



A Blueprint for Kokoda Pilgrimage Tourism



This blueprint is based on my personal learnings and experiences gained from:

- leading 100 treks across the Kokoda Trail over a 33-year period;
- my 21 years' service as an army officer; and
- my 40 year involvement in running my own business.

It is also influenced by the feedback from our Adventure Kokoda trek leaders who have a combined total of 160 years professional military experience and who have led more than 650 expeditions across the Kokoda Trail since 1992.

The Hon Charlie Lynn OAM OL
Major (Ret)
30 January 2025

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Burial party on Brigade Hill on the Kokoda Trail - Lest We Forget

Abstract

The 138 km Kokoda Trail, a corridor 10m either side of the tracks over which the Kokoda campaign was fought between Owers Corner and Kokoda in 1942, was officially proclaimed and formally gazetted by the PNG Government during the lead-up to Independence in 1975.

This paper concludes that the rapid increase in trekker numbers from 2004 overwhelmed the PNG management system which was under resourced and unable to cope with the diverse range of demands placed upon it.

After Canberra assumed responsibility for the Kokoda Trail under a Joint Agreement signed in 2008 environment issues relating to the protection of the Brown River Catchment and a bid to assist PNG to obtain a World Heritage listing took priority over tourism management.

This contradicted the findings of an international Rapid Assessment and Prioritisation of Protected Area Management (RAPPAM) report in 2006 and was negated by the construction of the Chinese funded Edevu Hydro Power Project on the Brown River, and an expert report advising that the Kokoda Trail does not meet the criteria for a World Heritage listing.

In the meantime the Kokoda Trail emerged as PNGs most popular tourism destination based on its military heritage and the physical challenge it presented in the '*land of the unexpected*'.

Unfortunately, no management systems have ever been put in place to support its potential as a world-class pilgrimage tourism destination for the economic benefit of landowner communities.

It is now timely for the PNG Government to formally transfer responsibility for the management of Kokoda tourism from the Minister for Provincial and Local Level Government (and the aid-funded influence of the Minister for Environment, Conservation and Climate Change) to the Minister for Tourism, Arts and Culture; to proclaim the gazetted boundaries of the Kokoda Trail between Owers Corner and Kokoda as a National Memorial Park; and use the provisions of their Lands Act to acquire the gazetted boundaries as a National Tourism Asset.

This should coincide with the Australian Government should assigning the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) as the lead agency to establish a Joint Agreement for Commemoration of our Shared Wartime Heritage with PNG and to develop a Military Heritage Master Plan for the Kokoda Trail.

The Kokoda Trekker

Since the 50th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign in 1992 more than 65,000 Australians have trekked across the Trail which has now emerged as PNGs most popular tourism destination.

The majority age bracket of trekkers ranges between 47 and 53 years - they are successful in their work and are attracted by the wartime heritage and the physical challenge it presents in the '*land of the unexpected*'.

They are hyper respectful of the environment and the subsistence villagers they meet - many would like to leave a footprint behind by assisting with local health and education needs if there was a mechanism with good governance for them to do so.

Our Vision

To acknowledge the potential of the Kokoda Trail as a world-class pilgrimage tourism destination capable of providing sustainable economic benefits for traditional landowner communities.

Pilgrimage: Journeys of Meaning

'Just a day's travel from Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane and you can be on the Kokoda Trail.'

'At the foot of the Owen Stanley Ranges in Papua New Guinea you can look into the ancient landscape - majestic peaceful wilderness, nature in its full glory.'

'There have been tracks across the mountains for thousands of years - the people who inhabit the region were gardening at the same time agriculture was developing in Ancient Egypt. The strength of natural and cultural heritage are beyond simple words; fascinating, awesome, daunting - world class.'

'Yet the battles of 1942 and the contemporary interest in 'Kokoda' are what have made it Papua New Guinea's No.1 tourist attraction.'

'In 1942 it was Australians and Papua New Guineans fighting Japanese for what was then Australian land. Young men in a bloody struggle for 'their land'. The battle has become folklore in Australia - a place of pilgrimage like Gallipoli, Villers-Bretonneux, Sandakan, Passchendaele.'

Michael Pender

The Kokoda Trail offers the complete adventure experience for post-war 'boomers' and young adventurers. A trek across it requires physical stamina and mental tenacity. The wartime history evokes strong emotions. The unconditional care and support of local PNG guides and villagers is humbling. The environment is rugged, remote, and pristine.

But equally important for our current generation is a desire for a brief escape from the intrusion of business, government, and social media into the bustle of our daily lives.

These factors are identified in a recent book, 'Pilgrimage - Journeys of Meaning', which provides an insight into the potential of wartime tourism in the modern world and the paradox of pilgrimage.

'Why in our otherwise markedly secular and sceptical times, especially in the developed world where numbers of those who describe themselves as religious is in rapid decline, are people actively seeking out places whose history is soaked in the sort of faith that is anathema to them?'

The author concludes:

'The standard answer I was given many times is that tourism is the new religion, and that pilgrimage just a new name for tourism.'

'For pilgrimage read adventure holiday, and for pilgrim read hiker.'

'Pilgrimage is a word that should be used with care, not thrown around lightly in glossy travel brochures. It signals more than a ramble through foreign countryside with friends more than a chance to get healthy and do some sight-seeing into the bargain.'

'Walking along a pilgrim road opens us to a legacy that reaches beyond firmer muscles and toned bodies. Significant numbers of those who walk the Camino, and who are among the more than 50 percent of them who disclaim the label of religious, nonetheless talk of how the experience leaves them changed.'

'Pilgrimage, past and present, has to be seen as a sub-section of a bigger and even longer human impulse that might be called 'walking with a purpose'.'

'Today that has been amended. The effort of 21st century pilgrimage directs thoughts inwards, as mountains are climbed, kilometres clocked up and blisters endured. Everything is done at walking pace, in contrast to a world that, now more than ever, is ceaselessly rushing ahead faster than we can quite compute. So, on pilgrimage progress can also be measured in self-exploration and self-knowledge.'

'There are many roads, but pilgrimage is less extreme, more mainstream, than many – though it is still quirky enough to raise an eyebrow. 'You! Going on pilgrimage? I'd never have suspected.' With its long history, and extraordinary spiritual geography, it continues to lend itself to the search for meaning.'

Search for 'Meaning'

Papua New Guinea lends itself to such a 'search for meaning' as it is the custodian of land sacred to the shared military heritage for pilgrims from Australia, Japan, and the United States of America.

Marion Frith captured the essence of her Kokoda pilgrimage in a Canberra Times article:

'It is as if we have arrived. Somewhere, anywhere. Our guides sit with us, their families join us, and the village and its people become imprinted in our hearts. Another woman and I join the evening church service and are entranced as the pastor, his face illuminated by a hurricane lamp, recites the prayers in pidgin and the children's voices rise in harmony so sweet we never want it to end.

