

Kokoda 2019



I never would have thought Kokoda would be on my agenda, at least not for a long time. But out of nowhere I had the feeling that I wanted to do it and complete it. The first step was booking it and then it was training for a year. For me I didn't train, I think I only did 3 days at the You Yang's and one Kokoda Historical training run at Mount Macedon.

I learnt enough of the history through my grandad over time, since he had completed four and was coming with me for his fifth, I read a little bit, watched a few films but knew a fair bit of the history. The training I did do, was fun, nothing like Kokoda, far from it, it was a walk in the park compared to the track.

I wasn't fussed with not training too much; during the time I should have been training it was preseason for football so I was doing some form of physical movement twice a week.

I was very fortunate before my trip to meet two Veterans of the 39th Battalion, George Cops and Alan "Kanga" Moore. Both veterans shared stories of the track and their own personal experience to me and my grandad will forever be grateful to have the opportunity to meet George and Alan.

I wanted to do the track to prove myself and I think for a lot of people it's the same, for me the history was a big factor but not the only factor in me walking the track. Along the way you learn a lot about the history and the same about yourself, it a good thing to do if you want to see how far you can take yourself mentally and physically.

Fast forward to the track, I don't think I'll ever have the words to describe how amazing it was, there's just something about walking up a hill.

To break it down we walked roughly 9-10 hours a day, 20+ km and an average of 200 flights.

But in all of that we were very lucky, it only rained twice and that was at night, we didn't get the "full" experience as some might say, but we definitely got an experience of a lifetime.

The sleeping arrangements were something else, just imagine a sleeping swag, it was roughly the same size and height but a tent. You had to fit your packs in the tent too in case a local walked through the village you were sleeping in and stole your items. For us females it was harder to get dressed, you can't sit up in the tents but we all made it work and at the end of the day we were just exhausted and went to sleep by 8pm so we weren't fussed. The toilets weren't as bad as I thought they would be, yes a hole in the ground is the best way to describe them but at most villages there was an actual toilet seat with a hole directly under it (note don't look down, under no circumstances). "Showering" was one of the best reasons to get into camp before dark, if we were lucky some camps had a shower cubicle that was a hose with running water from the river, other nights it was just bathing in a river. Even though it was freezing cold at first it was all you needed after a long day of walking in that PNG heat.

I can't pin point all my favourite spots or experiences but here's a few:

Isurava, to every Australian that has learnt of the Battle of Kokoda, this major battle sight has an effect on everyone that has been there. Whether it's the four pillars with Endurance, Sacrifice, Mateship and Courage or if it's the ground that the 39th Battalion held from the Japanese forces or the sacrifice Private Bruce Kingsbury took on his own initiative. He charged with a Bren gun, shooting from the hip against intense enemy machine-gun fire, causing many casualties. Alone, he continued to sweep the enemy with his fire until he fell, shot by a sniper.

Brigade Hill, the view was better than words could ever be described. We had a service which was moving to just imagine what those diggers went through and some only as old as me at the time of walking the track (19) makes it even more inspiring.

There were a lot of river crossings; one day towards the end of the trek we crossed 11 just in one day. A few slips were taken and one fall that almost saw me hitting my head on a rock, luckily my porter was always by my side and quickly to my aid if I did fall. I didn't fall in the water which was a bonus. The porters are far from amazing, I wouldn't have been able to finish the track without my porter Gordon, he literally pulled me up hill steps taller than me, waited with me while I needed a break, carried my pack with all my clothes in it. Let's not forget set up my tent after a long day of walking, dug a trench around the tent when it was raining so the tent wouldn't flood. These porters are ancestors of the Fuzzy Wuzzy angels and you can defiantly see it, they have such a caring and helping nature.

During the trip I met some amazing people, but four individuals come to mind specifically. The first two, Jason and Dayna took me under their wing when my grandad got air lifted out. Words would never be able to describe the gratitude and how thankful I am to of met such wonderful individuals. The second two Simon and Emily I met before the trip at a training run, my family knew their family pretty well. Anyone would have thought Emily and I had been mates for years, from checking to make sure Emily's eyes weren't puffy for our Instagram photos to the banter we all had between Jason, Dayna, Emily and myself our friendships will definitely last a lifetime.



Overall our whole group was awesome, the bond we all created and how quickly we all along it defiantly made the trip more memorable.

Of the best moments was visiting all the villages, all the kids run up to you, it puts a smile on your face. I took over little flash cards with animals and words on them, plus little koalas keychains to give out to the little kids. For me that was the highlight of my trip, to be able to make these kids smile and get so excited over something so small meant the world. I took over a football and was saving it for one kid in particular, I left it until our last day and as we crossed the Goodwater camp there was a kid in my distance waving and jumping up and down, that was him I decided in that small moment he would get my footy that I carried the whole way. He was a pretty cute kid, a bit shy but as I walked off I looked back and he was jumping up and down with his new toy, my heart has never felt so full.



There's no doubt that this track will test you, and what you thought was "normal" isn't, disconnecting from the world for 9 days and only having communication through a satellite phone you start to appreciate having a mobile phone, an education and a stable job. A lot of questions people have about the track and question I had was, are there many hard days and the answer is every day is hard some days you might have a really hard day and it could take you 12 hours to get into camp for myself day 2 was the hardest, a few mental breakdowns at the fact that my grand dad got air lifted out that morning but that's when you pick yourself up and you're porter is there every step with you. I created my little cheer squad of porters that day, they just help you when you can't help yourself and it means a-lot. The food is pretty good, taking your own snacks is a must! But one thing I like about Kokoda Historical is for lunch and dinner fresh meals were cooked, and they tasted delicious. So if anyone is reading this and wondering if they should do Kokoda the answer is YES, yes it's hard, mentally and physically it will test you to the extreme! But if it was easy everyone would do it.

It was one of the best things I've ever done and the most rewarding, we owe the fallen so much and they would want us, as Australians to walk in their footsteps and to have a greater appreciation for our country.

I want to personally thank Kokoda Historical for the experience, history and overall amazement.

- Jorgia Redmond

