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Issue
#4

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CHRISTMAS EDITION BlazeAid POST

An Insight into the BlazeAid Organisation and its efforts to Rebuild. Communities Affected by Natural Disasters

Current
Statistics

Total Volunteers:

33,847

Total Volunteer
Days:

346,350

Properties
worked on:

11,283

Fences cleared:

16,065km

Fences rebuilt:

15,709km

**Camps set to Open
(floods):**

Forbes NSW (4th Jan 22)
Warrumbungle Shire
NSW
Texas QLD

Volunteer Stories: In the Spotlight

More than Mending a Fence



BlazeAid Board Members, Bob and Jeanette Fenwick, have contributed to disaster recovery in BlazeAid camps since 2009. Bob was a captain in the RFS for many years and the pair owned a sheep and cattle property in Coonabarabran before their home was raised to the ground in 2013 in the Timor Valley fires. They have many stories of the people and experiences within BlazeAid camps and are keen to share just a few.

Hello, my name is Bob Fenwick. I've been involved with BA since the very first camp 2009. I'd like to share with you some of the good and some challenging experiences that I've encountered along the way while working in camps.

One night, in our first camp in Kilmore East, we were sitting at the table with Kevin Butler and several ladies and enjoying our dinner, when a Melbourne

businessman came into the shed and wanted to talk to Kevin. Kev said, "Get yourself a meal and sit down", and the gentleman did.

As he joined in the conversation with us, he spoke about the fires and how his property and his neighbours had been affected. I soon learned that he was the owner of a very flash mansion on a hill not too far from Kilmore

and was surrounded by nine hobby farmers. The properties were all enclosed by a road and the fire had ripped through all his neighbour's places - he was actually quite badly hurt too but he didn't need any of BlazeAid's help and certainly didn't want volunteers working for him. Due to being surrounded, this meant that his neighbours could not fence their property either, given the shared fence lines.

When he sat down with Kevin at the table, and after a little bit of a conversation, the businessman said, "I didn't realise what an idiot I've been. I am stopping these people getting on with their lives. Kevin how much money you need to buy the material to fence those 9 properties?"

Kev was thinking on the spot and came up with a figure of \$4000. And right there and then, this guy wrote out a cheque for \$4000. How good was that!

Another morning in Kilmore, before the days of our Combat Ready Trailers, Kevin sent out a team to a couple's place to begin their fences. When they got there, all their fencing materials had been stolen. Kevin was organising another lot to be delivered to them but the team that were going out didn't have very much in the way of tools. Being

*"They had nothing left.
Everything was burnt in the fire,
and someone had stolen all their
newly purchased materials.
Everything was gone."*

a farmer from Coonabarabran myself, Kev knew I had plenty of my own gear and asked if I would you go out and hang the gates for them. It was one of the saddest things I had witnessed - a young couple with two little children -

one little girl playing on the burnt logs another one in the stroller. They had nothing left. Everything was burnt in the fire, and someone had stolen all their newly purchased materials. Everything was gone. It struck me how callous the situation really was, that even in such despair, humankind could be so cruel. But I looked around and saw the volunteers - they had come from all over Oz, ready to help

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Volunteer Stories: In the Spotlight

a stranger for no want of payment, just to help. Faith restored. We were able to sort the family out with some new stuff and complete their fences so they could start their journey again.

After Kilmore, my wife and I attended a few more camps. We helped out at a few more camps, namely Coonabarabran and Dunedoo (fires), which were camps that had big numbers of volunteers and went on for 6 months or so. Sometimes there was up to 80 people in each camp. The person who ran both camps - and did a wonderful job - was Laurie Dawson.

At Coonabarabran, Laurie pulled me aside one evening to ask me to do a special job – an older couple. He said, “I’ve got a bad one for you Bob. I’m going to send you out to this property, but I’m really not sure what you can do to help. This couple are in a really bad way. All they’ve got left is the clothes on their back and the car that they drove away in. The house, all their stock – everything’s gone.”

The next morning, I headed there with my team and what a sad sight we came to. Fortunately, one of the couple’s sons (who was a school teacher) came home and was trying to do what he could for them. I sat down to have a chat to the son, to put a plan together. In the distance, I could hear the father crying. Not just a bit of a cry, a real loud howl. It was heartbreaking and I didn’t know what the devil to do. Anyway, I pulled myself together and gave myself some time to do a little bit of preparation.

The Coonabarabran Jockey Club had held a charity race meeting recently, just to raise funds for the fire victims. My sister also happened to be involved in the organisation of this charity race meet. She contacted me and said, “People want to know what they can bring that might be helpful for those who have been devastated by the fires.”

