



The Kokoda Track still harbors some treacherous twists, as senior Courier-Mail writer BOB JOHNSON, above, discovered on a walk to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the famous campaign.



LES Cook and the Oro Province Finance Minister Benjamin Ijumi.



TIME OUT... Isaac Matama from Kagi village takes a v...

# Blood and Sweat

**T**HE soldiers who fought on the Kokoda Track 50 years ago called it the Bloody Track, because more than 600 Australians and an untold number of Japanese died there.

For some of a group of 18 Australians who walked the famous Papua New Guinea jungle trail recently to commemorate the 50th anniversary of this crucial 100-day World War II battle, it was also regarded as bloody difficult.

Such was the difficulty of the walk that one member pulled out on the third day of the nine-day trek and several others were close to giving up during the second and third days.

The Kokoda Track runs roughly from south to north across the rugged, jungle-covered Owen Stanley Range from just outside the Papua New Guinea capital Port Moresby to Kokoda village near the northern coastline of the peninsula jutting south-east towards the Coral Sea.

The trail, only a footpath 300mm wide in most places, goes down and up, up and down the ridges and ravines of the Owen Stanleys, through tropical rainforest with towering trees and impassable undergrowth, past villages perched high on cleared knolls, and on and on and on for more than 100km.

Although the highest point above sea level reached is just over 2000m, the total of the upward climbs is more than 5000m and the total of descents is more than 6000m.

To travel the track in 1992, with one's main pack carried by one of the villagers hired as carriers, is a sobering experience: 50 years ago Australian and Japanese soldiers had much more than a difficult jungle track to contend with.

They spent months in the jungle with little shelter from the rain, poor food (often none for days and weeks), carrying their packs, weapons and ammunition and living with the expectation of a bullet at any instant from an unseen enemy.

Today the signs of the battle are few — a foxhole here and there beside the trail, a few .303 cartridge cases where an ammunition dump was blown up, a rusted barrel and breach of a rifle and



Track" and it plunged from Owers Corner, where the road from Port Moresby ends, down to the Goldie River — a steep and continuing downward path through semi-jungle which soon gave way to real tropical jungle through which we would walk for the next nine days.

Goldie River crossing was jungle picture-postcard stuff — clear, flowing, knee-deep water over water-worn basalt boulders, the trees and undergrowth overhanging, mountains surrounding, including the exhausting ascent to Imita Gap which took the afternoon.

When the Australians in 1942 brought 25-pounder guns to Owers Corner they fired over Imita Ridge at the Japanese on Maguli Range, and halted their southward advance towards Port Moresby — and Australia.

The last few hundred metres climb to Imita Gap, with its view north to Day 2's objective, the Maguli Range, took us up the Golden Staircase. This name came from the log stairs built 50 years ago but long rotted away.

Each step was 400mm vertically and to climb or descend them would have been anything but a "golden experience" as the soldiers and the Papua New Guinea villagers — the Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels — who carried out the wounded found.

With sundown approaching we began the steep descent to Ua Ule Creek at the foot of the Maguli Range for the first night's camp, arriving after 90 minutes' scramble in jungle-black darkness on an unfamiliar path with only torchlight to find our way.

The boiled rice and dried-meat stew was barely edible. Water and dry biscuits helped fill the stomach and the body just wanted to crawl into the tent.

Day 2: Charlie Lynn's "coo-ee" in the 5am darkness started off the hardest day of the trek — more than 13 hours on the track, up and over and down the Maguli Range to Naoro Village, the last three hours in darkness with only torchlight.

The walking, the seven days still ahead, the total concentration on taking



AUSTRALIAN soldiers dig equipment from the mud in 1942.

fourth side was the next day's upward track.

Day 4: The effort of the first three days had taken our minds off the military history which was made here 50 years before.

But now the chafing between the legs was easing, the sore feet and the tired muscles became bearable. We stragglers were still no competition for the pace-setters — and we never did become so. But we began to see that the goal, Kokoda Village, was attainable.

And we began to think of, and learn of, the hard war that was fought through there, of the battles of Brigade Hill and Mission Ridge when the Japanese had the Australians on the run and then the hand-to-hand guerrilla fighting as the battle turned and the Australians pushed the Japanese to the north back through these killing hills.

The day's trek took us through Efogi Village and on to Naduri Village where we were welcomed with flowers and offered fresh fruit and

vegetables and a night's hospitality. The aged village headman, Ovoru Idiki, was one of the Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels — the villagers who worked tirelessly as carriers of stores and the wounded in 1942 — and he wore his medal proudly.

Day 5: A shorter day's walk with some magnificent views of the Owen Stanleys. We left Naduri at 7.30am and arrived at Myola Village at 1.30pm. Myola was built by the Naduri people as a resort for hikers or people wanting to experience village life and the mountains, living in the bamboo and banana-leaf huts on posts and eating the fresh fruit and vegetables.

The afternoon at Myola gave us a break from walking, time to marvel at what we had achieved and prepare for the coming four days of the hike to Kokoda.

Day 6: A solid day's walking through the never-ending jungle which took us through the Kokoda Gap and near the summit of Mt Bellamy, at 2196m above sea level the highest point on the Kokoda Track.

From this point the track begins its decline towards Kokoda which is 340m above sea level. This downward trend unfortunately was not matched by the terrain the track followed, for it descended into gorge after gorge followed by steep climbs to ridge-top after ridge-top.

But the going was definitely getting better. We were over the worst of the fatigue and soreness.

The planned campsite at Templeton's Crossing No. 2 on Iora Creek

was re... unexp... the w... villag... erect... sign, c... The... Kokod... Govern... money... the tra... Neg... man t... that t... erecte... velo, t...

T... with t... Day... ally f... Creek... betwe... Some... creek... times... crosse... down... Late... us to... barrie... were f... Day... the las... could... barrie... three c...

mazda 323 ASTINA

# Best who

Wheels Magazine tested the top 20 best selling cars in Australia. Their goal? To rank these 20 cars in terms of quality. They tested mechanical and electrical systems they inspected quality of

by design and qual... And as Mazda 323... quality for a pretty... car that's given of

