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Issue One

June, 2021

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



# The BlazeAid POST



current statistics >>>

Since 2009:

Total Volunteers: 33,248

Properties: 11,065

Fences cleared: 15,565 kms

Fences rebuilt: 15,295 kms

Year to date:

Fences rebuilt: 637kms  
(That's approximately Melbourne to Cobargo, NSW!)



## BlazeAid Founders: Kevin and Rhonda Butler



*Born from the ashes of Black Saturday, Kevin and Rhonda Butler have forged a successful organization helping communities recover after natural disasters. Farmers through and through, they work their family property in Kilmore East, running sheep. Continued innovation and a passion for helping others and building community has instilled a relentless drive to continue BlazeAid's work year after year.*

Black Saturday, 2009. February 7<sup>th</sup>, a power line 500 meters from my parent's property snapped and began to lash around in the 130 kilometre winds. It touched the dry, brown grass and on that 46-degree day, a spark became a raging fire.

I am sure you have heard about the horrors in the aftermath of Black Saturday. 173 people died, thousands of homes and other structures were destroyed and over 400,000 burnt. More than 78 communities across Victoria were directly affected, many of those farming communities, with stock, fences, machinery and livelihoods destroyed.

The Butlers were fortunate - their home was untouched, but they had lost three kilometres of farm fencing.

are pragmatic and find ways to get the job done. Kevin put an ad in the local paper and asked for volunteers to help rebuild his fences. He had a group of 25 willing volunteers answer his call to arms, made up of members of the local community, friends and family.

The job was completed within a week and Kevin and Rhonda were back in action and back on the road to recovery.

It was Rhonda's idea to pay the favour forward, saying "Kev, you have your fences done, now you need to help the neighbours". This was the beginning of Blazeaid, the notion of a hand up, not a hand out and the idea of working shoulder

to shoulder so that the spirits of all involved are uplifted – pride and satisfaction of giving back to someone in great need, and for the recipient to feel they are not alone, that there is hope.

Since then, that small army of volunteers has grown to over 33,000 people helping farmers and rural communities across Australia rebuild after natural disasters. At the time of writing, BlazeAid has established a total of 140 Basecamps across seven of our eight states and territories.

Kevin and Rhonda continue to operate their farm in Kilmore East, while overseeing the daily running of BlazeAid.

*A farmer doesn't stop working. They are pragmatic and find ways to get the job done.*

Stock that weren't burnt, were running rampant on roads, getting in the way of fire trucks, creating a hazard for motorists.

After the initial danger had passed, Kevin and Rhonda were left with 3 to 6 months of work ahead of them to rebuild their fences, so they could contain stock and once again start producing an income. Filled with gratitude (and guilt), they felt that they had been incredibly lucky, but anguish faced at the job ahead was also evident.

But a farmer doesn't stop working. They



set the stage >>>

# Co-Ordinator of the Month: Maggee

Fully of energy and spirit, Maggee has dedicated 15 months leading the Basecamp in Wulgulamerang, remote East Gippsland, and ably supported by partner Paul, since the devastating NewYears Eve fires in 2019/20, leaving a legacy within the community and Blazeaid beyond measure.

## Maggee and Paul: Our Story:

Our Blazeaid tale begins months before we actually went to a camp.

It all began in a CMCA rally in Elmore, Victoria, October, 2019. There was a seminar being held about Blazeaid and it sparked my interest. I attended and thought, 'Yep, we can do that!'. We talked about it and agreed to volunteer in the next year. Well what a decision that turned out to be! The East Coast of Australia became a feiry hell and Blazeaid was in desperate need by so many and we left Sydney almost immediately to join the Wingham team.



Paul assisted with the tools and property cleaning and maintenance and I worked in the kitchen.

I absolutely loved it! The people, the buzz, the tremendous feeling of giving – giving our most treasured asset – time! As one day rolled into another, my interest moved to the admin side of things and I started helping the coordinator as needed.

