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Issue  
**2**  
August 2021

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

# The BlazeAid POST

## Current Statistics >>>

Since 2009:

Total Volunteer Days: 344,067

Properties: 11,331

Fences cleared: 16,028.48

Fences rebuilt: 15,639.76

(That's almost the distance from Melbourne to Rome, Italy!)



Year to date:

Volunteers: 1455

Volunteer Days: 13,638

Properties: 768

Fences Cleared: 742 kms

Fences rebuilt: 760 kms

**Value of work  
completed (in fencing  
alone) since 2009:  
\$157,362,500**

## Volunteer in the Spotlight

Say hello to Jenny & Lindsay from Bli Bli in Queensland.



Jenny and her husband, Lindsay have devoted their time to help at four different BlazeAid camps for over 18 months now. Now located in Casino, Jenny is up and in the kitchen from 5am to 7pm helping to ensure all her volunteers are well fed, while Lindsay is a terrific asset to our BlazeAid community by helping to maintain our everyday tools such as chainsaws and ensuring our trailers are well equipped and safe to tow.

In Jenny's spare time, she enjoys knitting, but not just any ordinary kind. Jenny uses tea bag strings! Yes, this scarf (pictured to the left) is completely knitted out of tea bag strings. Approximately 30,000 of them. So, where does one learn how to knit out of tea bag strings?

"A lady showed me what she was working on, so I went home, started collecting strings and attempted to work out patterns, and then I found a website. Yes, there is a website on how to knit out of tea bag strings!"

Jenny and Lindsay recently made the trip south to Bendigo to help set up the Bendigo Wool Show – something that BlazeAid is involved with each year. Unfortunately, the show was shut down due to covid lockdown and Lindsay and Jenny made a dash for home however have been unable to cross the border into QLD due tightened restrictions. We are so grateful and honoured to have Lindsay and



Jenny as part of the Blazeaid Family and hope that they are able to make it home soon.

Lindsay and Jenny celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary last year at camp Adelong (pictured left)

Jenny made this wreath for the 2020 ANZAC services (pictured right)



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# BlazeAid Opens Two New Camps

On many farming properties across Australia, fences are one of the assets that is usually under insured. The average cost to rebuild a fence in Australia is \$9,500 per kilometre! And that is labour only, so it doesn't include posts and wire. No wonder most farmers are under insured-the premiums are extremely expensive.

Farmers in the Victorian Gippsland region suffered the second devastation after 2019 bushfires within two short years. In June, aggressive storms hit the area, resulting in mass flooding. Many properties had fence lines drowned in debris from the brute force of the incoming storm water.

BlazeAid was quick to respond by setting up two camps in the area. One in Heyfield and the other an hour south in Yinnar. A convoy of 'combat ready' trailers driven by volunteers was pulled from different locations all over Australia destined for the two new camps, ready to start the recovery process.

Experienced coordinators Luke van der Meulen (pictured below) and Graeme Allen (pictured right) are leading the camps to help struggling farmers rebuild. But it's not just fences that the volunteers help with. "We rebuild sheds, if there were trees over roads, pipe and dam damage, or if the storm has damaged infrastructure of any sort, we'd consider help in any of those areas too", says Luke from Yinnar.

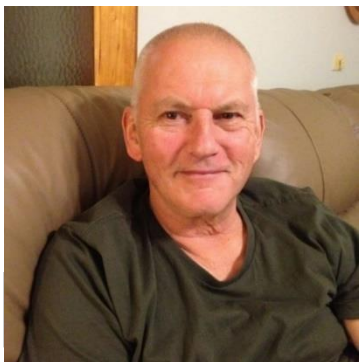
With a collective amount of 184 farms currently registered within these two camps, the recovery would normally take well over 12 months. All going to plan, Heyfield camp will finish up by the end of August and Yinnar before Christmas this year.



*Thanks to Phillip Frazer for coordinating transport of trailers*



Graeme Allen- Coordinator of Heyfield camp.



If you would like to help with the recovery efforts in any of our camps across NSW and Vic (Covid pending), please jump on our website, [www.blazeaid.com.au](http://www.blazeaid.com.au). We are always in need of volunteers, even if it's only a day you can spare! No previous fencing experience required. All contact details for camp coordinators can be found on the BlazeAid website.

## THE COORDINATORS CORNER

I ask everyone reading this to spare a moment to think about coordinating a BlazeAid camp. Some of you are spluttering right now and saying "yeah, right" but the rewards are enormous. You make a huge contribution to a damaged community by enabling a camp to be established, meet a diverse range of people, and experience personal growth. You will be challenged, supported, tired, and frustrated but above all you will be rewarded by your achievements. Camp coordinators are a rare species, and they give BlazeAid a pillar to reach out from and help impacted communities.

In these COVID times be aware of the requirements that you will need to address

If the State your camp is in enforces lockdown rules, or stay at home regulations, coordinators need to follow the following procedures.

