

KOKODA A PERSONAL JOURNEY BY IAN LOCKWOOD

A Journey to challenge all the senses...

I was always fascinated and drawn to the omnipotent of the Kokoda Track in PNG. For Australians it is a piece of history that we do not celebrate, there are no national holidays. It is an amazing story of courage and endurance. It is a victory beyond human endeavour; we were outnumbered 5:1 almost impossible to win. I have never been prouder to shout 'I am Australian' on our 9th day when we reached Isurava Village, we were close to our 96km end point I felt we could walk in their footsteps but never in their shoes, we had a very small infinitesimal taste of their hardship.



In July 1942 the Japanese landed at Buna the Southern end of PNG with the intention of capturing Port Moresby. The only accessible route for the Japanese was to walk to Port Moresby along the Kokoda Track. Once Port Moresby was taken the Japanese would have a launching pad, some say, to invade Australia. Below is a quote from Colonel K Norris, I could not have described the terrain of the track more succinctly.

"Imagine an area of approximately 100 miles long, crumple and fold this area into a series of ridges each rising higher and higher until 7,000 feet is reached, then declining to 3,000 feet - cover this thickly in jungle of short trees and tall trees tangled and great entwining savage vines. Through the oppression of this density cut a little native track two or three feet wide."
Colonel K Norris

The landscape is untamed, the colours and shades of green of the rainforest are out of this world. The colours of the butterflies are nothing I have ever seen before - ice blue, azure, turquoise, burnt oranges, brilliant yellows. The sounds of the birds of paradise are ever present. The hill and mountains are challenging, relentless at times but there to be conquered and remind us life is not that difficult!

Our group consisted of 18 Aussies represented from around Australia. We all convened together the night before the track at the Comfort Inn in Port Moresby, this was to be our last shower and bed for the next 9 nights. Our group was quite diverse, 5 women, 13 men, aging from 16 to 60 years all excited and nervous of the unknown. We quickly got to know each other and bonded whilst in single file climbing those formidable mountains sharing our life stories and motivating each other to put one foot forward.

As our bus left the next morning to the outskirts of Port Moresby, our first stop was Bomana War Cemetery an emotional beginning were all the Australian War Dead are buried. There are 1750 Australian's buried at Bomana, it is immaculately maintained, funded by the Australian Government.



Within an hour of starting the track the heavens open up. For those that have travelled in the tropics the rain is torrential but it is warm rain and not uncomfortable to walk in, incidentally this was the only significant rainfall during the ten days. Your endurance is built up along the way, Kokoda Trek and Tours do this well, the first day being the shortest walk of 4 hours and the last day the longest walk of 9 hours.



The people in the villages were extremely friendly and welcoming, we were centuries away, nevertheless on their subsistence living they still shared their food. Fresh bananas, mandarins and sugar fruit (similar to but better than passion fruit) are available at most villages, their taste is like nothing we experience at the supermarket! The textures, flavours, juiciness a genuine treat after a long walk.



Their singing and dancing in the villages was a sight to behold, they have syrupy smooth voices – great entertainment. Washing in the creeks at the end of every day was a real pleasure, at Alola village the shower in the creek was a wing of a Japanese fighter plane!

Our group was organised by Kokoda Trek and Tours who send an ex Army tour leader on the track. Our leader Scott was well versed in the campaign and described the significant events of 1942. Scott kept the group together and if anyone had any problems he was always will to take care of people.

Kokoda Trek and Tours were very professional and ensured we had a memorable experience. They looked after our provisions for 10-days, the food is basic but very edible we were even treated to Milo! There was always seconds and Doctor Craig from Townsville was always first in line for seconds!

In our group four carried their own full pack (up to 25kg) and the remaining 14 carried a day pack (4-6kg), then had a local carrier carried for the remainder of their gear. I recommend a carrier as they assist you at the end of the day with putting up your tent, assisting you across the numerous streams and support you over difficult parts along the track. The carriers set up a “brew” at the end of every day which is where they boil water over an open fire, another truly great ritual.



We trained for approximately 3 months prior to the trip which set us up well for the track. This encompassed a run a couple of days a week, push ups, sit ups and a walk nearly every weekend. The more training you do before you leave the easier the track (recommend Mt Donna Buang at Warburton for those in Victoria for a good guide of what you will expect).

Upon arriving at Kokoda you make your way to the Kokoda District Office touch the counter, relax and savour your achievement. You are then transferred back to Popondetta a three hour trip in an open van where you overnight at the Lamington Hotel. Fresh sheets and a hot shower is an awesome experience after the past ten days, the small things we take for granted.



We fly back from Popondetta to the Comfort Inn in Port Moresby for our last night together and a huge feast at the local Chinese Restaurant.

The Trek takes ten days to walk and the tours are run only in the dry season – June through November, if you want a remarkable experience contact Ian Lockwood for any first hand information. Ian is the Managing Director of Allways Travel Service who specialise in Kokoda trips.

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