The next thing I knew, I was asked to become a coordinator in Wulgulmerang – yep, I had no idea where it was either!

As our journey led us towards our destination, Wulgulamerang revealed itself. Houses lost, farms totally engulfed, black forests, no life to be seen, The only sound heard was the movement of our vehicle. Paul and I didn't speak as we drove further towards what was to become

our home for the following 15 months, As we settled into our new roles as Blazeaid coordinators, the realization and personal doubt overwhelmed us. 'Where are we? What are we doing here? What do we do first/next?'. But, as the days past, and while we waited for communication connections such as phone and internet to be sorted, we began to slowly develop our new home into a base where volunteers could come together after a long day and share stories and debrief. We would travel four and a half hours (round trip) to get the needed supplies and material for the camp, and slowly day by day the Wulgulmerang camp was established and ready to give assistance to those in great need.

Farmers came and registered, told us their stories and showed us heart felt gratitude for our our presence.

Volunteers arrived, keen and proud as punch to wear the fluorescent Blazeaid vests.

Up in the mountains, and two and a half hours away from any shops, we were challenged by the ideas of cooking for up to 15 hungry people in camp. As Covid -19 hit the shores of our beautiful country, we executed a strict policy, including minimal movement by those in basecamp. International volunteers graced our camp, aptly named 'International Rockstars' or IRS, with a diverse



and extensive list of dietary requirements. Such a steep learning curve for Paul and I! Due to 'the year that wasn't', 95% of our volunteers were IRS. And rockstars they were! Our camp became a real international community within the Wulgulmerang area – nationalities from all over, including England, Ireland, US, Canada, Poland, France, Argentina, NZ, Slovakia, Egypt, Japan and Italy, all coming together for one common good, to proudly help to rebuild farmers lives and communities in need.

With nowhere else to go to burn off excess energy, I soon realized that part of my job was to keep morale high and our focus in tact. So our out came "Maggee's Bag of Tricks"; Flippy Cup, Coits, I Spy, Charades, Celebrity Head and more! Boy, what fun we had! Very competitive these Internationals – out to win, with no prisoners! With such a competitive bunch of people about, the only thing to do was to create the "Wulgulamerang Olympics" - still a much talked about event on our Whatsapp Chat Group!

Over the 15 months in Wulgulmerang, we saw the joy returned to the faces of the farmers. The birds came back to the area, chirping and singing their song, Koalas roaming about to find the new growth. Kangaroos, emus, brumbies, deer, rabbits, even some dingoes let their presence be known!

We left Wulgulmerang on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, 2021, filled with memories, a bigger heart to accommodate all our new friends and as wiser people, much more aware of the needs of others!

- Maggee Apps  
Wulgulmerang Co Ordinator

## On Location!

# Wire Knots>>>

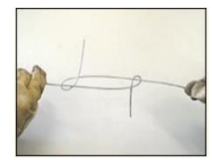
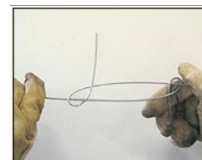
Wire knots are an important part of a fence. You use them to strain the fence tight, taking advantage of the elasticity of the high tensile wire. It's important to choose the right knot for the type of fence being built and the type of wire used.

Wire knots are inexpensive, but they can be time-consuming to tie. There

are three basic knots that you can use to join and tie wire – the Figure Eight Knot, the Orange Knot and the Loop, Crimp and Pin Knot. The Figure Eight Knot is the most common knot used in fencing. It is great for new fencing and repairs using plain wire and prefabricated fence rolls. The Figure Eight Knot is also the easiest and strongest knot in fencing. Here's how it's done.



Make the pin section of the knot by forming one end of the wire into a hook. Place the second fence wire



Form the 2<sup>nd</sup> fence wire into a loop around the 1<sup>st</sup> (the two loops combined will make the figure 8).



Pull the two wire ends together and you have a figure eight knot!