1. Check state regulations for absolute clarity. Know exactly what is required of you and your camp
2. Keep your lines of communication open with your volunteers. Uncertainty breeds fear and stress.
3. Don't be afraid to ring someone on the Health and Well-Being committee. Sometimes just having someone to listen and reaffirm your decisions can make you feel better.
4. Be aware of how grateful BlazeAid is to you for the efforts and sacrifices you make to coordinate a camp.

If you are keen to have a go or would like some more info, please scan this QR Code or click on the link and let us know your intentions;

[Coordinator Form](#)



# BlazeAid

Helping Communities Rebuild After Natural Disasters

## Joke of the Day

That's all 40 Sheep

What? We should only have 37!?

I know, I rounded them up.

# Coordinators of the Quarter!

We have the great pleasure of introducing you to, husband and wife team, Chris and John Male. Currently coordinating the Wauchope camp, both Chris and John have been tirelessly volunteering for BlazeAid since 2011. They are among the longest serving and most skilled coordinators in BlazeAid.

Chris and John Male, married now for 48 years, grew up in Victoria. Chris has come from a farming community where her dad drove cattle down from Orange to Gippsland on horseback to be fattened up and sold. John grew up in Footscray and worked at Monash University as a caretaker. They now have two beautiful kids together, Rodney and Bronwyn.

Chris first heard about BlazeAid from Macca on ABC's "Australia All Over" radio show back around 2010. The following year, they both signed up to volunteer their time to help in the kitchen and maintaining and servicing work tools at camp Laharum. Not long after Kevin and Rhonda Butler (BlazeAid Founders) met Chris and John at the camp where they put their hand up to be coordinators. "They have passion and willingness to coordinate, but I am just not 100% sure they will be good a fit as coordinators. They just seem too soft and gentle" were Kevin's initial thoughts. But boy, was he wrong.

Their very first camp coordinating was Clarkefield, northwest of Melbourne, Victoria. After 5 months, they had made such a positive effect to the community that volunteers follow them to subsequent camps they lead. In fact, they have now successfully coordinated over 8 camps throughout Australia.



"What do you like most about volunteering for BlazeAid?", we ask Christine. And the simple answer was "The people. The volunteers and the farmers. We have made some amazing friends, and it wouldn't have been able to meet these people, if it weren't for BlazeAid"

It was difficult not to quote all the positive comments when we asked Kevin and Rhonda Butler to describe the dynamic duo. "They have more moves than a can of worms, where they have the ability to turn devastated towns into thriving communities. With excellent communication skills and resilience, they are the essence of why BlazeAid is so successful. And anyone who trains under them has the same destiny."

## Have you seen the new BlazeAid app?

BlazeAid are taking the important steps towards digitising many aspects of the charity.

Previously, all volunteers and farmers would register with BlazeAid using the trusty old paper and pen. Now, we have set up an app that allows for registrations to be more streamlined and collated in one central place. It will also free up some time Coordinators spend on administration tasks.



Working on the app behind the scenes is Rhys Long and partner Sarah. Rhys has a background in IT, where he heads up

the technology department for a company that works along-side one of the largest oil companies.

There are more technology advances to come with BlazeAid, so watch this space!



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Thank you, Chris and John for over 10 years of loyal and passionate dedication towards BlazeAid. If you have not yet had the pleasure of meeting Chris and John Male, do yourself a favour - find your way to a camp that they are currently coordinating!

# From the President

*The BlazeAid story —memoirs by the founders*



By Kevin Butler

Chapter 1  
Beginnings -Black Saturday kills 172 people

Saturday February 7, 2009, was the day that changed the rest of our lives for Rhonda and I. It was the day that ultimately started BlazeAid.

It began for me at 11:45 am at our Kilmore East (Vic) farm when I spotted an innocent looking white puff of smoke rise up-five kilometres away to the East.

Justifiably terrified of the consequences, I walked down from the vegetable garden into our kitchen and told Rhonda that 'this was bad, and it will never be stopped'. Sarah our 22-year-old daughter No 3, saw my grief and tried calming me with a 'It'll be alright Dad' but I couldn't help but think 'what would you know about what fires do on a predicted 54-degree day and 100 km per hour winds- it's just going to be catastrophic'

Minutes later at 11:58 am a Kilmore fire tanker slowly moved past our home towards the fire front. I thought 'why are they going so slow-don't they realise how serious this is'. It was to be the only fire truck I would see until 7pm that evening.

So, my job given to me weeks beforehand by our Kilmore CFA Captain Denis was to drive to the highest hill and report into HQ on the fire behaviour and direction. This I tried to do in my truck from 12:15 pm at a 360-degree high viewing point at the Kilmore East quarry hill.

Just 1 km from the fire's ignition point I could see the first responder, neighbour Noel Baker in his Private Farm Fire Unit trying to protect the Moira Kelly Children's First complex.

