



# The BlazeAid POST

SEPT 2025- ISSUE 18

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

## IN THIS EDITION

Volunteer in the Spotlight  
Give a Farmer a Break  
Coordinator of the Quarter -  
Karen and Greg Noble  
Around the Grounds



## VOLUNTEER IN THE SPOTLIGHT JOHN TURNBULL

Affectionately known as JT by his many friends, John Turnbull first joined BlazeAid in 2013 following the devastating fires in Coonabarabran.

John first heard about BlazeAid through a close friend who works as a Ranger with National Parks and Wildlife in Coonabarabran. At the time, the fire was still burning inside the park. His upbringing on a family farm in southeast Queensland gave him a deep appreciation for the hard work farmers do to provide food, fibre, and other essentials that many take for granted.

Like many volunteers, he quickly caught the BlazeAid bug. Although he was still working at the time, he spent two weeks at the camp, marking the beginning of his journey with the organisation.

In 2016, JT travelled to Muttaborra for a drought relief camp, working alongside John Lillocco and many others. His journey was delayed in Barcaldine due to rain and road closures, but once at camp, he contributed in unique ways – rebuilding a veranda on one property and redecking a three-deck B-double sheep trailer on another. It was a very different experience, with no fencing involved.

By 2018, JT was volunteering at the Bundarra camp, south of Inverell, under the coordination of Brian Carr. It was here that he deepened his fencing skills and formed lasting friendships with fellow volunteers.

Things became more serious in early 2019 when the Tingha Plateau fire broke out near Inverell. JT, living near Tamworth, was only a few hours away and joined the camp in March. He spent nearly six months there, working under coordinator Tony Samual. With mentors like Laurie Dansey and Evan Williams, JT gained extensive knowledge in fencing – skills he continues to value deeply.

Tony recognised JT's leadership and appointed him as a team leader, a role JT embraced with gratitude.

After the Tingha camp closed in August 2019, JT was soon scouting a location for another camp in Ebor, where fires had spread from the National Park into private properties. He sent a report to Kevin in Victoria, and not long after, received a call from Tony Samual asking if he'd be heading to Ebor.

JT's response was simple: "Yes mate, I'll be there."

From September 2019 to March 2020, John Turnbull was part of the BlazeAid camp at Ebor – a unique experience, as it was the only camp where fires were still actively burning. Volunteers remained vigilant, constantly watching for signs of fresh smoke. Many of the friends John had made at the Inverell camp joined him at Ebor, strengthening the sense of community and camaraderie.

It was at Ebor that John met Bev, who had come to volunteer with her sister. Their connection grew quickly, and they've now been partners for five years – a beautiful relationship born from shared purpose and service.

In July 2020, John received another call from Tony Samual, this time to join a small camp at Olinda near Rylstone, NSW. It was the middle of winter, and conditions were cold. The camp was short-lived, with few volunteers and landowners waiting for machinery to clear fence lines. The Hargraves camp in 2023 also wrapped up quickly as winter approached.

Then in 2025, Mother Nature struck again – this time with devastating floods across southwest Queensland. With Bev heading overseas to visit family and friends in the USA, John made his way to Quilpie in early May. Under the coordination of John Lillocco and with Chance De Silva managing admin, John spent six weeks rebuilding flood-damaged fences, primarily on one property. He led multiple teams of volunteers, forging new friendships and demonstrating his leadership once again.

On his final night in camp, John was presented with his BlazeAid certificate and badge – items he hadn't received in previous camps. Chance spoke warmly about John's contributions, noting that his teams had reinstated approximately 50 kilometres of fencing. John felt deeply proud of the teams and humbled by the trust placed in them by property owners who had never met them before. Their work wasn't just about rebuilding fences – it was about helping rebuild lives.

John has been retired since July 2015, shortly after his 65th birthday. Despite that, he says he's never been busier. He enjoys clay target shooting and travels around the country to compete. He also crafts wooden toys to sell at the local Tamworth craft market, though sales have been slow – something he doesn't mind, especially when he's away volunteering.

He has two sons and seven grandchildren, all living in Newcastle. While he wishes he could see them more often, he respects that everyone has their own lives to live.

Looking ahead, John is open to taking on the role of camp coordinator if the opportunity arises. He acknowledges he'd need a strong admin partner to feel confident in the role. As a volunteer and team leader, he's always taken the work seriously, striving to complete tasks to a high standard. While he sometimes finds it challenging to navigate the quirks of fellow volunteers, he reminds himself that they're all there for the right reasons – doing what they can to help those in need.