'We are silent as we get up from the rough-hewn pew. At that moment we have experienced life at its most perfect, superb in its simplicity, and suddenly we realise that the walk was worth it, if only to find this. Peace and joy are tangible, if fleeting, qualities and we know that where we are going to, where we have come from, we will probably never find it again. We want to seal the village in barbed wire and never let the world touch it.'

A niche wartime tourism industry beckons beyond the Kokoda Trail to Rabaul, Milne Bay, Bougainville, Buna-Gona, Shaggy Ridge, Black Cat Track, Markham Valley, Ramu Valley and Finisterre Ranges.

The most relevant guide to the potential of a wartime tourism industry in PNG is the continued growth in those making the annual pilgrimage to Gallipoli.

Each year up to 9000 Australians visit the Dawn Service at Anzac Cove - thousands more visit it at other times of the year. It is also becoming a pilgrimage for more than a million Turkish people who now visit Gallipoli each year.

PNG battlefields and war cemeteries which are closer, cheaper, and just as meaningful attract few visitors apart from around 500 trekkers each year.

Pilgrimage tourism is not restricted to trekkers. It has the capacity for wartime cruises to Port Moresby, Milne Bay, Lae, Madang, Wewak, Aitape, Manus, Rabaul, Bougainville and the Solomon's.

Imagine . . .

an Anzac Dawn Service at Owers Corner; a showcase of PNG culture along Ela Beach; a 'Beating-of-the-Retreat' at Bomana War Cemetery; followed by a 7-day Pacific War Cruise to each of the significant coastal/island battlesites.

The most important challenge for PNG is to develop a sustainable model that can then be applied to each area. The rapid development of pilgrimage tourism provides a timely opportunity for a case study as the basis for developing a model for a wartime tourism industry beyond Kokoda.

But first there needs to be an understanding of the values and needs of pilgrims relating to authenticity, safety, hygiene, governance, and service efficiency.

Relevant Link: [PNG – A Place of Pilgrimage](#)

Kokoda Trail: Environment Vs Tourism

My views have been influenced by this picture I took in a bush hut in Nauro village when it was located in a swamp 30 years ago around 1995:



Koiari villagers have been harvesting their gardens for thousands of years – they are masters of their local environment - this woman would therefore not be concerned about Western concepts such as ‘World Heritage’ or ‘Protected Area Management’.

Her concerns are simple – men to harvest vegetables to cook over the fire for her family; access to a local health centre with a trained nurse; and a good education for her young boy.

Pilgrimage tourism, if properly managed, can provide for all of these needs across the Kokoda Trail.

1. Rapid Assessment and Prioritisation of Protected Area Management Report

A 2006 ‘[Rapid Assessment and Prioritisation of Protected Area Management](#)’ (RAPPAM) report, compiled by the Department of Environment and Conservation, the PNG Forestry Authority, the Research and Conservation Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, and the Village Development Trust advised:

*‘Many of the areas with **high socio-economic importance** are facing a relatively **low degree of threat** (Kokoda, Wiad, Pirung).*

‘Areas like Lihir, Tonda, and Bagiai are exceptions to this rule and hence require more efforts to protect them from the variety of threats they are currently facing.’

If this is the case it begs the question as to why CEPA isn’t doing its job and focusing on priority areas facing a higher degree of environmental threat such as Lihir, Tonda, and Bagiai - particularly in view of the report summary which includes these facts:

- *‘Findings from the assessment indicated a weak PNG Protected Area system that requires some careful rethinking. Thematic areas of Representation, Legislation and Policy, Collaboration and Partnership, Capacity Building and Training, communication, Education and Awareness and Pressure and Threats are highlighted in the recommendations, and*

- *'To ensure that this exercise is not just a paper one, these recommendations must now be turned into an Action Plan and implemented as fully as possible to ensure that the country's outstanding culture and biodiversity are protected for generations to come.'*

The report also revealed that the Kokoda Historical Reserve, which has a low degree of environmental threat, comprises a miniscule area of just **11 hectares**, while Lihir, Tonda, and Bagiai, which have a higher degree of threat, have a combined area of 623,968 hectares.

2. Brown River Catchment Area

The 'Joint Understanding between PNG and Australian on the Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges', signed in 2008, is no longer relevant due to the development of a Chinese funded \$260 million dam on the Brown River (the [Edevu Hydro Project](#)) which has negated the need *'to maintain the Brown River Catchment, given its national importance as a potential water and power supply from Port Moresby'* [\[ii\]](#); and

3. World Heritage

In 2015 an expert report by Dr. Peter Hitchcock, Dr Jenifer Gabriel and Dr. Matthew Leavesley revealed the Kokoda Trail does not meet the criteria for a World Heritage listing. They concluded that the Kokoda Trail:

'has little prospect of being able to stand alone as a World Heritage nomination, at least on natural heritage values. Given the on-going threat to heritage values by mining and other development activities, no part of the Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges Tentative Listed area should be considered for formal nomination as a World Heritage area . . . ' [\[iii\]](#)

A copy of their report can be read on this link: [The Fallacy of World Heritage for the Kokoda Trail](#)

It is therefore time to reset our Joint Understanding by separating 'military heritage' from 'environment'.

4. Organizational Division of Responsibility

After Canberra assumed responsibility for the Kokoda Trail in 2009 the Australian High Commission was concurrently managing a 'Kokoda Development Program' under the auspices of AusAID, while DFAT established their own 'Kokoda Initiative'. It was soon evident that both programs were operating in a parallel universe with neither one related to pilgrimage tourism.

Both failed to address the fact that The Kokoda Trail is a national tourism asset which meant it needed to be elevated from Provincial and Local Government level to the Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA) at the national level. This resulted in negative ramifications for Kokoda tourism as numbers began to fall under their watch.

A 2014 departmental reorganisation in Canberra saw 'Heritage' removed from the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) after it was transformed into the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPC).

'Heritage' was removed from its title.

The AusAID 'Kokoda Development Program' was then amalgamated with the DFAT 'Kokoda Initiative' which increased the influence of environment officials as they were simply transferred from DEWHA/DSEWPC) to DFAT in PNG.