# Volunteer of the Month: "Chainsaw Pete"

*A true BlazeAid Legend – the fabric of our organization. Every town needs a 'Chainsaw Pete', and Cobargo and surrounds are lucky enough to have this one!*



Peter with his Chainsaw Gang, Cobargo.



Peter with BlazeAid Founder, Kevin Butler, Cobargo Basecamp.

Peter Bartlett has been a volunteer at Cobargo BlazeAid Basecamp since its inception in January, 2020 – nearing 500 days.

In fact, Peter Bartlett was with his family in Moruya when the devastating summer bushfires hit the south coast of NSW. He made the trip from his home near Sydney to help protect his parents home and keep them safe.

In the days following the massive blaze, Pete was a key contact and leader in assisting displaced people, working non stop, hour after hour to ensure the safety and well being of those who sought refuge. After his time at the local evacuation centre, Peter decided he had to do something more to help fire-affected people within the community. He heard about BlazeAid - he liked the idea that it was an organisation where everyone was a volunteer - and planned to head to the camp at Adelong when he heard on the radio that a new basecamp was opening up in Cobargo.

A passion for helping his beloved Cobargo community, changed his direction and he made his way to the new camp.

Since his arrival, Pete, has been an integral part of the BlazeAid family. He has spent hundreds of hours volunteering on the chainsaw, clearing dangerous trees from properties and fence lines, and quickly earned the nickname "Chainsaw Pete".

Pete has devoted countless days leading teams rebuilding fences in the area, as well as nurturing and supporting new volunteers who come to help.

Pete is commonly heard saying "I was there to put the first strainer post in the ground and I'll be there to put the last one in!" as BlazeAid continues helping rebuild for the Cobargo people.

Pete's 21 year old son Will has also completed four trips to BlazeAid Cobargo and has been an advocate for our work whenever he goes back to the Shoalhaven community.

Pete's father, Les, is in his late 70s, but has also joined our teams on several occasions. He was delighted to be part of the Bartlett Family Fencing Team in Spring 2020.

Full of integrity and passion for helping others, Pete believes he is not a "one-outer", saying that Chainsaw Pete is a team, not one person. He says he couldn't do the work he does without the amazing tribe of volunteers around him and having the full support of BlazeAid.

Loyal and dedicated, he is the first one to offer support when times are tough, and to rally troops when needed.

Apart from his love of Cobargo and BlazeAid, Pete's dedication extends to The Mighty Rabbitohs, family, fishing, and a drop or two of Tooheys Old!

BlazeAid salutes champion 'Chainsaw Pete' – a true aussie hero!



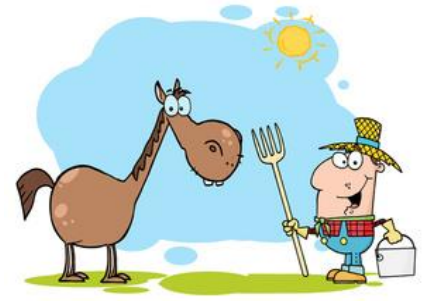
Pete meets the Governor-General



The Bartlett Family Team – (from left) Will, Pete and Les.



Shucking oysters for a Cobargo Camp dinner!



## Morning Muster Joke of the Day

A Texan farmer goes to Australia for a vacation. There he meets an Aussie farmer and gets talking. The Aussie shows off his big wheat field and the Texan says: "Oh! We have wheat fields that are at least twice as large."

Then they walk around the ranch a little and the Aussie shows off his herd of cattle. The Texan immediately says: "We have longhorns that are at least twice as large as your cows."

The conversation has, meanwhile, almost died when the Texan sees a herd of kangaroos hopping through the field. He asks: "And what are those?"

The Aussie asks with an incredulous look: "Don't you have any grasshoppers in Texas?"