Since his first camp, John estimates he's spent around 600 days volunteering with BlazeAid. When he first added up the days, he was "gobsmacked." While he knows others have done more, he's proud of his contribution – 600 days of service, connection, and impact.

At times, he wonders why he keeps coming back. But in the end, he knows the answer: it's about giving back to the rural community. Because without them, he says, "I'd go hungry."

We are so grateful for all your efforts and work to help farming communities! Thank you JT!



# Give a farmer a break

Our Give a Farmer a Break (gafab) Program started in June 2025, it is a BlazeAid initiative connecting farmers in need with subsidised freight delivery, volunteers and donors.

This initiative was created to support farmers facing drought by matching them with essential assistance, including volunteers, feed and agistment opportunities for livestock.

Our freight delivery subsidy is aimed at helping those needy farmers in SA and Vic who are currently facing drought conditions. We source the hay, the farmers pay for the hay and BlazeAid is off setting the payment of the freight subsidy.

Since the program has been running we have made 114 hay drops, we have helped out numerous farmers with farm sits, other assistance, fencing and even just talking to them.

We are extremely happy with the outcomes this program is achieving. BlazeAid urges any needy farmers facing drought issues in Vic or SA to reach out to Debbie Buttler our National Business Manager if you need support on 0418990267.



# Co-Ordinator's of the Quarter Karen and Greg Noble

BlazeAid is proud to introduce another fantastic couple who have become an invaluable part of our volunteer family – Karen and Greg Noble.

Just having finished coordinating operations at our Nhill basecamp in Victoria, Karen and Greg bring a wealth of life experience, practical skills, and heartfelt dedication to every camp they join.

Karen, aged 66, retired in 2018 after a fulfilling career as a Literacy Tutor at a primary school. Her nurturing nature and strong communication skills have made her a natural fit for BlazeAid's community-focused work. Outside of volunteering, Karen enjoys spending time with her family and grandchildren, reading, gardening, and staying active. Her daughter Amy and son-in-law Jay live nearby in Seaton with their two children, Harper and Marshall. Her son Simon and his partner, Amy, live in New Zealand with their young son Teddy, who recently turned one.



Greg, aged 70, has a rich background in agriculture and transport. He was a dairy farmer until 1994, after which he became an owner/driver of a tip truck and trailer, continuing in various trucking roles until his retirement in October 2022. His hands-on experience with rural life and machinery has proven invaluable in BlazeAid's recovery efforts.

Greg first connected with BlazeAid in 2013 at the Maffra camp, volunteering while travelling to and from work. Both he and Karen felt drawn to BlazeAid, believing their farming and fencing experience could be put to good use helping others.

Their journey as camp coordinators began unexpectedly – they “fell into” the role while helping out at Swanpool and Forbes, and were later asked to coordinate the Nymboida camp. After volunteering at Goroke in March 2025, they moved to Nhill and were invited to relieve Debra Ong as coordinators.

Karen and Greg describe their approach as being “all-rounders” – ready to take on whatever tasks are needed to keep the camp running smoothly. They note that no two days are the same, and they thrive on the variety and challenges that come with each new situation.

As grey nomads, they travel Australia for holidays and often stop in to volunteer at BlazeAid camps when one is nearby. Their camp history is impressive and includes:

- Ensay (2020)
- Moruya (2021 – twice)
- Swanpool (2023 – twice)
- Wickepin (2023)
- Forbes (2023 – twice)
- Nymboida (2024)
- Yinnar (2024)
- Willaura (2025)
- Nhill (2025 – twice)

Karen and Greg say they keep coming back to BlazeAid because of the deep satisfaction they get from helping people in need and the wonderful friendships they've formed along the way. Their warmth, reliability, and willingness to serve make them a treasured part of the BlazeAid community.

# Everything and the kitchen sink!

**Bendigo Bank has donated a \$100,000 Kitchen Trailer to BlazeAid, dedicated to the late Gary Lawrence**



If there's one thing the BlazeAid community knows well, it's that hard work doesn't happen by accident. Behind every volunteering stint, every fence wire strung, and every smidgen of hope that seeks to extinguish the fiery destruction of natural disaster, there are good, real people working together. People who know the value of a smile, a good time, rolling up their sleeves and showing they care.