I had a bright idea, and I asked her to tell people to bring pot plants. Well, these people turned up with around 250 pot plants, filled with many different varieties of beautiful flowers. I noticed some very nice roses amongst the bunch. I picked up a dozen of them and I popped them in the back of my ute.

I made my way back to the farm, and I said to the elderly fellow, “Come with me, I’ve got a job for you.”

Away we went over to the ute, and I showed him the roses. I asked to him to take four of the roses up to both his neighbours (whose losses were very minimal), and then four over to his wife. And off he went. Two hours later the same car returned, but certainly a different man was driving it. Those roses worked a treat. I never saw him in that terrible state again (and I’ve met him again on several occasions since). It just goes to show that sometimes a way of healing your own wounds is to give to others.

I recall this healing on another occasion. A gentleman named Don, was not doing too well after the Coonabarabran fires - his health had deteriorated, and his energies were slipping away. His doctor thought it would be a good idea if he sent this fella to BlazeAid to do a little bit of volunteer work.

The doctor thought that it could be a way for him to improve, as Don felt he had no reason for getting out of bed in the morning anymore. Well, he was absolutely super! Not only on the workforce but also entertaining people at night and helping throughout the camp. Don was just a great person. A couple of days after the camp closed, I received a telephone call from a guy who I knew very well.

“Bob, I don’t know what to do. I’ve just been talking to my neighbour

and he’s talking self-harm and suicide.” We spoke for a while and hung up and when I was trying to contemplate what the hell do, when the phone rang again. It was Don, “Bob, BlazeAid changed my life! Is



pay the favour forward?” I said, “Don, how quick can you get here?!” and I told him the story of my friend’s neighbour. Don arrived the next morning and we went out and stayed with this old chap

for four days, drinking more coffee than working and just talking to him. Don stayed there for another 10 days and was able to change this fella’s whole perspective on life. Eight years later, my mate’s neighbour came and saw me to thank us. “I’m now living happily in Newcastle and everything is back on track”, he said.

I was working at Dunedoo but often coming back to Coonabarabran to cheque my own stock. I got a call from the local rural supplier to call in. The fellow behind the counter told me that he’d received a call from a customer who had received a lot of BlazeAid help and he intended to pay every cent of it back when the opportunity came up. Apparently, this fellow had seen me in town and had dropped into the supplier and paid for \$4000 of material. I was able to collect all that material and gift it to other farmers to help get them back on their feet.

Sometime there were only small amounts. One lady had done some fundraising and she raised \$300 and donated it for materials. Many of the gates didn’t come with hinges to attach to the strainer posts. One day I went into the supplier to get some hinges for the gates – a box full came to \$420. The bloke behind me in line paid for them all.

Another time, I had a team of 11 people. Trying to organise a team of 11 people where many of them hadn’t done any fencing could be a bit of a challenge.

I’d had taken half the team, who were more experienced, off to build a new fence a couple of hundred meters away, while I left the rest of the crew to roll up the burnt wire. When I came back, I could see that they were crowding around something. When I got closer, I saw it was the Bunnings food van – they had come to cook us a few sausages and supply us with drinks.

BlazeAid welcomes people from all walks of life and values diversity. Working in Coonabarabran, there was a property which was on some pretty tough terrain. The ground was full of rocks and the fencing was hard going. I had two wonderful ladies in my team, and I asked if they could help me lay out the fence on this tough job. “Im not so worried about the spacing of these posts,” I said, “just so long as you can get them into the ground and the fence is straight.”

Off to work the ladies went, and when I came back, they had done a mighty job. The farmer came to check on the work and he was so impressed he said he would loan the fence to the rifle club – they could sight their rifles up through the holes, it was that straight!

Another camp that I visited was Bendemeer. This camp struck challenges due to covid. A farmer we encountered was in a pretty bad way. He had spent \$180,000 on hay to feed his cows, went into hospital to have an operation, and came out after the fires had been through to find his cattle dead in a dam and all his newly purchase hay gone. He was understandably very low, suicidal actually.

What we found often in Bendemeer, was that whenever you worked on one property, the farmers neighbours were all there to help too. We worked away along the roadside and fixed up all his fences done together pretty quick smart. He often rings me to thank BlazeAid for saving his life. You just can’t underestimate the power of mates helping mates. Many often think, “it’s just a fence”, but what BlazeAid volunteers do is so much more than that. They are the conduit for healing, they are often the beginning, when all it takes is a smile, someone to start and someone to show they care - with a few laughs along the way.