## Volunteering: Have you had your Tetanus shot?

Tetanus is a bacterial infection caused by Clostridium tetani. The bacteria make a toxin in your body that causes the disease. Tetanus causes severe muscle spasms, especially in the neck and jaw (called lockjaw).

Around 1 in 10 people who get the disease will die from it. Tetanus bacteria live in soil, dust and manure, particularly horse manure. Infection occurs when the bacteria enter the body through a break in the skin. Symptoms occur between three days and three weeks after infection. Most cases occur within 14 days. Generally, if symptoms appear very quickly, the infection is severe.

All wounds other than clean, minor cuts are considered 'tetanus prone'. If you get a wound and you haven't been immunised for tetanus in the last five years, visit your doctor as soon as possible. The best prevention against tetanus is immunisation. BlazeAid recommends all volunteers be immunised for Tetanus before volunteering in camp.

# final thoughts...

BlazeAid is lucky enough to have support from many wonderful organisations. One of those partnerships comes from Bendigo Bank.

Long known for its commitment to communities, Bendigo Bank has thrown its might behind BlazeAid's mission to help communities rebuild after natural disasters. Read about their impact and how their assistance is making a difference.



## One of Australia's biggest banks, Bendigo Bank, is proud to partner with Blazeaid an Australian organisation that is always doing good!

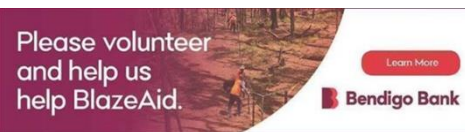
Everyday Bendigo Bank customers help change and save lives simply by banking with their local branch. Community Banking is based on a "profit with purpose" model, which means their profits are returned directly to communities. There are over 300 locally owned Community Bank branches across Australia who have reinvested and returned over \$250 million back into communities. In 2019/2020 nearly 8,000 national projects were funded. Now that's a lot of community giving & top of the list for the bank is Blazeaid!

The 19/20 Black Summer Bushfires had a devastating impact! Bendigo Bank launched National and State



based Bushfire Appeals to support long term community recovery. Blazeaid received over \$1.6M from the emergency relief funding to set up much needed camps with accommodation and equipment for their volunteers to help farmers rebuild fences and their lives. Bendigo Bank recognises their ongoing outstanding recovery work is vital to impacted communities and is proud to be a partner promoting their need for volunteers as more natural disasters have unfolded. The recent floods across NSW left farmers again in need of Blazeaid and to the rescue they came and when a Cyclone hit WA they quickly set up another Blazeaid camp!

Blazeaid undoubtedly makes a difference and was instrumental in rebuilding fences and lives during the 19/20 Bushfire season. Blazeaid established 47 camps in communities from Kangaroo Island S.A. to the Queensland border on 6,115 farms, with 14,776 volunteers over 180,035 working days with several camps still



in operation after 16 months. ( Adelong and Cobargo).

During the current year more Blazeaid camps have been established in SA, WA and NSW after natural disasters of fires, cyclones and flood. Blazeaid camps are opened in NSW – Adelong, Cobargo, Corindi Beach, Macksville, Moruya, Rappville, Spring Plains, Wauchope, in QLD – Texas, In W.A. – Woolaroo & Yuna and in S.A Liucindale.

Rural Bank operates as a division of the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank group with over 400 locations nationally. They deliver much needed specialist banking services to Rural and Regional Australia providing exceptional financial services, knowledge and leadership for Australian farmers to grow!

**Together, Blazeaid, Bendigo Bank and Rural Bank are spreading the word to do good!** Bank locally and / or volunteer to make a difference.



ask the question >>>

**Q:** Are BlazeAid Coordinators paid?

**A:** No, BlazeAid Coordinators are also volunteers.

*We have had many queries on our social media pages over the years, and often within camps, where coordinators have been asked if the job 'pays well'. Our coordinators dedicate their time and efforts as volunteers. Aren't they amazing?!*

Find us here:



Do you have a Blazesid 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'd love to hear from you!