newspaper, a volunteer firefighter in the CFA and is an active member of the Surf Coast Shire community.



1. In what year was BlazeAid Established?

2. Approximately how much does it cost to run a Base Camp per week (on average)?

3. Name the founders of BlazeAid?

4. How many kilometres of fencing has BlazeAid built to date?

5. Name our board members?

6. How many Basecamps did BlazeAid have running in 2024?

7. Can you name 3 Camp Co-Ordinators who were involved with our Wauchope Camp?

8. How many corporate partners are involved with BlazeAid?

9. How many volunteers have volunteered since inception at BlazeAid ?

1. 2009 2. \$5000per/week 3. Kevin and Rhonda Butler 4. 18300km 5. Kevin Butler, Rhonda Butler, Chris Male, David Caple, Helen Hickson, Andrew Gibson, John Male and Graeme Allen. 6. 16 camps 7. Bob & Lisa Abdo, Chris and John Male, Steve Matthews. 8. 13 Partners 9. 38300

Did you know BlazeAid has had 220 camps since starting in 2009

Around the Grounds

Willaura VIC

After the fires that came through Grampians National Park and surrounding areas, BlazeAid set up its first camp of 2025 in Willaura on the first week of January. In just its first two months, the Willaura camp has seen over 200 unique volunteers, including backpackers from 10 different nationalities come through its doors. In that time the volunteers have cleared over 150km and built over 130km of fences - completing almost half of the 71 properties registered thus far.

Currently run by Camp Coordinators Stuart Opie and Christopher Siva Chance, part of the huge accomplishment achieved in such a short period could be attributed to several veteran BlazeAiders and other new and talented individuals choosing to volunteer at Willaura, likely due to being the only camp open in the country through the first seven weeks of the year. In efforts to inspire others to join BlazeAid, one of the volunteers, Rudy, recently initiated a project aimed at shining a spotlight on some amazing BlazeAiders by taking it upon himself to interview and write about them. These have since been shared regularly as a new BlazeAid Legends Series on the official socials.

-Stuart and Chance

Willaura Coordinators



Nhill (ex -Goroke) VIC

Goroke camp opened on February 24th. We started with a core group of 6 volunteers but have expanded to 16 now. The camp has settled into the Goroke Recreational Reserve which is an awesome facility. We are so lucky and the community support has been heartwarming so we have had a promising start.

The terrain around here in the West Wimmera and Hindmarsh Shires is relatively flat with very sandy soil. A striking change from Stanthorpe last year which was steep and very rocky.

Our Volunteers have made friends in the local community very quickly and this has led to tremendous support from all areas within the district including the local mens shed, farming groups and the IGA Store in town. Locals are dropping in and fresh local produce is being donated so we are living very well.

We will continue to strengthen our community ties, welcome farmers to register and be very grateful to all our volunteers.

Wishing everyone a happy and safe Easter and beyond. Chris and John Male

NB: Our Goroke camp has now moved to the Showgrounds in Nhill, which is closer to many of our registered properties.

-Debra Ong

Nhill Coordinator



Around the Grounds

Wagin WA

Wagin Camp is currently addressing a devastating fire that consumed 11,000 hectares within just a few hours in the wheat belt of southeastern Western Australia.

Each year, the Wagin community organizes a significant event called Woolorama, and we were fortunate to secure a stall to promote the establishment of our camp. The residents and council have been incredibly generous, going above and beyond to support us in setting up and running a successful camp. This includes grading roads and fence lines to clear as much debris as possible. We have hosted an information night and several productive meetings with the shire and local farmers.

Since we became operational on March 12, we have cleared 4 km of fences and installed 7.1 km of new fencing within our first week of work. Initially, we started with just two volunteers, who had previously joined me on other camps, but by the end of the week, our team has grown to 10 volunteers, with more expected to join us soon. Some of our members have devised a quick and effective method for cutting twitches, which is shown in the attached picture.

We have received a loan of a chest freezer and a large two-door fridge, along with a lamb for food, as well as five deliveries of biscuits, scones, and desserts from various ladies in the district. One particularly generous elderly resident, who donates \$1,000 annually to charity, chose Blazeaid as his beneficiary this year simply because we assisted him in lifting some heavy parcels.

Additionally, the local op shop has generously allowed us to take items we can use for the camp without charge. We have found several high-visibility shirts, pants, and a good high-visibility drill jacket for one of our members, along with a convection microwave, which is particularly useful since we do not have an oven in our kitchen.

With a fantastic crew and a supportive community, this camp is shaping up to be a truly memorable experience in this small town in the southern wheat belt of Western Australia.