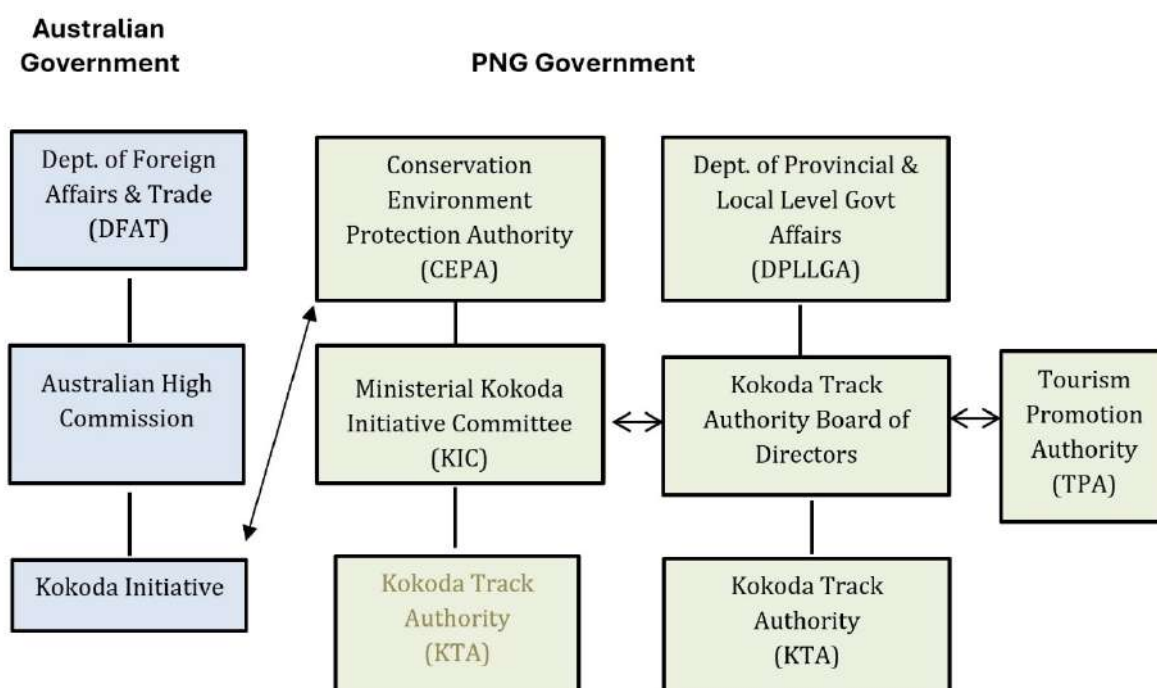
It also became apparent that the Board of Directors appointed by the Minister for Provincial and Local Level Government to oversee the Kokoda Track (Special Purpose) Authority

(KTA) were not qualified for their role. Allegations of nepotism and corruptionⁱⁱ soon began to surface along with their failure to comply with their statutory obligations for good governance.

Rather than address the issue of their suitability for their role the PNG Minister for Environment, Conservation and Climate Change established his own Kokoda Initiative Committee (KIC) within his Conservation Environment Protection Authority (CEPA).

The DFAT Strategic Management Advisor was appointed secretary of the KIC which increased his influence over the management of The Kokoda Trail and the flow of aid-funded projects.

The following management structure which evolved from this process can best be described as an unworkable ‘*dog’s breakfast*’ with the two key stakeholders for pilgrimage tourism i.e. the Minister for Veterans Affairs and the Minister for Tourism, Arts and Culture being effectively sidelined.



5. 2019 Annual DFAT Kokoda Initiative Report

The 2019 Annual Review of the DFAT ‘Kokoda Initiative Partnership’ represented a hijack of pilgrimage tourism across the Kokoda Trail by Australian environmental officials.

The review failed to address the chronic dysfunction of the management systems put in place since Canberra assumed control of the Kokoda Trail in 2009.

It failed to address the lack of governance within their surrogate PNG organisation, the Kokoda Track (Special Purpose) Authority (KTA), which has failed to account for more than K12 million in trek fees.

It also failed to address the issue of ‘pilgrimage’ which is the primary reason Australians choose to trek across the Trail.

Relevant Link: [2019 Kokoda Initiative Annual Report-A betrayal of our Kokoda Legacy](#)

6. **DFAT proposal for a National Kokoda Track Management Authority**

In 2019 the Conservation Environment Protection Authority (CEPA), which controls their Ministerial Kokoda Initiative Committee (KIC), initiated a clandestine plan to legislate their control over the Kokoda Trail via the development of a new 'Kokoda Track Management Authority (KTMA) Act.

The proposal to wrest legal control of the Kokoda Trail from Minister for Provincial and Local Level Government by creating a new environment authority would be a significant addition to the influence of the Minister for Environment, Conservation and Climate Change in Government.

It would also increase the amount of aid-funds flowing through his portfolio and provide a career enhancing haven for foreign environment officials.

The proposed Bill was intercepted by the Deputy Chairman of the Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA), Mr. Andrew Abel CSM ML, who is well aware of the negative impact it would inevitably have on PNGs most popular tourism destination by having it managed as an aid-funded environment park as opposed to a tourism enterprise for the economic benefit of traditional landowner communities.

From: Mark Nizette <mark.nizette@gmail.com>

Date: Thu, 1 Apr 2021, 11:47 am

Subject: KTMA Draft Bill and Discussion Paper

To: Gary Juffa <Gvjuffa@gmail.com>

Gary,

*Attached is the latest version of the KTMA draft bill, and a draft discussion paper **I'm working on**, and a draft covering brief for you and the other members of the KIC.*

There are some key policy issues we require guidance on and then your approval to get this draft out to the communities and the other stakeholders (e.g. tour operators).

We will then finalise it for final KIC approval and then go through the channels to get it to Parliament for the three readings. Would love to have this in place before the end of 2021 so we can start 2022 with the KTMA.

*Your help would be most appreciated, as I'm finding it difficult to step people through the process (being so far away). However, Julius and Dr Moutu have been very helpful. **(CEPA has been more absent – just between you and me).***

Happy to discuss the content and the process of going forward from here. I think Martin Brash could assist.

Please note that nothing is set in stone yet, with the bill, or my discussion papers etc. We need KIC clearance/discussion and feedback/direction.

m.

Mark Nizette, MBE

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It was no surprise that CEPA had *'been more absent'* as there is nobody in the organization qualified in business management, pilgrimage tourism, or commemoration. The only person with the incentive to hijack the word 'Kokoda' to drive an environment agenda far beyond the Trail as a career enhancing opportunity was Mark Nizette.

It is possible the lines of *'advice'* and *'influence'* could therefore have been blurred due to Mr. Nizette's long tenure as a Strategic Advisor with the Kokoda Initiative (2011-2021) and his influential role as Secretary of the KIC.

The process leading to the development of the proposed KTMA Bill indicates Mark Nizette may have therefore fused his role of 'advisor' with that of 'influencer' of PNG legislation. For example, according to Word and pdf document properties relating to the proposed bill:

- The author of the 'Issues Brief KTMA Draft Legislation' signed by Mr. Julius Wargiral, is 'Mark Nizette'.
- The author of the 'KTMA Bill "Zero Draft" Discussion Paper February 2022' is 'Mark Nizette'.
- The author of the 'KTMA Discussion Paper, March 2021', is 'Mark Nizette'.
- The author of the 'Kokoda Track Management Authority Bill 2021' is 'Mark Nizette'.

An overview of Mark Nizette's tenure as the DFAT Strategic Advisor to the Kokoda Initiative from 2011-2024 can be viewed on this link:

- [Mark Nizette MBE: Kokoda Advisor or Foreign Influencer?](#)

Nizette's proposed Bill failed to address the reasons behind the collapse in trekker numbers and the subsequent loss of income earning opportunities for the village communities our aid agencies were supposed to help under his watch.