Gary Lawrence was undeniably one of those people - a backbone to camps across Lismore, Miles, Toogoolawah and more. First and foremost an engineer and a project manager, Gary first joined BlazeAid at Biggenden. After coordinators Bev and Bill witnessed his leadership skills and suggested he'd make a great coordinator himself, there was no turning back. He led with devotion and care, all the while loving what he did. 'Gary was Gary,' his wife Jan told me, 'He could get the best out of most people and dedicated a lot of time.'

It's been a pleasure this last month to learn about BlazeAid legend Gary Lawrence and his legacy as a Board Member, many-time camp coordinator and 'Mr Sunshine'. It is also an honour to report on BlazeAid's new Kitchen Trailer donated by Bendigo Bank at a value of \$100,000 and dedicated to Gary. Without him, as the trailer's spectacular print reads, the initiative 'may still be just a great idea.' 'He would have been so overwhelmed to see it happen', said Jan. She and her children are 'very overwhelmed and pleased'.

Adam Francis (from Eavesdrop) got involved through surf club friend Andrew Gibson, and played a big part in sponsor communications and design. Adam was drawn to BlazeAid for its genuine, personable message and practical approach to volunteering.

Keen to convey the spirit of Blaze Aid on four food-focused wheels, Adam's approach features fun (see the 'Volunteers Inside' sign), a heartfelt dedication to Gary, and wonderful graphics with the help from his daughter, India.

This August, the trailer has enjoyed its very first outing at the Gympie Music Muster. After long days of volunteering, the wonderful Gympie crew are loving sharing hot meals and swapping stories, all the while remembering Gary. Coordinator Chris Male says the workload and stress of making meals for vollies has very much been eased - they have ovens now! Flat top grills! On behalf of the team, Chris shared how lucky they felt to be the first ones to use the trailer, and their gratitude to Bendigo Bank sponsors and admin. 'It's lovely to have something that represents us.'

Gary used to remind his teams that 'volunteering keeps the mind and heart ticking'. Something tells me that his spirit lives on, will travel on many dusty tracks with the trailer, wherever it may go, and continue to work its generous magic.

*Thank you so much to Charmaine for the wonderful photos, and to Jan, Chris and Adam for speaking with me.*

*-Claudia Roberts*



# BlazeAid Song

-by Robert Gibson

Intro

Australia suffers much, fire and flood.  
Covering farms, with ash and mud.  
Crops ruined, and stock killed.  
Destroying what took, generations to build.

Chorus

BlazeAid helping rural communities  
In their greatest, time of need.

In the aftermath, BlazeAid will be there.  
Rebuilding fences, easing despair.  
Volunteers from far and wide,  
skilled and novice, working side by side.

Repeat Chorus

Some come for one day- thats fine.  
Others stay for weeks, or months at a time.

They come to do what they can.  
Housed in tents, campers and vans.  
There's admin, tooling, cooking, to choose, and of course manning fencing crews.

Repeat Chorus

Don't worry, if you haven't got a clue,  
skilled hands will show you what to do.  
Why not have an outback holiday and help at a camp along the way.

Repeat Chorus

So if you want something worthwhile  
to do BlazeAid me be just the thing for you.

## Barbed Wire Waltz (Jundah)

Out past the dust where the channels run dry,  
Where Galaha wheel lazy in a Western sky,  
I shoulder the weight of a star picket stack,  
Steel teeth gleaming down the dusty track.

Jundah lies quiet in the midday heat,  
A hundred clicks from the nearest beat.  
The wind hums low through the Mitchell grass,  
As I dance with the wire in a fencing class.

Boots all dirty from the sun-baked ground,  
Each drive of the post makes a hollow sound.  
Gloves torn up by the devil's string,  
Barbs that bite, and the blood they bring.

The crowbar sings and the strainer groans,  
As sweat carves tracks through sunburnt tones.

A twisted rhythm--pull, twist, tie tight,  
Fencing by day, dreaming by night.

The flies find you no matter what you do,  
New friends surround you to help you through.

This is no city man's affair--  
It's muscle and grit and the outback air.

So we build this fence in the midday sun, one picket at a time, till the job is done  
The farmer is happy as he has prayed  
And to his rescue comes BLAZE AID.

# Around the Grounds

## Jundah QLD

For the month of July, Jundah camp has had a range of cold mornings, with beautiful days of Temperatures in the low 20's, then every now and then Mother Nature would then throw in a curve ball and give us a 30deg day. We have cleaned off a variety of fences, ranging from Exclusion fences, cattle fences with sometimes up to 5 barb strands and some ring lock fences as well. Some of our fences go for 30kms to 50kms.