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BLAZE AID IN THE PAPPINBARRA VALLEY

My Heartfelt Appreciation

-Written by Kelly Miller

BlazeAid's contribution to my family and community cannot be over-estimated. It has been extraordinary!

Our Pappinbarra Valley has been ravaged by natural disasters over the past 5 years.

On our own farm, as for so many others, a significant drought meant we were hand feeding hungry cattle and sheep. Prices for feed were soaring, we were supplementing bought silage with out-of-date food from Coles. Faced every week with the difficult decision of whether to sell livestock for record low prices thereby drawing a line under our losses or to hang on to the hope of rain and keep hand feeding at a significant cost. We sold most of our cattle before the drought broke, licked our wounds and absorbed the losses.

The drought meant we were heading into catastrophic fire conditions in February 2017. It was my husband's birthday and we decided to head to Port Macquarie for the day. In the early afternoon we received our very first text message from the Rural Fire Service to say, 'if you have not evacuated it is too late'. We rang a neighbour to hear our farm and surrounding farms were on fire. Mark tried to get home, but the roads were blocked. We got through the next day to tend to our remaining livestock and dog. Our house had been saved by the RFS water-bombing. Our livestock were safely huddled in a far paddock out of reach of the fire. Our dog greeted us in our sodden yard, she had been helping the fire-fighters we were told. It was an unbelievable relief! Our only losses were 8.4 km of fencing and our cattle yards and a few other items in our paddocks. Some neighbours had lost their houses and some livestock.

Needless to tell you, two years later the 2019/2020 fires were worse. More people in our valley lost their houses and some lost all of their possessions. The community was reeling.

People went about their chores as though in shock. We often said we are lucky no lives have been lost in our community. We have a very active Progress Association who once again opened up our valley hall to support our community. They organised food, the opportunity to shower, wash clothes, meetings with local government agencies to hear our plight and offer some assistance.



BlazeAid planting trees in our valley.

Blaze Aid arrived and set to supporting landholders with their lost fences. They helped rebuild Pappinbarra fences and our morale. Fencing for farmers is vital to contain and care for livestock.

It is surprisingly costly in resources and time. To get personal help from others to rebuild supported our suffering community on many levels.

On the 19th of March 2021 Pappinbarra, like many other parts of the mid-north coast had the worst flood event ever recorded. Four homes and contents were lost completely, including the oldest house in the valley, many more houses had flood water up to the windows, a lot of infrastructure including cars, sheds and fences were lost and power lines were down. Some of the debris ended up on other's properties. A lot of wildlife was lost. The Pappinbarra River has been home to Platypus. We wonder where they are. The Pappinbarra River has been laid flat. The dead, horizontal trees and lost soil is an ever-present reminder of the event. Farming paddocks lay strewn with rock from landslides. Not only has the beautiful Pappinbarra River lost much of its wildlife but the weeds have established with vengeance. Where do we begin? Our farm lost 4km of fencing to the flood waters, our irrigation pump and associated infrastructure. BlazeAid arrived and once again offered exhausted locals moral and physical support to rebuild. BlazeAid have been rebuilding fences and have also been helping with replanting endemic plants to restore wildlife along our beautiful valley.



Fires wreak havoc on our farm,

Will we again see Platypus in our river? The positive attitude of BlazeAid volunteers and the camaraderie they develop with locals has also been a significant support. This personal positive interaction has been of immense value.

Charlie, my 84 years-old father, no longer able to help with fencing, has been working in the kitchen and dining hall for BlazeAid at their Wauchope Camp. He is really enjoying helping, talking to BlazeAid volunteers hearing their stories and telling a few of his own. He is enjoying being fed by people who can cook!

BlazeAid have been a magnificent support for me, my family and community. BlazeAid volunteers are the best our society has to offer! The physical and moral support cannot be over-estimated. Our lives would be a lot poorer right now if it was not for BlazeAid!



Our Neighbours home, Pappinbarra

- Kelly is a farmer and retired Deputy Principal teacher from the Pappinbarra Valley who is passionate about the area, its community and the environment



The Pappinbarra River floods, 2021

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Coordinator in the Spotlight

Ron 'Spud' Murphy



A gentleman who is full of life and energy, Ron Murphy is a natural born leader. Having coordinated Rappville/Casino camp for the last 12 months, Ron has made his mark as one of BlazeAid's National Treasures.

BlazeAid: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Ron:

I am a young (for Blazeaid) 66. I have 2 daughters, 2 grandkids and 1 great grandchild. My wife unfortunately passed away in 2014. I was raised in Redcliffe, Qld and left at 15 to do an apprenticeship in the army.

