



The

BlazeAid POST

MAY 2023 - ISSUE 8

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

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Life in Braidwood After BlazeAid

Everyone knows the catastrophic effect of fire, not only on the land and personal property but also the mental torture it can put people and their community through.

BlazeAid arrived in Braidwood on the 6th of January 2020 after the Black Summer bush fires and immediately set up camp at the Braidwood Showground with the assistance of local council, Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council (QPRC). The council were aware of the devastation caused by the fires, along with the importance of BlazeAid to help to rebuild our community.

Dennis and Carol McGrath were camp co-ordinators from Day 1 to stumps and lead from the front. They arrived at our community that was devastated and exhausted but we had that important ingredient of never giving up hope.

The BlazeAid volunteers blended in beautifully well with the Braidwood and district community. They were welcomed, thanked and joined in local events. We even arranged a table tennis competition between the BlazeAid volunteers against the best of the Braidwood locals. The locals were beaten soundly, winning the inaugural "Blazewood Trophy". Local community groups such as Lions, CWA and Scouts regularly cooked for the volunteers.

And the Community Bank Braidwood arranged for each volunteer a \$50 voucher to be spent at businesses in Braidwood. This not only assisted the volunteers but also our local businesses that had suffered so much during the fires. And with my Community Bank hat on, there was nothing better than seeing trailers donated to BlazeAid through the Bendigo Bank's philanthropic arm, the Community Enterprise Foundation. The Bank continues its support of BlazeAid.



Statistics that came out of BlazeAid Braidwood:

Properties registered and completed: 265

New fencing: 249 kilometers

Total number of pickets used: 29,332

Total number of meals served: 28,831

Total number of volunteers: 454

Total number of volunteer days given: 9392

Money spent locally: \$500,113.06



Of course, most of what I have written can have the location of Braidwood substituted with many other locations where BlazeAid have set up camp. This is the beauty of the BlazeAid culture and the support it offers. It's been just over 2 years since the Braidwood camped packed up with their worked completed. In fact, it was the 22nd of November 2020.

So how is life now in Braidwood? Has the land recovered? Have the farmers and locals recovered and what about our local businesses? What is life like after BlazeAid? People react from disasters differently as we are aware. A number of significant events have taken place in our district since November 2020 and I'll elaborate on a few:

1. Braidwood Community Radio: Braidwood FM played a huge and significant role during the fires and followed this up after the fires. Funding through different organisations enabled the production of locally made podcasts, 6 in total. The final episode was launched on 18 February, 2023. To listen to the podcasts, go to braidwoodradio.com.au/podcast/hots. Station Manager, Gordon Waters said "Our town had just gone through one of the biggest, if not the biggest, natural disaster ever encountered. Braidwood FM held weekly interviews with Dennis so the community could be kept up to date with progress, stories both funny and sad. It was a terrific relationship between the radio station, the community and BlazeAid".

From left to right: Carol McGrath, Dennis McGrath, Nick Fry, QPRC Mayor, Mr. Tim Overall

2. Braidwood Community Arts Association:

A newly formed community organisation that produced a documentary "A Community Under Fire". The documentary tells the story of the 2019-2020 Black Summer bush fires. It highlights the importance of community and how everyday people do extraordinary things to help the community survive and recover. A shortened version was made and won many awards in film festivals. The premiere of the long version was screened at the Braidwood National Theatre to a packed house with hardly a dry eye and plenty of packets of tissues used.

3. QPRC:

The local council were enormously supportive during the fires and importantly after the fires. They had specialised staff to assist with recovery, they held mental health sessions and many, many meetings and BBQ's that continued well into 2022. Our community cannot thank them enough. So life has basically gone back to normal, at least for the time being in Braidwood and the district. The BlazeAid story is a very important part of Braidwood's history. Any community where BlazeAid has been represented will attest to this.