It also fails to acknowledge that the Kokoda Trail is PNGs most popular tourism destination.

There is no record of any consultation with key stakeholders in Kokoda tourism in the drafting process of the bill as required by PNG law.

The bill seeks to extend the influence of Canberra environment officials by expanding the 10-hectare area of the wartime Kokoda Trail to a 230,000 hectare 'Kokoda Corridor' and designating it as a 'protected area'. This would provide a bonanza for Australian aid-funded officials and consultants.

If the bill is approved by National Executive Council (NEC) PNG will become the only country in the World to manage its most popular tourism destination as an environment park for the benefit of aid-funded foreign officials, rather than as a national tourism enterprise for the economic benefit of traditional landowners.

A detailed analysis of DFATs proposed bill can be viewed on this link:: [Environment Bill for Kokoda – A suicide note for Kokoda tourism](#)

7. Final review PNG–Australia Governance Partnership

The final review of the Kokoda Initiative abandons any pretence of the importance of our shared wartime heritage of the Kokoda Trail.

It's clear Canberra environment officials see it as an opportunity to extend their social engineering agenda into PNG at the expense of subsistence villagers across the Kokoda Trail:

*'While the review focuses on the period between April 2019 and March 2022, it takes a broader perspective on the overall legacy, learnings and effectiveness of the investment. **It also incorporated two deep dives: one on gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) and one on the impact of COVID-19.***

'The corresponding Management Response was prepared by the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby in June 2022, in consultation with DFAT Canberra. It outlines the key findings, review approach, management learnings and lessons for future programming in the governance sector and through 'facility' modalities. It also links key lessons from the review to major new DFAT programs in PNG.'

It is worthy of note that neither Kokoda tour companies who generate the income for pilgrimage tourism; the Department of Veterans Affairs; the Australian War Memorial; the Tourism Promotion Authority; nor the traditional landowner communities across the Trail were consulted as part of the process for developing their report.

If they had consulted village communities along the Kokoda Trail via 'village-based workshops' they would have learned they are strict adherents to the faith of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. As a result there are virtually no alcohol, drug or endemic domestic violence issues. The roles of men and women in these villages have been conditioned by centuries of subsistence living and are based on mutual respect. All villages along the trail have women engaged as teachers and health workers.

Women along the trail are as smart, as tough and as strong as the men. Trekkers are often humbled by the sight of young mothers carrying a baby with a bilum as heavy as their backpacks walking up mountains in bare feet – and always with a friendly smile to greet trekkers as they pass.



If you're not touched by these type of pics taken in the middle of the jungle-you don't have a heart!

The problem has been the failure of the Kokoda Initiative to introduce programs that will allow them to earn additional income by providing services that meet the needs of trekkers.

For example, PNG is the coffee capital of the Pacific, but it is not possible for trekkers to buy a cup of coffee anywhere along the trail. Most trekkers would gladly pay \$10 cup of freshly brewed coffee with a fresh scone from a drum oven (3300 trekkers X 2 cups per day X 8 days @K20 = K1 Million in additional income. Add to this the opportunity for villagers to wash and dry trekkers clothes; have a hot shower; purchase a bilum with the name of their village and 'Kokoda Trail' on it; and special commemorative activities at significant locations along the trail and we have the potential for them to increase their annual earnings of up to K2 million.

The Kokoda Initiative has not developed any discussion papers or sought feedback from tour companies as to how best local villagers could be trained to increase their income earning potential.

The 50th anniversary of Independence is a timely opportunity for PNG to break from the shackles of Australian aid-dependency and reclaim ownership of their Kokoda Trail for the economic benefit of their traditional landowner communities.

Joint Agreement for Commemoration of our Shared Wartime Heritage

Papua **and** New Guinea were Australian mandated territories in 1942 – the two territories were amalgamated as Papua New Guinea when they were granted independence in 1975.

After the War in the Pacific from 1942-45 more than 7,400 Australians Killed In Action (KIA) were buried in Commonwealth War Cemeteries at Bomana, Lae, and Rabaul. These are managed by the Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG) within the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) which is also responsible for the Australian War Memorial.

DVA funded the Isurava Memorial on the 60th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign in 2002 but have not invested in any form of plan or interpretive memorial since then despite its increasing popularity as a pilgrimage tourism destination for Australian taxpayers.

A Joint Understanding to seek a World Heritage nomination for the Kokoda Trail and Owen Stanley Ranges was signed between the Australian and PNG environment Ministers in 2008 and since then the Trail has been managed as an environment park.

No funds have been invested in military heritage projects across the Trail under their watch and no systems have been developed to manage it as a pilgrimage tourism enterprise. Trekker numbers have since fallen by 42 percent as a result.

The 50th anniversary of PNG's Independence is a timely opportunity for the Minister for Tourism, Arts and Culture to invite Australia's Minister for Veterans Affairs to use the Kokoda Trail as a model to develop a Joint Agreement to commemorate our shared wartime heritage, A draft document can be read on this link:

- [Proposed Joint Agreement for Commemoration of the shared wartime heritage between PNG and Australia](#)

If Australia is reluctant to proceed with such an agreement and to support a new management structure for pilgrimage tourism the PNG Government should be prepared to go it alone as the

average number of trekkers across the Trail in recent years makes it economically viable for them to do so.

Australia-PNG Military Heritage Cooperation

An [Australian-Japan Research Project](#) was established at the [Australian War Memorial](#) more than a decade ago. The project seeks to explore aspects of Australian and Japanese attitudes to the Pacific War using archival material held by the Australian War Memorial.

The recent upscaling of army cooperation between Australia and PNG in response to China's expanding influence in the Pacific should include a strategy to identify, record, map and signpost significant battlesites of each campaign.

The Australian War Memorial could assist by developing an 'Australian-PNG Project along similar lines to their Australia-Japan Project.

Reg Yates, a former Australian Army captain has explored all of the significant campaign sites throughout Papua New Guinea over a 40-year period and published [‘A Guide to Adventurous Training for ADF Personnel’](#). This could be used as a template for a detailed heritage plan of each site.

Small teams of Australian and PNG army officers could be assigned to each of the significant sites across the Kokoda Trail (Kokoda, Deniki, Isurava, Eora Creek, Templeton's Crossing, Lake Myola, Brigade Hill, Ridge, Ioribaiwa and Imita Ridges) to study the tactics of each battle then map and signpost each one. This would complement interpretive memorials which could later be developed as part of a Military Heritage Master Plan for the Kokoda campaign.

This model of research and development could then be replicated at other significant campaign sites throughout PNG.

ADF-PNGDF Cooperation

Pilgrimage tourism, based on our shared military heritage across the Kokoda Trail, lends itself to meaningful cooperation between Australian army personnel stationed in PNG and their PNGDF counterparts in the following areas:

1. Campsite Development

Campsites are an essential component in the transformation of the Kokoda Trail into a world-class pilgrimage tourism destination.

