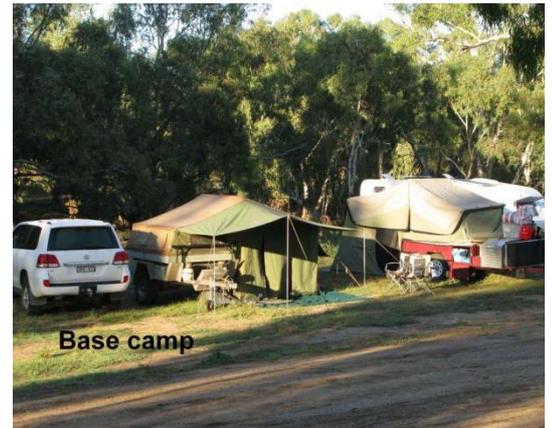


# Flood Relief – Charlton - 25-28 March

Participants: Meg and Terry Dillon – Fancy new Nissan and Camper-trailer  
Vicki and Allan Davis - Nissan plus big caravan  
Bruce Gooday – Toyota LC and Camper-trailer

After the 2009 Black Saturday fires our club assisted farmers in the Mudgegonga area. We helped remove and replace damaged fences. On one weekend we were assisted by some 4WD members from Kerang and Swan Hill so thought we would return the favour when we received a request for assistance in their area following the recent floods. This time we worked through an organisation called Blaze Aid, and rather than reinvent the wheel, I will quote a couple of paragraphs from their recent media release.



“Rhonda and Kevin Butler are farmers from Kilmore East who lost 5 km of fences in the Black Saturday fires of 8<sup>th</sup> February 2009. Realising that the fencing task was too big for them, they called on family and friends plus a few local volunteers to help. Soon the word spread and with a total of 120 helpers, the fence was rebuilt in 7 days – a task that would have taken Keith and Rhonda up to three months on their own. At this point Rhonda said to Kevin “You know how to fence and you know how to organise people ... now you should help others” and so Blaze Aid was born.”



“From a humble wool shed in Kilmore East, 3,200 volunteers from all parts of Australia and overseas were allocated to teams to work alongside Black Saturday bushfire survivors. Over a period of around ten months they cleared approx 600 km of damaged fence lines, and helped rebuild or replace 400 km of fences.”

Following the recent floods, Blaze Aid was fired up again (deliberate pun), this time to help with fencing in Queensland, Northern NSW, and Victoria.

Our small team arrived in Charlton on Friday afternoon. We set up camp at the local sports ground (Blaze Aid HQ for Charlton) and were advised that we were expected to join the crew for the evening meal. We soon got a feel for country hospitality – breakfast, lunch and dinner provided at no cost by a band of local volunteers. The sweets at dinner were typical country fare – apple crumble and strawberry topped pav. Then we got a feel for country work hours – reveille at 6.00am, muster at 7.30, on the fence at 8.00, knock-off at 4.00pm.

Allan, Terry and I were assigned to separate teams. I worked on 1km of fence from which debris had already been cleared and cement posts realigned.

Over the weekend our team removed the old wires and completed the installation of new ring-lock. Meanwhile, back at the camp, Meg and Vicki helped with the domestics – making lunches, washing dishes, cleaning floors and showers etc.





The Dillons and I called it quits on Monday morning while Allan and Vicki decided to stay on for the rest of the week – hats off to them for their community spirit.

All up, a very satisfying experience shared with like-minded Aussies.

Bruce Gooday

## Flood Relief – Charlton- Vicki & Allan Davis

After Bruce, Terry & Meg left, I (Allan) continued on with the fencing. Vicki was getting up with the chooks to make sandwiches for crews that needed to be fed due to their farmer not being in a position to do so. She helped with the cooking and shopping for the BlazeAid Charlton Group, and cleaned up after us grots.

We had up to seven teams on the go this last week, travelling up to 50 km North & South of Charlton. There were people from Tamworth NSW, Streaky Bay SA, Snug in Tasmania, Warrnambool, Ballarat, Gippsland fire fighters from Point Cook and many other places that I have forgotten.

Occupations were varied there being Nurses, School Teachers, Housewives, an ex-Bank Manager, an Electrical Linesman and Farmers, aged from their early thirties to nearly eighty I heard. Anybody with any experience was in great demand. I was put in charge of one crew on the third day. We were a mixed lot - two men and two women - who worked well together though I had trouble remembering the ladies' names properly. On many occasions Pam could be (Pat, Patricia, Pauline, etc.) and Jean (Jan, Joan, Janet, Jill, etc.). They took it with a smile and forgave me my sins but that night at the nightly de brief one bright spark wanted to know where I had acquired all the extra females from and whether I was putting a Harem together

The farmers for whom we were clearing and fencing generally provided excellent meals. My crew were twice shouted to a counter meal with drinks at the local hotel. There was a great friendly rivalry on-going between the crews so we always rubbed it in that we had 5-schooner lunches (I don't drink). Long Bob from Tamworth (whose crew was being fed Muffins for morning tea and a three course lunch) always said he only got road kill to eat.

It's forty odd years since I have had to work with such a diverse team and I found it very interesting to learn to focus on what we had in common rather than our differences, as our backgrounds were very different.

The houses and shops of Charlton are still drying out and really stink. Some insurance companies won't pay out and this is affecting nearly half the town. Vicki spent some time talking with two female shopkeepers who really needed an outsider to talk to.

A joke was told at every de brief. One that had every one in stitches was told against one of the oldest and best workers (75yrs). It went like this. Bob was out fencing in the sun - forty degrees in the shade. A dam was nearby so Bob decided to go for a dip. He stripped off and dived in. In a little while he heard female voices through the trees so he grabbed for his clothes but only had time to get his hat with which he covered the essentials. The females looked on with great amusement and Bob, with as much dignity as he could muster, said **"If you were ladies you would turn your heads"**, to which one lady replied, **"If you were a gentleman you would tip your hat."**

Allan Davis