BlazeAid: How did you hear about BlazeAid?

Ron:

I heard about Blazeaid from a person at a Country Music Festival in 2011. He was wearing a BlazeAid cap very proudly and told me all about it so when the floods hit the Murgon area I decided to go and give it a try. At the time I had no idea of the impact the other volunteers would have on my life.

BlazeAid: What made you want to become a Coordinator?

Ron:

I had my first taste of coordinating in 2013 when I relieved Paul and Alison Handbury, so they could have a well-earned break. Their commitment and compassion for the farmers and vols was an inspiration for me when I started coordinating much later.

BlazeAid: What does a typical day entail for you?

Ron:

My day starts at 5am when I get up and wait

to see how many changes I have to make to the days program. I know with certainty that it will happen. Once the dreaded paperwork is done I visit the jobs we will be starting next and go over plans with the farmer. That is the best part of the day.

Meet some real characters and have a great yarn. Because of the fact that we were in the community for 4 months with the fires still burning, we have formed a real bond with the community as a whole and I am extremely proud of the high regard we are held in by the farmers and townspeople alike. Local Heroes, a title that



is awarded every year during Beef Week celebrations and the council had a Blazeaid display in the chambers to promote this.

To work with people who engender such respect from the community is very humbling and makes me extremely proud to wear the Blazeaid colours.

BlazeAid: What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?

Ron:

People ask about the duties and responsibilities of being a coordinator and my belief is: The welfare and well-being of the farming family is number one but of equal importance is the Safety, well-being and Happiness of the volunteers. I have been criticised by some vols as possibly being a bit hardnosed about safety aspects and I am proud of the criticism. The safety of volunteers is not just about OHS and Insurance it is also the pain and anguish serious accidents inflict, not only on the victim, but their families, other volunteers, and the community we are trying to help and undermines the improving mental health that we have worked so hard to bring to these rural families.

BlazeAid: What do you get out of being a BlazeAid Camp Coordinator?

Ron:

5 years ago, I was rather ill and as a result was left with some disabilities that made me embarrassed to join in a lot of everyday activities. A Blazeaid mate talked me into going out to Murgon and doing a bit of work and I reluctantly agreed. It was like stepping into a new world.

It wasn't just the way I was accepted back by Vols, farmers and townspeople alike but I started to get a glimpse of the fact that a lot of farming families suffer medical anxieties as well and they aren't as lucky as I am in having the support around them because of their isolated life.

This opened my eyes for the need to be more community involved and try and offer our support and understanding to rural families undergoing these sad and difficult times on top of the disasters that they have just undergone.

BlazeAid: How do you plan to spend the Christmas period this year?

Ron: I am hoping to close the camp for a week and finally spend some time with my daughter and siblings... but in saying that, I won't be surprised if I can't go home due to being needed here.



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BlazeAid's Christmas Reader Recipes!



Christmas Cracker

Q:
Where does steel wool
come from?

A:
Hydraulic Rams!

A very big thank you to those of you who were willing to share your delicious, well tested family recipes! Please post a picture on our Facebook pages if you decide to make one of these treats

Rhonda Butler's Irish Whiskey Cake

375g each of raisins and sultanas, chopped
50g each of red and green glace cherries, chopped
85g dried dates, seeded, chopped
55g each of seeded prunes and glace pineapple, chopped
55 g mixed peel
2 tsp each of grated lemon and orange rind
2 tablespoons lemon juice
¼ cup orange juice
1/3 cup Irish whiskey
1 small apple peeled, grated,
185g butter, softened
165g caster sugar
3 eggs
50g walnuts, toasted, chopped
40 grammes ground almonds
225g plain flour
¼ tsp ground nutmeg
½ tsp ground cinnamon
2 tbs Irish whiskey (extra)



1. Combine fruit, rinds, juices, whiskey and apple in large screw-top jar; shake well. Store jar in cool, dark place for three weeks; turn jar daily.

2. Line the base and side of a deep 20cm round cake pan with 3 layers of paper, bringing it 5cm above side of pan.

3. Beat butter and sugar in a medium bowl with electric mixer until just combined. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well between editions. Place fruit mixture in large bowl. Mix in walnuts, ground almonds and egg mixture. Stir in combined sifted flour and spices, spread mixture in prepared pan. Decorate with blanched almonds and extra red glace cherries, if desired. Bake in slow oven 3 hours (cover with foil during cooking if over browning). Brush hot cake with extra whiskey. Cover, cool in pan.

*NB: Can be made three months ahead. Storage in airtight container, in refrigerator. Freezer suitable. Microwave not suitable.