***“A motorist reported on 774 that the fire had jumped the Hume highway at Wandong and that bloke was right -it was serious”***

One fire truck was nosing around there as well. But by this time the fire had raced ahead of them into Smorgan's Pinus Radiata 500-hectare forest which stretched 4km -almost all the way to the Hume Freeway and the small town of Wandong.

Meanwhile to my left, I constantly watched the origins of the fire (I kept thinking of how evil it was) which appeared to come from logs in a hidden valley while up in the smoke clouds, I watched a helicopter vainly twirling around like flotsam and jetsam in the wide ocean. It just reminded me of a little blowfly buzzing around in that massive smoke cloud generated by the forest going up.

At this time, 774 ABC radio was only reporting a fire near Horsham and not this potentially massive Kilmore East one which was heading South towards Melbourne.



My mobile calls to Kilmore Fire brigade HQ were not being picked up (constantly engaged) so at 12:55 pm I phoned Libby Price on 774 ABC radio and told her -live to the listening audience -that the people living in Wandong had better put their fire plans in place as the fire was almost on top of them. A minute later, a motorist reported on 774 that the fire had jumped the Hume highway at Wandong and 'that bloke was right -it is serious'.

For the next 12 months, the Kilmore East-Kinglake fire was rarely out of the media news - it was the biggest loss of life from a fire in Australian history with 2000 homes lost as well and it started with a fallen power line falling into tree branches with the only witnesses being a mob of starving kangaroos. For me, survivor's guilt began to creep into my psyche-why were we spared?

*Next time...*

*Chapter2 -Fighting the fire alone with black wattle branches. Almost all of us were alone until the inferno was largely out at 2 am the next day.*



*BlazeAid*

Helping Communities Rebuild  
After Natural Disasters

## BlazeAid's Support Partner...



Recently, Farm Owners Academy interviewed Kevin Butler for their podcast "The Profitable Farmer" and have kindly donated \$10,000 to BlazeAid.

Farmers Owners Academy is helping farmers create a more profitable farming business. Through coaching and mentoring, the team uses their skills to teach others how to maintain and develop their farms with innovation and business management skills.

**When you're ready to take the next step and work with us, here are three things you can do:**

### 1. Subscribe to our 'Profitable Farmer' podcast

This free audio podcast delivers ideas to help you run a great business – leading to more profit, control and freedom – [The Profitable Farmer Podcast](#)

### 2. Join the Farm Owner Academy's closed Facebook group 'Profitable Farmer'

Our new Facebook community is where smart farm owners learn how to get more profit, control and freedom, and you can connect with like-minded farm owners – [Farm Owners Academy Facebook Group](#)

### 3. Work with us privately

If you'd like our team to help you scale up your farming business or create a 'freedom farm' just email us at [support@farmownersacademy.com](mailto:support@farmownersacademy.com) and put "Private" in the subject line... tell me a little about your business and what you'd like to improve and I'll send you the information you need to get started!

**Q:** "Where will my donation go when I donate to BlazeAid?"

*All donations go directly to the work of providing support to rural landowners after natural*

**A:** *disasters. Did you also know, donors can choose the camp/region/state their donation is directed to?*

### How do you build a fence in Australia?

*A poem by Hannah Dunning*

*How do you build a fence in Australia, they ask?  
I'll tell you once I've had a swig from my flask.*

*It's not really that hard, if you use the right tools.  
It's not really that hard, if you follow the rules.*

*Rule number one, DO let the dog give you a lick.  
Rule number two, DON'T let the cow give you a kick.*

*Rule number three, smile kindly.  
Rule number four, smile kindly while you knock on  
the farmer's door.*

*Rule number five, keep an eye on the skies (if it  
rains, we're outta here!)  
Which brings me to the last rule; there is always  
time for an after-work beer.*

*There's names for all the gadgets, gizmos, and  
tools.*

*We only know half of them, so we look like  
pommy fools.*

*There's a wackapacka and a chainsaw, a  
hammer, and an axe.*

*There's cutters and thingy bobs and muddy car  
tracks.*

*There's wires and pliers, tweezers, and twitches.  
Even measuring tape  
To whip me into shape!*

*And of course, there's koalas, dingoes and  
kangaroos, there's lots of laughter, eating and  
funny taboos.*

*When I first came to Blazeaid  
I thought I might feel like a maid,  
But in fact, being a volunteer has made us all  
bond as peers.*

*So how do you build a fence in Australia? You  
must tell me.*

*Don't worry, you'll hear all about it in England  
over a cuppa tea.*



Find us here:



Do you have a BlazeAid story to share about a person, place, or experience? If you do, drop us an email at [admin@blazeaid.com.au](mailto:admin@blazeaid.com.au) or contact Melissa on 0436316955. We would love to hear from you!

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