To meet the demands of high-value international tourists campsites need to be strategically located with the following facilities built from 'bush material' with a capacity for up to 35 trekkers and a support crew of 100 guides and porters:

- **Trekker Needs:**
 - A kitchen
 - Dining hut for 35 trekkers
 - Drying hut
 - Flat grassed area for 35 tents
 - Shower block with change room
 - Three toilets
- **PNG Support Crew Needs:**
 - Kitchen
 - Sleeping huts for up to 100
 - Drying hut

- Four toilets

2. Battlesite Research & Restoration

The army has a process for conducting an ‘appreciation of a battle’ relating to each phase of war (Advance, Attack, Defence, Withdrawal). The ‘appreciation process’ is referred to as a ‘Tactical Exercise Without Troops’ (TEWTs) which leads to the drafting of ‘orders’ for each particular phase.

Each battle site across the Kokoda Trail lends itself to a training exercise for young Australian and PNG army officers.

The process would lead to the defensive layout of each site and the identification of weapon pits which are easily identified. These could be then be scraped out and identified with discreet signage.

TEWTs would lead to a more informed interpretation which would be incorporated into the heritage plan for each site.

Military Heritage Master Plan

A Military Heritage Master Plan developed by an accredited heritage architect under the auspices of the Australian War Memorial would include the restoration and interpretation of all significant campaign sites along the 138 km Kokoda Trail between Owers Corner and Kokoda as gazetted by the PNG Government in 1972.

This is within the remit of the Australian War Memorial as Papua and New Guinea were Australian mandated territories in 1942. The Military Heritage Master Plan would include:

1. Owers Corner Visitors Centre

Owers Corner is at the end of an all-weather road approximately 40 km from Port Moresby - it commands a majestic view of the Owen Stanley Range at the point our veterans stepped onto the trail.

A Visitors Centre based on the military heritage of the place along with a replica Koiari tree house, a coffee shop; an arts and crafts shop; a ceremonial welcome area would see it soon develop as PNG's most popular tourism destination due to its proximity and road access to the national capital.

The replica village would assist in the development of a ‘day-trekking’ industry with guided treks down to the Goldie River and/or up to Imita Ridge and back. The initiative would lead to increased economic activity for other local markets on the Sogeri Plateau.

Relevant links:

- [Owers Corner – Neglected Gateway to the Kokoda Trail](#)
- [Owers Corner – How to convert a memorial junkyard into PNG's No. 1 tourism asset](#)
- [Case for a Visitors Centre at Owers Corner](#)

2. The Kokoda Plateau

The Kokoda plateau has the potential to be the next most popular tourism destination in PNG and certainly the most visited in Oro Province as it also has all-weather road access from the provincial capital of Popondetta.

The Kokoda plateau should therefore be accorded its proper place as a military heritage precinct.

It represents the only time in Australian history where Australian troops were attacked by a hostile foreign aggressor on Australian mandated territory. Over the following three months Australian and PNG soldiers and wartime carriers absorbed the horror of pitched battles back to the last line of defence for Port Moresby, then rallied and drove them back to recapture Kokoda. On 3rd November 1942 they raised the Australian flag on the same Kokoda plateau they had been driven from on 29 July 1942.

Kokoda is currently an anti-climax for trekkers – particularly after they have visited the Isurava Memorial – because there is nothing there that captures the spirit of what it represents.

A ‘Military heritage – Orokaiva Cultural Precinct’ on the Kokoda Plateau would open the tourism potential of the area to a wider Australian cohort who do not have the time or the physical capability to trek across the trail but who would like to be able to visit such a significant place to pay their respects. It would also be a gateway to further wartime heritage developments along the 90 km Kokoda Highway towards the ‘Battle of the Beachheads’ in the Buna-Gona area.

3. Kokoda Heritage Battlesites

Independent military heritage interpretation plans should be drafted for each significant site across the Trail which include Deniki, Isurava, Alola, Abuari, Eora Creek, Templeton’s Crossing, Lake Myola, Mission Ridge, Brigade Hill, Ioribaiwa Ridge and Imita Ridge.

Kokoda Tourism Business Model

Government is responsible for providing infrastructure and policies to support economic development which will minimise risk for private investment and lead to a broadening of their taxation base via profits generated.

Government bodies such as TPA and KTA have a responsibility to ensure Kokoda tour companies meet their taxation obligations in PNG. A review of IPA returns has revealed that 99 percent of licensed Kokoda tour companies have not paid any tax on the profits they have generated over the past 20 years.

The business model for Kokoda tourism should be based on an acknowledgement that the wartime heritage of the Kokoda campaign, along with the physical challenge across the rugged Owen Stanley Ranges in the ‘*land of the unexpected*’, are the primary reasons Australians choose to trek across the Kokoda Trail.

Government investment in support of Kokoda tourism should therefore address the following criteria:

- Will the investment enhance the value of the pilgrimage for trekkers?
- Will it assist village communities to earn additional income?
- Will it ensure the Trail is safe?

The income structure for the industry should therefore be based on providing for the administrative cost of the management body; the safety of the Trail; assistance with community development; and support for village income generating initiatives.

Kokoda Tourism Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders in the development of pilgrimage tourism across the Kokoda Trail are the Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA) representing Government; traditional landowner communities; and tour companies who generate the income for the industry.

All others are ‘interested parties’.

Management Issues

1. Duty of Care

Because the Kokoda Trail is located in a rugged and remote jungle environment the Australian and PNG Governments have a shared ‘duty of care’ to ensure safety issues relating to connecting roads and airfields are maintained; an effective communications system is operational; and there is a competent management authority in place.

The management authority has a ‘duty of care’ to ensure licensed tour companies have legitimate and adequate Public Liability Insurance policies; VHF radios and satellite phones for emergencies; and leaders with advanced First Aid qualifications. They must also verify that each of their trekkers has a Travel Insurance Policy which provides for emergency evacuation by helicopter from anywhere along the trail.

2. Governance

There is currently no due-diligence conducted by the Kokoda Track Authority on individuals seeking a ‘Commercial Tour Operators Licence’.

There are no checks to verify if the applicant has a registered company in accordance with the IPA Act; a Public Liability Insurance policy; communications equipment; training in advanced First Aid; or the means to protect the welfare of their PNG support crews.

The current system therefore favours opportunistic tour companies who ‘cherry-pick’ peak season periods and do nothing to build their business at other times.

Consideration should therefore be given to imposing a 100 per cent peak season loading on trek permits for tour companies operators who apply for less than 150 trek permits per trekking season. This will provide them with an incentive to market their treks outside peak periods and therefore spread opportunities for the employment of local guides, carriers and campsite owners over non-peak periods.

Such a loading would increase the income stream for the management authority during these periods.

Essential Management Tools

Essential tools for an effective management system are:

1. A head office;
2. qualified staff
3. an effective Kokoda tourism ranger system;
4. a modern, interactive website;
5. a comprehensive database management system;
6. an online campsite booking system; and
7. a VHF communications system.