Nick Fry
Community Engagement Manager
Braidwood and Bungendore Community Bank
Branches NSW
Bendigo Bank



VOLUNTEER IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Peter Ross (Rossy)

Introducing our volunteer from our Murrabitt camp Peter Ross, also very well known as "Rossy". Peter has been a BlazeAid volunteer for many years now and a handy man to have around camp. Peter is 67 years old and is enjoying retirement. During his working career, Peter was a Theatre Technician in hospitals. His hobbies include playing Blue Grass and traditional American Country music on the guitar and the mandolin. On his days off, he does enjoy a sleep in now and then. Peter has 4 children and 2 grandchildren who he enjoys spending time with. Living in Newstead when not at one of our camps, Peter first got involved with BlazeAid through his brother-in-law Barry Thompson, who was a camp coordinator at a number of our sites. Peter's first camp was at Barnawartha, he said "It was a very confronting situation looking out at the burnt grounds and seeing what people had to deal with." Peter values working with BlazeAid as a volunteer - he appreciates being able to get in and help others and give some much needed assistance and direction to those people who have been affected and do not know where to start.

Peter is up and about by 6am helping Murrabitt camp out as a team leader. He says, "he has a pretty good crew who really look after themselves and are self motivated. Not much direction is needed! We can get to a job, do an assessment and get the work done." He will also look at jobs and think, "*how can we work smarter rather than harder?*", and adapt equipment/tools to make things easier. You may spot him on our social pages with an entertaining 'how to' instructional video or two about fencing tips and tricks!

He really enjoys volunteering at BlazeAid and keeps coming back because of the kindness shown by people. His two favourite sayings are, 'Do what you can with what you've got.' and 'Kindness is its own reward.' What great mottos to live by! We salute you Pete! Thanks for all you do to give to others and helping out our BlazeAid crews!



News from around the Traps

Cessnock NSW

Volunteers at Cessnock NSW

Rod Edson (pictured right), from Thornton NSW, is new to BlazeAid, and joined Cessnock camp in March 23. He was a power house when it came to lifting quarter split post on the fence line. Rob tells us that he will be back to BlazeAid as he and wife Vicky so enjoyed the experience, while its hard work when you return to camp and enjoy everyone's stories of the day and hear of the gratitude of property holders its worth doing.

While his SHORTER counterpart Carolyn Richmond (also pictured) from Central Cost of NSW, a returning BlazeAider, first volunteering in Casillis in 2017 with many members of the Cessnock camp. Carolyn brought along 3 friends to share her experience.



Dot Baker (pictured above right), from Salamander Bay NSW, is a returning Volunteer from Wauchope camp in 2019 & 2021. She fabulously added to the ambience at Cessnock Camp with her delightful sense of humour, colourful Ladies' room and delightful table decorations!



MOLONG NSW

Col who is coordinating our camp in Molong has said the area really does live up to its meaning "Many Rocks". Slowly and surely, one at a time, we are getting through the properties, weather has been a challenge to get out and get the jobs done. We currently have a team out of 4 today and to date have completed 13 properties. More volunteers welcomed.

WAUCHOPE NSW

Bob and Lisa are still receiving registrations for new properties requiring works. Again weather has been challenging at times, but they are preparing for twelve school students from Cronulla High School to assist at the start of May.

Bob and Lisa have the pleasure of assisting a farmer who is located at the sale yards where the camp is situated, helping him with his cattle and works on the property.

OXLEY ISLAND NSW

We are also welcoming at Oxley Island camp, a group of students from the Danthonia Bruderhof Community in the next few days to assist us for 3 nights with fencing for the farmers

MURRABIT VIC

This camp is formerly our Kerang camp, now situated at the Murrabit Tennis club. Martin (Simon to take over in May) our coordinator has been busy with 50 properties registered for assistance, of those the camp has completed 35. Very low on volunteers makes it difficult to get more jobs completed, so we would welcome help in any shape or form!

ECHUCA VIC

Echuca camp moved from Lockington in March, as we had several farms up on the Murray/Goulburn rivers, which were just too far to reach from Lockington. We had 15 farms in the Kotupna, Nathalia and Barmah regions that had been waiting on help for a month or more and the Rotary Club in Echuca was kind enough to loan us their facilities for the duration of our work in this area. The Rotary Club have been amazing and very generous. To thank them for their support, we have erected a post and rail fence along the front of the club house and down on the riverbank where there is a miniature railway. We have had some awesome volunteers through the camp, a number of which followed the camp up from Lockington, so we are making steady progress on the farms.

The Farmers in this area had water approximately one meter deep on their properties for up to 8 weeks, so the work here is a bit more challenging, but the farmers we have met have been such a delight and very appreciative. This makes our efforts all so worthwhile. The camp is situated right on the Campaspe river, and there is a lot to see and do in this historic town on our down time. One thing we did was to help the Rotary with a sausage sizzle on a farm when they had 'pick a box day' where people came from everywhere to pick tomatoes. I think the camp ended up with about 40kg so we have been making our own sauce and relishes.

