

# Why it's a hard trek to the corporate top

Each year CRA sends its high fliers on a 10-day trek along the Kokoda Trail. **MARTIN CHULOV** joined them.

HIGH on a treacherous mountain range human resource manager Alan Watling is lying covered in mud and sweat feeling worse than he ever has — and his company, CRA, couldn't be happier.

Eight other CRA employees lie collapsed in the jungle around him exhausted and silent.

The group has been earmarked as CRA's future corporate leaders and *The Sun-Herald* has joined them on the notorious Kokoda Trail.

But their minds are more on survival than leadership. For the next nine days the trail will be their classroom. It is close to the toughest learning environment possible.

We saw spiders big enough to eat birds, three-metre long pythons and leeches the size of fingers; in muddier parts of the track the ground almost seethes with them.

Australia's biggest mining group regularly sends staff on the 10 day trek across the fearsome Owen Stanley Ranges to the village of Kokoda.

CRA is so impressed by the progress of trek graduates through its ranks it has pledged to keep sending about 30 staff a year.

Despite an invitation to other corporations to go on the trek, the response rate has been low, although our trekkers included James Walker-Powell of AMP, Brian Brushfield, a wool merchant from Geelong, and Kirsten Bruce, a Young Liberal from Kirribilli.

The trek traces the route Australian soldiers took when they fought the advancing Japanese all the way back to Kokoda from within sight of Port Moresby.

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vision. "What we got was a huge injection of wisdom in being able to predict how people react in adverse situations," he said.

Alan Watling has recovered from his exhaustion. "The trail," he says, "takes discipline, it takes caring and a great awareness of others.

"You gain a very deep insight into yourself, your weaknesses and your strengths, and what is beholden upon you then is to close your weaknesses."

As Mr Lynn says: "It is certainly different to a weekend at Jupiter's."

*Martin Chulov joined the trek courtesy of Nuigini Tours and permission of CRA.*



**EXHAUSTED:** James Walker-Powell drops in his tracks during the trek.

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