Organizational Structure for Kokoda Tourism Management

The organizational structure for the Kokoda Trail should acknowledge the findings of the International Rapid Assessment and Prioritisation of Protected Management (RAPPAM) report which found that many of the areas (such as the Kokoda Trail) ‘with high socio-economic importance are facing a relatively low degree of threat’.

It follows that the Kokoda Trail should therefore be transferred from the Minister for Provincial and Local Level Government and the aid-funded influence of the Minister for Environment, Conservation and Climate Change, to the Minister for Tourism Arts and Culture.

The DFAT ‘Kokoda Initiative’ should therefore be rebadged as the ‘Owen Stanley Initiative’ to reflect its proper role in Protected Area Management for the surrounding environment.

The division of responsibility between conservation and environment in the wider Owen Stanley Ranges and pilgrimage tourism across the Kokoda Trail is illustrated in the following charts:

Conservation & Environment Management for the Owen Stanley Ranges

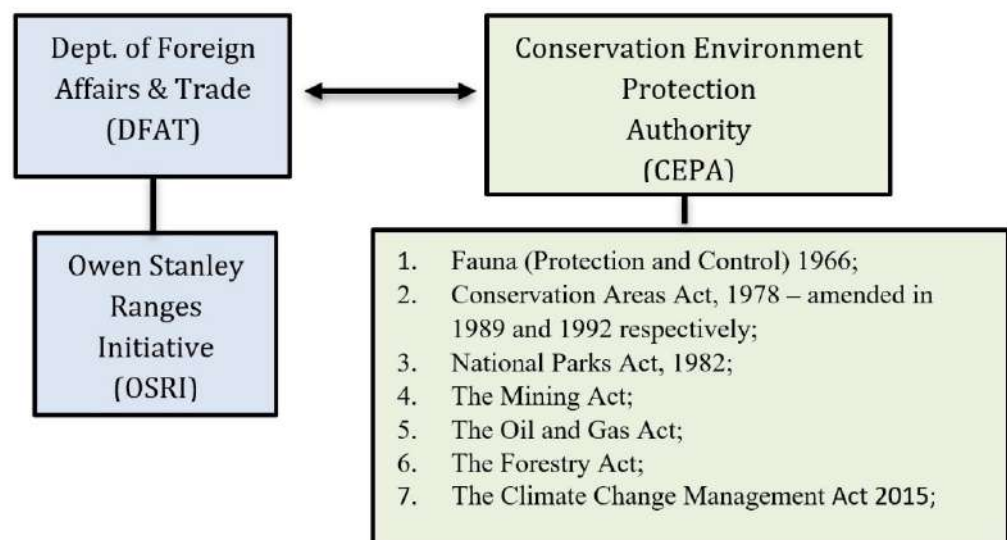


Figure 1: Owen Stanley Ranges Initiative

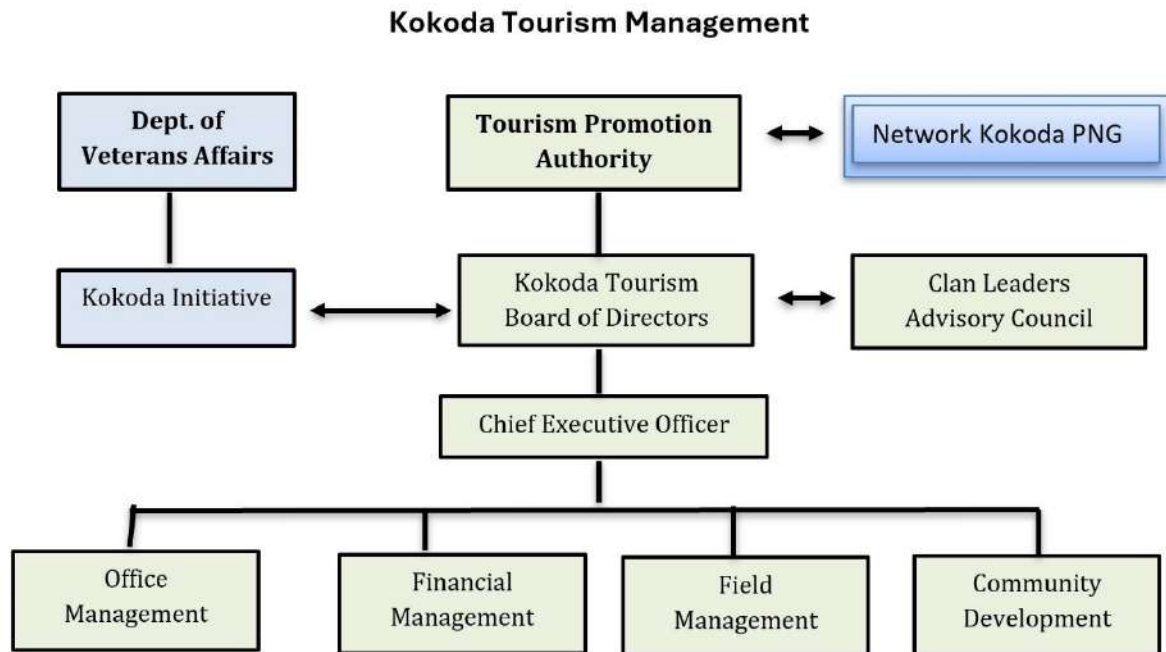


Figure 2: Kokoda Initiative

The Board of Directors for pilgrimage tourism management across the Kokoda Trail should include the CEO of the Tourism Promotion Authority; the Governors of Oro and Central Provincial Governments; the Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG); the President of the PNG Flag Officers Association; the President of the Port Moresby RSL, and professionals with expertise in business, law, accounting, governance and military history.

An Advisory Council should include representatives from the Koiari and Kokoda Local Level Governments; the Chairman of each Incorporated Land Owners Group; Ward Chairmen from each sector along the trail; and village women's groups.

The operational management structure should comprise the following functions:

- Offices management to operate the website, database an online booking system and routine office functions to support the administration of the authority.
- Financial management responsible for all financial transactions; the provision of monthly financial reports to the CEO and the Board of Directors; and the publication of Annual Financial Reports on the website.
- Field management to protect the wartime heritage and environment values of the Kokoda Trail and manage tourism rangers, liaise with landowners, manage checkpoints, conduct campsite audits and supervise track safety/maintenance.
- Community Development responsible for the conduct of annual village-based workshops; the development of an integrated community development strategy; community development partnerships; and liaison with Government aid agencies and philanthropic organisations.

The management system should be supported by legislation and a licensing system which reflects local cultural traditions and provides a level playing field for Kokoda tour operators. It should have a professional website linked to a database and an online booking system. The financial

management functions should be managed by a commercial business manager who operates at 'arm's length' to avoid intimidation and influence from vested interests.

Attachment 1 below contains a suggested brief for a professional website.

Licences, Fee Structures & Levies

Kokoda tour company licenses will be restricted to Proprietary Limited companies registered with the PNG Investment Promotion Authority (IPA).