HARGRAVES NSW

This camp opened up at the end of March 2023 and is being coordinated by Tony Samuels, with Bron and Bruce taking over in May. Currently the camp has 20 properties registered with more to come. With 9 volunteers currently, the camp is coming along slowly. We are faced with 100 year fencing that requires a lot of time to clear and replace with the new. We have shelters set up for the volunteers, so we do welcome more.

MOONAMBEL VIC

This camp was opened back in Dec 2022 and has now closed April 2023. They have managed to help 44 properties, complete 23Kms of fencing and cleared 53kms. Thank you to all involved and to Gene and Mike who helped coordinated the camp towards the finish. Also a special mention to Kaye who managed to make fresh scones, with jam and cream for the volunteers on their final day of work.

CORRIGIN WA

We reopened this camp on the 11th April to assist the people who were affected by the bushfires last year. Currently we have 8 properties on the books for help and have had 7 volunteers come through. Looking for more volunteers as this week the weather has made it challenging.

MILES QLD

Recently opened up on the 7th April 2023. Gary our camp coordinator has welcomed 17 volunteers and received 12 property registrations so far. The jobs ahead at an estimate would require at least 100kms of fencing to be replaced. The Western Downs Regional Council are planning a Farmers/ Community night on the 29th April to assist with fund raising for the farmers who are desperate need of help.



FORBES NSW

Forbes camp is tracking along strongly. We had a wonderful Easter period with up to 22 volunteers in camp. It was a positive vibe, volunteers reconnecting from previous camps and good weather. What more could you want! The Coordinators Chris and John found it energizing and stimulating as we achieved a lot. Since the last edition the Coordinators have seen their camp become settled and we have developed our routine into meeting the challenges of the probability of a long camp. As always we would like more volunteers and less stressed farmers but the real world has been confronting at times making us become more resourceful and resilient. Our wonderful volunteers have shown and led us by their work ethic and compassion to the farmers. We are proud of the respect being given to our team by the Forbes community. Many of our volunteers are using their time off to become tourists in the area, taking in some sights, exploring surrounding towns and of course frequenting the coffee shops. The camp wishes to extend an invitation to any past BlazeAider's to come along and give us a day or more to help, and thank those who have assisted here.



Coordinator of the Quarter!

Graeme Allen

Introducing Graeme Allen, another great camp coordinator whom BlazeAid is lucky to have on board.

Graeme is a retired Civil Engineer, who did most of his work as a Project Manager with a company for the airport in Queensland. Married to his beautiful wife Carolyn for 50 years this year, they have 3 children and a couple of grandchildren. Woodend is home when he is not looking after a camp for BlazeAid. Graeme enjoys 4 wheel driving, gardening and travelling.

BlazeAid: When did you start volunteering?

Graeme: My first camp was back in 2019 at Bunyip when I started as a volunteer. I really enjoyed working on the fence line with the other volunteers and farmers. Since then I have been at eleven additional camps and Coordinated five others.

BlazeAid: Why did you want to volunteer at BlazeAid?

Graeme: BlazeAid had a lot of camps at the time that needed help. I wanted to go and help the people who were disadvantaged by the Black Summer disaster.

It was a great satisfaction to help people get back on track, and as BlazeAid always does, it gives people a good starting point.

I enjoy working outside and getting people motivated, and seeing the changes in people's attitude, is a real positive.

BlazeAid: What are your duties, functions, and responsibilities in camp?

Graeme: My duties with coordinating also included working on the fence line side by side with the farmers and volunteers, administration work at the camp and morning muster. I enjoy leading and helping people develop new skills, especially with the new volunteers to BlazeAid.

BlazeAid: What is it that you enjoy about Co-Ordinating a camp?

Graeme: I like to help people come back from the natural disasters and give them a starting point. I enjoy meeting people and really appreciate the volunteers and communities coming together and helping out. The afternoon catch up after a hard days work and socialising is great to see. I find that BlazeAid is good for the people, it helps create new found memories and friendships.

Board Member in Review Gary Waterson

It's time to introduce another very valued board member, Gary Waterson. BlazeAid is very grateful for all your hard work and we are very lucky to have you and your wife Colleen on our team!