-Kerrie Bennett

Wagin Coordinator



Boobyjan QLD

Boobyjan Camp graciously accommodates a maximum of six volunteers, as per the Farmer's request, and indeed, there is no more space to spare. Since our arrival on the 23rd of February, 2025, we have joyfully accomplished several tasks, including clearing 11.14 km of land, erecting 8.54 km of fencing, and relocating numerous cane toads and snakes. Though we have not received any donations, assistance, media attention, or visits from esteemed guests at HQ like at our other camps, our Farmer expresses heartfelt gratitude repeatedly. Thus, all is harmonious in our quaint little camp.

-Bob and Lisa

Boobyjan Coordinators





BlazeAid is so thrilled and honoured to have Dometic on board as a sustainable partner in our work. Together, we aim to create a better experience for our volunteers, bringing together comfort and convenience for BlazeAiders, particularly in remote areas where basic requirements are harder to find. We know Dometic's generosity and support will help BlazeAid to continue its great work across Australia!

Who is Dometic?

As a global leader in outdoor technology, we design innovative products that make life in the outdoors easier and more accessible. But it's not just about high-tech solutions—our engineering mindset shapes everything we create, from camping benches and tents to iceboxes and power products, ensuring durability, practicality, and quality. In Australia, we have a long history in mobile refrigeration, and many of our long-time customers may remember us as Waeco, a name that became synonymous with reliable cooling in the harshest conditions.

The Partnership with BlazeAid

From our very first meeting with the BlazeAid team, it was clear just how much impact they have on communities in need. We saw an incredible opportunity to support their volunteers with our gear—helping them stay powered, sheltered, and equipped in remote locations. By providing reliable access to power, running water, cooking, shelter, and food preservation, we enable those on the ground to focus on what matters most: rebuilding communities.

Measuring Impact and Success

We could talk about the number of portable fridge/freezers, tents, and other gear in development, but the real impact lies with the volunteers on the ground. Through our partnership with BlazeAid, we're focused on understanding how our products support those in the field—learning what works, what doesn't, and continuously adapting. Our goal is to evolve our support to meet the changing needs of each camp, ensuring volunteers have exactly what they need to keep going. Through the data provided by BlazeAid, we are able to report to our stakeholders the impact these camps have through tangible measures, highlighting the real difference being made on the ground.

The Future with BlazeAid

Our partnership with BlazeAid and Isuzu Trucks is just beginning, and 2025 marks an exciting step forward. We're expanding our impact with more deployment packs, a custom-designed and fully equipped support vehicle, and a new corporate support program. We're grateful for the trust BlazeAid has placed in Dometic and look forward to seeing how much more we can achieve together.



Easter Slice Rocky Road

Ingredients

- 1 cup plain flour
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 110g unsalted butter (chopped and chilled)
- 1 Tbsp iced water
- 400g dark chocolate finely chopped
- 4 Turkish Delight bars cut into 1 cm pieces
- 100gm pink and white mini marshmallows
- 180g of Pistachio or Pecan nuts chopped.
- 175gm Small speckled eggs or chocolate eggs



Method

1. Preheat oven to 180C/160C fan forced. Grease and line a 23cm shallow square cake pan with baking paper, allowing the paper to overhang the sides.
2. Process flour, sugar and 80g of the butter in a food processor until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. With motor running, gradually add the water until a soft dough forms. Press the dough over base of the prepared pan. Bake for 15 minutes or until lightly browned. Set aside in pan to cool completely.
3. Place the chocolate and remaining butter in a heatproof bowl over a saucepan of simmering water (make sure the bowl doesn't touch the water). Stir with a metal spoon until mixture is melted and smooth. Set aside for 10 minutes to cool slightly.
4. Combine Turkish delight, marshmallow and half of the nuts in a large bowl. Add cooled chocolate mixture. Gently fold until just combined. Spoon over biscuit base. Use the back of a spoon to lightly press into the pan. Press speckled eggs and or chocolate eggs and remaining nuts into the top of the chocolate mixture. Set aside for 2 hours to set. Cut into pieces to serve.

Anzac Biscuits

Ingredients

- 1 cup plain flour
- 1 cup Desiccated Coconut
- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1/2 cup caster sugar
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 125g butter
- 2 tbsp golden syrup
- 1/2 tsp Bicarbonate Soda



Method

1. Preheat oven to 180C. Line 2 baking trays with baking paper. Place the flour, coconut, rolled oats and combined sugars in a large bowl, and stir with a wooden spoon to combine.
2. Place the butter and golden syrup in a small saucepan over low heat and cook, stirring occasionally, for 3 mins or until butter is melted. Set aside for 5 mins to cool slightly.
3. Combine 1 1/2 tbs boiling water and the bicarbonate of soda in a small bowl. Add to the oat mixture along with the butter mixture. Stir until well combined.
4. Roll tablespoonfuls of the mixture into balls and place on the lined trays, allowing space for spreading. Gently press each ball to flatten slightly. Bake for 15 mins for crisp biscuits. Set aside on the trays to cool completely. The biscuits will harden as they cool.