

# The unforgettable adventure of Kokoda

**F**IFTY YEARS ago a handful of young and ill-prepared Australian soldiers clambered along the treacherous Kokoda Track and stemmed the seemingly invincible onslaught of Japan's Imperial Army. The diggers of the Kokoda Track formed Australia's ragged line of defence against a Japanese war machine that had swept unchecked through Asia and the Pacific.

Hastily trained and untried in combat the diggers were outnumbered and out-gunned by their well-equipped battle-hardened opponents. Nevertheless the Diggers overcame the terrain, their inexperience, their fears, their lack of basic supplies, and their initial defeats to rally and to inflict the first defeat suffered by the Japanese.

It was a display of indomitable spirit against the greatest of odds and the cruelest of hardships, a spirit being honoured by a series of Kokoda Commemorative Treks across the Kokoda track from 1992 to 1995, the 50th anniversary of the campaigns in Papua New Guinea.

They have been organised by adventurer and former Army Major Charlie Lynn, an experienced bush-walker who has a detailed knowledge of the campaigns and a patriotic determination to make Australia pay homage to a piece of history that few school children have even heard of.

The trek that I joined, arriving on Kokoda on the 50th anniversary of its recapture by the Australians on November 2, was a gruelling and arduous eight-day undertaking, beginning at the end of a rough track at Ower's Corner where we were suddenly washed with a terrifying appreciation of the task ahead in the form of a spectacular panoramic view over the awesome Owen Stanley Ranges.

No two treks will be identical, the very nature of the changing terrain and the different natures of those who undertake them ensure that each is an unpredictable adventure.

We made our first steep descent on our first day down to the Goldie River, followed by the first back-breaking "up" into the fringe of the jungle canopy that envelops most of the range. We crossed countless sparkling creeks before beginning the arduous climb up the famous Golden Staircase. The stairs, which comprised thousands of small logs pegged by army engineers into the face of Imita Ridge, have long since rotted away and it is difficult to know whether their absence hinders or helps the struggle to the top.

Still, we clambered to the top of Imita Gap, the final obstacle for the Japanese in their intended capture of Port Moresby and where the Australians were ordered that there would be no further

## ◆ Walking the Kokoda

Track is not a holiday, but Marion Frith found the experience would have to rate as one of life's most challenging.

### TICKET TO

#### The Kokoda Track

For further information on the commemorative treks, contact Charlie Lynn (046) 284 820, fax (046) 283615.

Prices begin from \$2795, ex-Sydney and include return airfares, transfers between airport and hotel, two nights' accommodation at Port Moresby Travelodge, all meals and all costs associated with the trek, including guides, tent and village accommodation and a contribution to each village.

the point where many Australian soldiers from the 21st Brigade found themselves cut-off during the withdrawal from Kokoda and were forced to go bush and endure an epic struggle for survival.

Just north of Menari, a picturesque village which overlooks the mist-bung valley, we climbed to Brigade Hill and Mission Ridge, the site of one of the most important battles of the campaign. The battle was so bloody the diggers, outnumbered by almost six-to-one, referred to it as "Butchers Ridge." We silently sit and pay homage at the battle site, and 72 gravestones that nearby village elders say contain the remains of Australian diggers, claims upheld by excavations.

It is then on to Efoigi which Peter Brune, in his *Those Ragged Bloody Heroes*, says many veterans still regard as the most soul-destroying segment of the track. "The day's exertions to reach Efoigi culminated in the final gruelling scaling of a lofty height, towering some 700 feet, whose sharp gradient had to be renegotiated next morning as a descent." From here it was over to Naduri village, a spiritual and physical haven of laughing children, majestic views, and fresh garden food, before entering the mystical moss forest south of Myola. Finally we broke out of the jungle canopy on the edge of Lake Myola, an extinct volcanic plateau approximately 1700 metres above sea level. The area was discovered by Lieutenant Bert Knieze.



Overnight camp at Alolo Village, in rugged country between Templeton's Crossing and Isurava.