Gary was born, raised and educated in Sydney. After marrying his beautiful wife, Colleen, they moved to the Central Coast of New South Wales, where they have now lived for over 40 years.

Married for over 50 years, Colleen and Gary have 2 children and 3 grandchildren.

Gary started his career working for a major Australian bank. For a number of years after leaving the banking industry he was self-employed, and was later offered the opportunity to undertake studies in engineering and procurement. For the last 20 plus years of his working life, Gary worked for a major Australian owned cereal manufacturing company in the engineering division, specialising in the procurement and maintenance of cereal manufacturing equipment, and contractor management systems, including Contractor Occupational Health and Safety systems.

Gary and Colleen have always been involved in volunteer work within their children's schools and local church, and wanted to continue to carrying out volunteer work once they retired. Gary and Colleen had heard of Blazeaid through the ABC Australia All Over programme, however at the time were unable to obtain leave from their jobs to experience Blazeaid.

One of their goals after retirement, was to spend a number of years travelling Australia while endeavoring to do some volunteer work before settling down. They spent just over 4 years travelling Australia, and decided to settle down in the New South Wales, Mid North Coast town of Kempsey.

Once retired and while starting travels throughout Australia, they gave Blazeaid a go.

Their first camp was Bridgewater around 2010. After spending some time at the camp, they felt BlazeAid was an organisation they could continue to volunteer at and still see Australia.

Gary and Colleen have always had a great love of Australian rural communities and being a part of Blazeaid has enabled them to give back to those who help feed Australians through good times and no so good times.

Over the past thirteen years, Gary and Colleen, have coordinated and volunteered at numerous Blazeaid camps throughout Australia. They have also delivered many presentations, spreading the word on what Blazeaid stands for and is doing for rural communities.

Volunteering with Blazeaid has enabled them to meet and stay connected with a number of rural communities and farmers all over Australia, which is something Gary and Colleen say they would never have contemplated had they not joined the Blazeaid family!

"Being a member of the Blazeaid family gives us great pride in the work that Blazeaid has been able to achieved for rural communities in times of natural disasters since the its inception in 2009." Gary says.

Gary's hobbies include reading Australian History, gardening and researching the history of motor vehicles in Australia. He also assists Colleen with her volunteer work with the local Country Women's Association branch and the local hospital auxiliary.

In recent years Gary has had the opportunity to join the Blazeaid board. Whilst being a board member, has assisted with the behind-the-scenes management of the tools and assets, and drafting of safety procedures for tools.

Thank you for all your wonderful work and commitment to BlazeAid, Gary!



BlazeAid's Supporter of the Quarter

Farm Owners Academy

BlazeAid are proud to partner with FOA Foundation in a auspices arrangement. The foundation was inspired by those challenged by the 2020 Kangaroo Island fires and in the hope that we can help hundreds of farming families navigate adversity over the coming years. The FOA Foundation now exists to offer financial and well being support to those in need.

BlazeAid was approached by the FOA as they were impressed by our work and efforts during the KI and SE fires in 2020. FOA share a common vision, and have a strong value alignment with BlazeAid.

Under the Auspice arrangement with BlazeAid, the FOA are wanting to raise funds for the families and communities affected by natural disasters. All the money that is raised goes straight back to the farmers and their families.

FOA are very passionate about the success of Australian farming families and are always looking at ways to help.

"FOA has 15,000 in their community, over 11,000 following facebook, over 5,000 following a fortnightly podcast series and over 500 farmers progressing through various programs every year.

They are growing, and the community is highly engaged, and feel they can actively mobilize their members and community in direct support to BlazeAid, and in turn helping those in and beyond the FOA community in need."

From left to right: Jeremy Hutchings (Managing Director FOA), Tracy Secombe (Director FOA), Debbie Buttler (National Business Manager BlazeAid), Kevin Butler (Founder and President BlazeAid), Melissa Jones (CEO BlazeAid), Sam Johnsson (CEO FOA), Deb Johnsson (Co-Founder FOA) and Greg Johnsson (Co-Founder FOA).