Australian companies must also be approved as a Foreign Enterprise in accordance with the IPA Act and contract with a registered PNG company to provide in-country administrative and logistic support for their trekking operations.

All licensed Kokoda tour companies would be required to submit their annual return to the IPA along with a copy to the Kokoda Trail Management Authority (KTMA).

1. Kokoda Tour Company Licencing System

A credible Kokoda tour company licencing system will be based on the lodgement of a bond with Kokoda Tourism Management and a contract with a registered PNG company to provide administrative and logistic support for Australian Kokoda tour companies.

The bond will be refundable should the tour operator decide to surrender their licence.

The licencing system will reflect the fact that Australian tour companies are required to invest considerable resources in marketing treks, purchasing gear, recruiting and training trek leaders, booking international air travel and accommodation, and managing clients.

PNG companies also invest considerable resources in arranging ground and air transport; recruiting and training guides and porters; storage, issue and maintenance of uniforms, sleeping bags, camping gear and communications equipment; confirmation of campsite bookings, on-Trail payments for campsites and local contingencies; and the purchase, storage, and issue of food and medical supplies for the duration of each trek.

PNG companies will be registered with the IPA and IRC, have a business bank account, and file annual returns as required by the IPA Act.

To ensure compliance Australian Kokoda tour operators will be required to provide a copy of the international transfer to their PNG company with their application for Trek Permits to Kokoda Tourism Management 14-days prior to the start of each trek.

The annual licence fee will be K10,000 to cover the cost of administration and compliance by Kokoda Tourism Management. According to the number of licensed Kokoda tour operators on the Kokoda Track website this would yield K370,000 each year.

A refundable bond of K5000 will apply.

2. Peak and Non-Peak Trekking Periods

According to KTA records peak times for trekking during the year occur during the Anzac period in April and designated school holiday periods.

The records also show many opportunistic tour operators '*cherry-pick*' peak season periods and do nothing to build their business to generate local employment or provide income earning opportunities for villagers at other times.

Consideration will therefore be given to imposing a 100 per cent peak season loading on trek permits for tour operators who led an average of less than 150 trekkers across the Trail during the previous three trekking seasons.

This will create an incentive to market their treks outside peak periods and therefore provide a more even spread of employment opportunities for local guides, porters and campsite owners during the trekking season.

Such a loading would increase the income stream for Kokoda Tourism Management during these periods.

The following trek permit fee rates will apply during the peak periods of Anzac and school holidays:

- Peak Season Tour Company: K500 per trekker
- Non-Peak Season Tour Company: K1000 per trekker

The Australian governments should fund essential positions such as a Chief Executive Officer, a Commercial Business Manager, a Chief Finance Officer, and a Field Manager. The remainder of the positions in the management authority should be funded by trek fees.

Community Development and Trail Maintenance levies should be introduced and paid in advance as part of the Online Booking System process.

Additional Levies

1. Community Development Levy

It is not possible to have community development without community consultation and community involvement. The most effective means of achieving this is through the conduct of annual village based workshops with facilitators experienced in local language and culture. This will ensure a continuous review of objectives, partnerships and commitments.

This important area has been ignored by Australian government officials since they assumed control of the industry in 2009 despite much advice to the contrary.

There is a need for an independent philanthropic entity with an empathetic understanding of the needs of local communities along the trail and with proven expertise in the delivery of sustainable community development partnerships.

A K100 'Community Development Levy' would yield an additional K33,000.

2. Trail Maintenance Levy

There has been considerable environmental degradation of the trail since trekker numbers increased substantially in 2006. There was a flurry of activity after Canberra assumed control of the trail in 2008. Australian 'volunteers' were flown into locations along the trail to do work local villagers had been doing for generations at significant cost to the taxpayer. Very little follow up maintenance has been completed since they left around five years ago.

The resources of trek operators, who have a vested interest in the safety/maintenance of the trail, were ignored in this process.

The solution to the challenge of trail maintenance is relatively simple and could be solved with a 'trail maintenance levy' of K100 per trekker. This would generate an income of K330,000 for payment directly to villagers involved in trek maintenance each year.

The trail could be divided into say five areas between Owers Corner and Kokoda. Ranger Teams for each one could then be paid around K66,000 each to maintain the Trail in a safe condition and rebuild the necessary bridges prior to start of the trekking season in March each year.

Trek operators could be invited to provide trail reports at the end of each trek to the field manager/chief ranger. They could also report on the standard of work carried out by trail maintenance crews and make recommendations as appropriate.

3. Significant Site Levy

There is considerable angst amongst landowners of significant sites along the trail because they are missing out on a large share of benefits from the Kokoda trekking industry due to the lack of any accounting/banking system to support them.

The management authority could assist by collecting the fees in advance and paying them directly into the landowner's personal bank account. This would require the management authority to identify each significant site and each landowner – then assist each one to establish a bank account.

Significant sites include Owers Corner, Imita Ridge, Ioribaiwa Ridge, Brigade Hill, Lake Myola, Templeton's Crossing, Eora Creek, Abuari Waterfall, Isurava battlesite, Deniki and Kokoda. These could also include local museums at Efogi and Isurava to provide them with an incentive to display and maintain weapons, ordnance and gear they have recovered as well as wartime aircraft wrecks.

A K10 Significant Site Levy would raise \$175 000 (i.e. \$15 000 for each landowner).

Significant site landowners would be required to maintain the site in a clean and safe condition.

4. Charity Levy

Australian charities have used the Kokoda Trail to raise significant amounts of funds for various causes. Whilst these are well intentioned there is little evidence of such funding contributing to worthy causes in PNG – even after trek participants witness the needs of villagers along the trail!

One professional charity, the Kokoda Challenge, hijacked the idea of having an annual team endurance event to raise funds for educational and health scholarships and diverted the profits to develop a 'Camp Kokoda' on the Gold Coast for Australian youth. The 'Kokoda Challenge' has since 'diverted' more than K6 million from the intended recipients in PNG to young Australians who already have an abundance of support programs in this area. The Kokoda Challenge website details 'where the money goes' at <http://kokodachallenge.com/where-does-the-money-go>

A 'Charity Levy' of K1,000 per trekker for one-off charitable treks and K2,500 per trekker for professional charities such as the 'Kokoda Challenge', Intrepid Travel, Aurora Adventures would ensure that villagers along the trail would receive a significant share of benefits from 'charity trekkers'.

Philanthropy

Philanthropy offers the best opportunity to fund community development, health and education initiatives across the Kokoda Trail.

One charity, [Network Kokoda](#) (established by Adventure Kokoda), has funded the establishment of a Community Learning Centre at Sogeri; agricultural projects at Sogeri and Iaowari High Schools; a TB Isolation Ward at Popondetta Hospital; a Community Centre at Abuari village; student scholarships; and emergency evacuations and medical treatment.

Other tour companies have also provided philanthropic support however there has been no interest from the DFAT-Kokoda Initiative or the Kokoda Track Authority to formalise a program which would allow trekkers to make charitable contributions on a regular basis.