Mushroom Wellington

- Recipe from Jenny Robins

Serves 6

12 large field or portobello mushrooms, stalks removed
2 tbsp olive oil, for frying
½ onion, finely chopped
100g mushrooms, finely chopped
1 garlic clove, crushed
1 egg, beaten
50ml milk (or almond milk)
2 tbsp ground almonds
100g mixed nuts, finely chopped
500-600g frozen puff pastry sheets
Salt and black pepper
150g blue cheese, chopped
6 tsp cranberry sauce
1 egg, beaten, for glazing
50g cooked spinach, squeezed and chopped
1 tbsp each of tarragon, chives and parsley, chopped



Method:

1. Set the oven to 160C/325F/gas mark 3. Put the large mushrooms on a baking sheet, drizzle with a little olive oil and season. Bake for about 15 minutes, then set aside to cool on kitchen roll, to remove any excess moisture (as this will make pastry soggy).

2 Fry the onions for 5 minutes, add the chopped small mushrooms and garlic, then cook over a high heat for another 5 minutes, until tender and all the liquid has disappeared. Allow to cool.

3. In a large bowl, mix the egg, milk, almonds, nuts, spinach and tarragon until well blended. Season. Turn up the oven to 200C/400F/gas mark 6.

4. Lay out the pastry sheets on a floured surface. Cut out 12 discs at least 1cm larger than the mushrooms all the way round. Place a mushroom cap-side down on six of the discs, then spread each with a layer of the spinach mix. Sprinkle with blue cheese and top with 1 tsp of cranberry sauce. Top with the rest of the spinach nut mix and top with the other mushrooms cap-side up.

5. Brush around the edges with beaten egg and put the remaining pastry discs on top of the mushroom parcels. Press down the edges, so they seal with the discs below, and crimp to seal. Transfer the six parcels to a baking tray lined with parchment. Glaze with the egg wash. The rounds can be scored lightly with a knife going down the sides from top to the edges. At this point, you can put them in the fridge and cook them the next day, if you like.

6. Bake for 25 minutes, or until golden.

Christmas Icecream

- Recipe from Linda Hibbard

1 big tub vanilla ice cream
3 pack of 6 fruit mince pies
Optional: Throw in chopped pecans, or walnuts, or hazelnuts, macadamias, glacé cherries too.



Let the ice cream soften

Completely crush mince pies

Once ice cream is soft-ish, mix in crushed fruit mince pies (and other optional ingredients)

You will need a bigger ice cream tub to refreeze it in

Bon Noel 🎄🍷

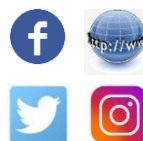
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Do you have a BlazeAid story to share about a person, place, or experience? If you do, drop us an email at admin@blazeaid.com.au or contact Melissa on 0436316955. We would love to hear from you!

BlazeAid's Christmas Reader Recipes!



Poverty Pudding

- Recipe from Coordinator Christine Male

3 cups Self Raising Flour
1 kg mixed fruit
1 1/2 cups grated suet
1 teaspoon bicarb soda
1 large teaspoon mixed spice
1 cup sugar
Cold tea

Place in a large mixing bowl and mix well. Bind mixture together using cold tea

Mixture should be similar consistency to a fruit cake.

While you are getting dry ingredients together boil a meter of unbleached calico in the pot you are going to boil pudding in. After the cloth has boiled for a couple of minutes take it out and spread on the bench after you have drained it in a colander.

Lay out flat and sprinkle with flour.

Place in a colander and put mixture in and tie up tightly with string.

Place a bread and butter plate in the bottom of the building pot and place pudding in the pot onto the plate.

Boil for about 4 hours. Check regularly and if water is getting a little low add boiling water to pot.

When you take the pudding out, put it into a colander and let it sit for a few minutes.

Undo the string and pull back the cloth a little. Place a plate/platter on top and flip pudding over.

Peel cloth off gently and enjoy.

Popcorn Roast Chook

- Recipe from Administrator of BlazeAid Grey Nomads Facebook Page, Russ Anderson

1 chicken
1 cup melted butter
1 cup of your favourite stuffing
1 cup uncooked popcorn
Salt/pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 200 degrees.

Brush chicken well with melted butter

Season in and out with salt and pepper.

Fill cavity with stuffing mixed with uncooked popcorn.

Place in baking pan with the neck end toward the back of the oven.

Listen for the popping sounds.

When the chicken's bottom blows the oven door open and the chicken flies across the room and lands on the table, it's done and ready to eat.



*Wishing all our amazing volunteers,
farmers and supporters a happy,
healthy and safe Christmas and 2022!*

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