Our average run out to a property is over 100kms and teams have sometimes done nearly 300kms in a day.

We have had an amazing array of Volunteers through the camp, all have left vowing to volunteer again.

We have had a couple of dramas with breakdowns, bird strikes and kangaroos, wanting to join us in the vehicles, but the local council workshop has been amazing in fixing the minor problems, so we can stay on the road.

We also have the problem of the nearest supermarket being 2.5 hrs drive away, so it took some "thinking outside of the box" moments, in how to get food for the camp at reasonable prices. We finally have a pretty good system in place and the stress of getting food here has settled down, so we can concentrate on the properties and their needs.

This month we had the privilege of having an amazing Nurse Practitioner Andrew Cameron, drop in for a cuppa and we invited him to dinner most nights. Out here this Nurse is the only medical help in over 200kms. The flying Doctor holds a clinic once a fortnight, so that is the only time you can get sick 😊. Andrew is one of the most highly decorated nurses in the Southern Hemisphere and has Nursed in some of the most inhospitable places on the planet, including The Gaza Strip, Afghanistan and the Sudan [during the Ebola outbreak].

His stories were amazing.

Kerrie

BlazeAid Jundah

Camp Co-Ordinator



## Quilpie QLD

The camp has been going well. We've just passed 200km of new fence built and are having a great time. We've also just passed 250 volunteers over the whole camp so far, which is about 4 months now. We're down in numbers and could use some more volunteers going into next week. The community out here is amazing and everyone in town is super happy to have us. The CWA has donated a bunch of meat so we're eating really good too.

Angus

BlazeAid Quilpie

Camp Co-Ordinator



# Around the Grounds

## Nhill VIC

With six properties to be completed before we close the camp. We will have until the 13<sup>th</sup> Sept to vacate the showgrounds so they can finalise preparations for the Nhill show in Mid October. The weather has been very kind to us most of the time and we feel we should achieve completion on the farms. Our small group of volunteers have experienced varied terrain and types of fences which have provided them all an array of challenges which the volunteers have undertaken with gusto.

Karen and Greg Noble  
BlazeAid Nhill  
Camp Co-Ordinators



## Longreach QLD

Our camp at Longreach has come to a close. The camp started back in May 2025 after the QLD floods, Bob and Lisa started up the camp and was later taken over by John Lillico and then came in Helen Cole. Having 124 volunteers come through the camp managed to complete 87km of fencing and clearing 140km.

A very big thankyou to all the volunteers, local community and the Longreach Regional Council for making this all possible.



# Around the Grounds

## Kendall NSW and Oxley Island

113 Properties registered from Bulahdelah to Kempsey (182km)

Due to urgency 31 properties started, 6 properties completed, Dairy Farmers have been hit hard in this area More flooding over last week causing delays in work at both camps

Kendall had a Chinese Farmer registered that has difficulty speaking & reading English, the work on this property was completed over 2 days by 8 Volunteers with some interesting happenings (3 Volunteers covered in mud head to toe) due to communication breakdowns. The daughter has started learning English! Her husband does not speak English but he thought it would be a good idea to bring his Toyota onto the paddock, the BA crew of 8 were yelling no no stop stop, then using enough hand signals to stop an Airbus at Heathrow to know avail, the Toyota got totally absolutely positively bogged

They then spent the next 30 minutes to get him unbogged by using the branches etc that they had cleared off their fences, they asked the Chinese driver to slowly drive out, but he put "pedal to the metal"

He did get out( See picture below of volunteer covered in mud)

Kendall camp is currently being moved within the Showgrounds to accommodate a Motor Cycle Club pre booked for a 4 day event

Oxley Island had a Lions Club dinner on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> August 2025 for Farmers & Volunteers Community support has been extraordinary with the devastation that has occurred in this large area.