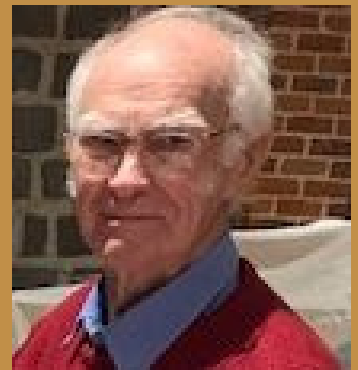
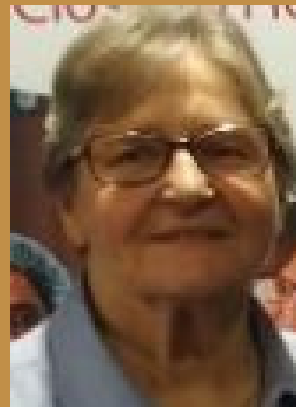


THE HISTORY OF OUR CONTAINERS

Recently, some BlazeAiders spent some time sorting out and itemising the contents of the containers at HQ in Kilmore East, and it was somewhat puzzling to see each was proudly emblazoned with a name. You maybe wondering who these special people are. Well, here's the scoop!

Dennis and Helene Livingstone

They were with Kevin and Rhonda Butler from the start of BlazeAid. They would help provide advise and be great listeners to both, any hurdles or challenges where always discussed. Dennis was the person who came up with the name for the "Combat Trailers." This proved to be a more easy and productive way for the volunteers to carry tools for the job. Both Dennis and Helene spent time on the board with BlazeAid, Dennis was our treasurer for many years before sadly passing away in 2021. Both these people provided great support and encouragement to BlazeAid and will always be truly appreciated.



Angus Guild

He was a Team Leader in 2009. His years of being a Bank Manager where put to good use. He ran the Charlton Basecamp in 2010, Maffra 2013 and Wandong in 2014. Angus would always assist when needed and ran an excellent camp. A great person with a senses of humour. Thanks Angus for all your efforts.

Angus's famous morning Battle Cry in camp each day was

"We are not here to be pretty!"





Lyn Bailey

She was the first administration person to help BlazeAid back in 2011. Lyn worked long days and long hours for Kevin and Rhonda to assist with the paper work, banking and phone calls.' Lyn designed the first paper based form for the camps to report on. No ipads back then!

Lyn would assist camps when setting up and provide great support. Her hard work and direction was very appreciated.



Bob Cross (THE LONG BOB)

He was a Team Leader in 2009. Bob had a certain quality that people loved and for that he always had people wanting to be on his team. He was very helpful on campsite cooking meals and cleaning up after meal times. Bob was even more handy on the fence line.

Bob was the person who first set up the container to be a workshop. Bob sadly passed away, he was a wonderful person to have around.



Eugene Ross

He was a Team Leader in 2009 and also helped support our safety and first aid. He was always the first to go out to the furthest properties and would also assist our farmers who just need to talk and needed some direction. Another great team leader who was never short of volunteers as he always go the job done.



| | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| MAX GROSS | 30.480 KGS | 67.200 LBS |
| TARE WT. | 3.745 KGS | 8.260 LBS |
| PAYLOAD | 26.735 KGS | 58.940 LBS |
| CUBIC CAP | | 67.7 CU M |

Laurie Dawson

In 2011 Laurie was one of our camp Coordinators. This job was required as the volunteer numbers blew out to over 40 volunteers at our Bridgewater camp at the time. Laurie did an awesome effort in running the camp that he put his hand up for more camps in the future. He was a fantastic person to be around, he always got involved with the community which was a great benefit to BlazeAid.



So whenever camps are packing up and sending items back to Kilmore East or even when starting up a camp, just remember that these "tools, items and donations" are being homed by some of our very first influencer's.

WORD FIND

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Joke of the Day

Did you hear about the wooden tractor?

It had wooden wheels, a wooden engine, wooden transmission and wooden work!

Words to Find:

Auger
 Battery Charger
 Crow Bar
 Hammer
 Pliers
 Shovel
 Rakes
 Hard Hat
 Wire Twitchers
 Bolt Cutters
 Chainsaws
 Charger
 Drill
 Mattock
 Axe
 Post Driver
 First Aid Kit
 Tape
 Star Picket
 Gripple
 Chaps
 Wire Strainer



Did You Know?

BlazeAid has just launched its new website!

As with all new things 'technology', we have had a couple of teething issues, but all is good to go now! You can use our website to find out information relating to volunteering and registering for help, as well as finding all our newsletters!

Find us at www.blazeaid.com.au