Bob and Lisa

BlazeAid Kendall/ Oxley Island  
Camp Co-Ordinators



## Gympie Heroes

*A Poem by Peter Whipper*

On the sloping patch of ground,  
where the van tilted like a stubborn child,  
I felt the weight of it,  
too much for one set of hands.  
John came first,  
quiet in his steadiness,  
eyes scanning angles,  
boots pressing the earth with patience.  
Beside him, Trish—  
her voice a gentle current,  
encouraging,  
soothing the strain from my shoulders.  
They stayed,  
long past when a stranger might have  
walked away, measuring, shifting, lifting—

Their care steadying more than the caravan.  
Dust stuck to our skin,  
sweat marked the hours, yet they gave without  
count,  
As though kindness was the most natural task.  
When the wheels at last settled true,  
when the slope no longer threatened sleep,  
I saw it clear—  
this Muster is built on such hands,  
on John's quiet strength,  
on Trish's calm care,  
on the grace of help freely given.  
And I knew  
I carried more than gratitude—  
I carried the warmth  
of two people who refused to leave me struggle.

# A Winner at Royal Ascot

## Cercene

Congratulations to our board member Shane Stafford on his remarkable win at Royal Ascot with his Filly Cercene. Receiving the winning trophy from King Charles was a real honour. Shane said “They chatted about cattle way too long for the TV apparently.”



“A lovely man and I nearly fell over when he told me he loved Eidsvold a mere 35 mile from hometown Monto. We spoke about the Joyces and Santa Gertrudis cattle. So easy to chat with, some honour as I said. Not sure from here but will let it soak in and appreciate the win and the lifetime experience.

## Norton Owners Club

Each year, the Norton Owners Club (NOC) selects a charity to support through its fundraising efforts, and in 2025, BlazeAid was honoured to be chosen as the recipient. This special connection was made possible by Simon Hardy, a dedicated BlazeAid volunteer and the NOC's Membership Secretary, who was thrilled when his favourite motorcycle club decided to support a cause close to his heart.

Founded in the 1980s, the NOC brings together enthusiasts of Norton motorcycles to share their passion through club rides, rallies, and mutual support in restoring and maintaining their bikes. The club currently has around 160 members, with a core group of about 50 actively participating. While membership is slowly declining due to the advancing age of its members, the spirit of camaraderie and generosity remains strong.

This year's fundraising efforts included the club's biannual auction of motorcycle parts, where the widow of a former member generously donated his remaining parts to benefit BlazeAid. The ladies who ran the catering on the day also contributed all proceeds to the cause. The highlight of the fundraising calendar was the annual Charity Ride, held on August 10, which saw 24 riders travel from Lilydale to the Reefton Hotel under beautiful weather conditions.

On August 18, NOC Secretary Kevin O'Byrne and Simon Hardy met with BlazeAid CEO Melissa Jones to present a cheque for \$2,555. Melissa's beaming smile in the photo captured the joy and gratitude felt by everyone at BlazeAid for this generous donation.



# A BLAZE AID POEM

We were listening to Macca one Sunday morning nearly 3 weeks ago  
And a call to drive vehicles to a Blaizaid camp was made on his show  
Now we've known of Blaizaid for years but not had time to assist  
But we had to take our van to Cairns and it really pricked an interest  
I looked on the Blaizaid website and gave Debbie Buttler a call  
She mentioned Longreach and I thought we might have a ball  
Next I spoke with Lisa to signify our intent  
Let me know when you are 2 days out was the message that she sent  
So we dutifully arrived a day after opening  
To learn what to do and how everyone was coping  
Melissa the Blaizaid CEO arrived for the night  
Just to make sure Bob was doing things right  
The next day to Augathella 4 of us went  
To pick up 4 vehicles that Cunnumulla had sent  
At Blackall we hooked up fencing trailers to bring back our way  
By the time we returned we'd do over 800 K  
So then we were busy setting up the camp  
And giving it a good Aussie Blaizaid stamp  
There was unpacking and sorting and plenty to do  
Under the watchful eyes of Lisa and Bob Abdoo  
Overnight rain delayed our trip out to properties  
An extra day to learn to do things properly  
Friday came and out a lot of us went  
Mostly Sth to wherever we were sent  
Our boot camp alarm at 5:30 most mornings  
Got us awake before the day was dawning  
Morning muster at 7 Bob gave us the rundown  
Before all loading up and leaving Longreach town  
We met property owners and were given our instructions  
So off we went to clean rebuild and complete construction  
Up and down the road for a week or more  
And not one day was ever a bore  
And on return to camp , to good food we were treated  
And from the wonderful camp volunteers we were cheerily greeted  
The sense of achievement is a great satisfaction  
It's given us a fantastic Blaizaid initiation  
None of this is possible without people at the top  
With Lisa and Bob, I reckon, we have the cream of the crop  
So from Jan and I and I think all of us here  
A very big Thankyou and a mighty big cheer.