Their failure to establish a database to record the contact details of trekkers has resulted in a lost opportunity to raise millions of Kina for charitable causes.

For example, if just 10 percent of the 65,000 trekkers who have crossed the Trail agreed to donate the equivalent cost of one cappuccino per week to a philanthropic Kokoda Trust' it would now have an income stream of K4 million per year to support local health centres, schools and community development projects.

The figure would possibly be much higher than this as some of the wealthiest and most influential Australians have trekked Kokoda over the past two decades.

Campsites

Campsites should be a unique feature of the Kokoda experience. They should be built from bush material and contain adequate and hygienic ablution blocks including latrines with privacy screens. They should also contain a kitchen and dining area for individual trek groups, sleeping huts for guides and carriers, a haus drai for both trekkers and guides, and a sufficient amount of firewood for each group.

Ideally they should be segregated from villages so they do not impose on their day-to-day routine – particularly on the Sabbath. They should not be 'grouped' with other sites as individual trek groups develop and cherish their own integrity as part of their Kokoda experience. 'Grouped' campsites also increase the size of the scar on the local environment.

There has been no order in the development of campsites along the trail over the past decade. Landowners carved out sites at random then found there was not enough business to sustain them. Many have since been abandoned and are slowly being reclaimed by the jungle.

Campsites should be strategically located to meet the demands of peak trekking periods. There is scope for landowners to operate their sites as micro business enterprises. In addition to standard kitchen/dining huts, guide/carrier accommodation, male/female ablutions blocks and toilets there should be level sites for tents. Tents could be provided by the management authority for each site on a repayment basis. Campsite fees could be increased by \$5 per night per trekker. This increment would be withheld by the management authority until the tents were paid for then the landowner would get the full benefit of the increased fee.

Tents would be stored by the landowner and erected when the management authority advised them of the number required and the dates according to their booking system. Campsite fees owing by the trekkers would be pre-paid to the management authority and deposited directly into each landowner's bank account.

The concept of 'trekkers huts' should be discounted. Trekkers prefer to have their own private space after a day's trekking and the most effective means of achieving this is with individual mosquito proof tents.

This concept would allow for heavier duty tents to be used for trekkers accommodation as they would not have to be carried by each group. It would also leave a smaller footprint on the trail as fewer carriers would be required. The money saved by trek operators as a result of not having to purchase, maintain and store tents would benefit landowners who would receive increased campsite fees.

Such a system would be dependent on an efficient campsite booking system being implemented.

1. Campsite Fees

The current campsite fee of K20 for trekkers and K5 for PNG guides could be increased by 50 per cent for those who meet the standards established by the management authority. A proper 'campsite accreditation system' would potentially increase their combined income by more than K1 million a year.

2. Campsite Audits

There is an urgent need for a 'Campsite Audit System' to ensure local landowners receive the full amount due to them. Such an audit has been recommended many times in recent years but has not been implemented. As a result local campsite owners are being effectively short-changed by unscrupulous trek operators. It is a relatively easy task for Tourism Rangers to gather the details of payments from each trek group at each campsite and report the figures back to the Chief Ranger for cross-checking.

3. Campsite Register

There needs to be a Campsite Register provided to every campsite owner along the Kokoda Trail. The Campsite Register would be photographed by the KTMA Rangers as part of their Campsite Audit process and submitted to the management authority at the end of each calendar month.

The Campsite Register should include:

- Date
- Trek No (as per Trek Permit)
- Direction of Trek (Kokoda to Owers or Owers to Kokoda)
- No of Trekkers
- No of Trek Guides/Porters
- Total campsite fees paid
- Total payment for food provided by campsite owner/village
- Trek leaders name
- Trek leaders signature

Operators would be required to pay all guesthouse and campsite fees prior to moving on from that location.

The ultimate objective would be to pay all campsite fees in advance according to respective trek itineraries. These should be deposited into the bank accounts of campsite owners immediately after the tour company reports that all facilities and services were provided (clean toilets, discreet ablution facilities, dining facilities, haus drai, firewood, accommodation for guides and trekkers, etc.).

Guides & Porters

Guides and porters are the unsung heroes of Kokoda tourism – Deidre McKinnon's comments are common among trekkers:

'My personal carrier, Paul Duri, was an "angel" in every sense of the word – kind, pure and beautiful and a gift from God. When I was sick Paul washed my clothes, he dried my backpack and filled my water bladder and helped me out in many ways over and beyond his job description. I never asked him to do these things he just insisted on helping.'

Despite this they are the least appreciated by Port Moresby based PNG officials responsible for their welfare because they have never trekked with groups to see them in action. They are therefore vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous Kokoda tour operators.

If Kokoda tourism is to achieve its potential as a world-class pilgrimage tourism destination it is essential that the following welfare needs of guides and porters are addressed:

1. Uniforms

An essential step towards a 'high-value' Kokoda pilgrimage is the provision of uniforms for all guides and porters employed by licensed Kokoda tour companies.

The current practice of providing them with only a t-shirt advertising their company name is not good enough.

The minimum requirement should be for each guide and porter to be issued with a cap, shirt, shorts and rain-jacket/poncho with each item bearing their respective company logos.

This will instil a sense of pride within PNG support crews and add to the professional 'look' of their respective teams.

2. Minimum Pay Rates

It takes an average of eight (8) days to comfortably trek across the 138 km Kokoda Trail.

Some Kokoda tour companies advertise 'fast treks' of 4, 5, or 6 days' which means PNG support crews have to work longer hours to complete it faster. However it is common practice for them to be paid a daily rate so if they complete it faster than the normal 8-day itinerary they actually receive less pay.

This practice should not be tolerated. All PNG support crews should be paid a flat rate of 8-days' pay for treks of shorter duration with a loading of 15 percent due to the longer hours they have to work to support their trekkers each day.

3. Personal Equipment

Under the current system guides and carriers are required to provide their own blanket or sleeping bag by most tour companies. This is another form of subtle exploitation as many cannot afford to purchase a sleeping bag and therefore have to rely on thin blankets to keep warm in areas where temperatures drop as low zero degrees at night in the higher altitudes.

Kokoda tour companies should therefore be obliged to provide each of the PNG support crew with a sleeping bag and foam sleeping mat.

4. Trek Meals

Many operators pay their guides and porters a small allowance to buy their own food from villagers as they pass through.

This is an abhorrent practice as villagers are challenged in meeting the demands of trek groups during peak-trekking periods when most of their boys are absent working as guides and porters.

Kokoda tour operators should therefore be required to provide the same ration scale for their PNG support crews as they do for their trekkers from supermarkets in Port Moresby – apart from some variations in local tastes. Village food should only be used to supplement local vegetables for food if and when available.

5. Backpack Weight Limits

The maximum backpack weight limit permitted by regimental medical officers for wartime carriers during the Kokoda campaign was 18kg. The current weight limit prescribed by the Kokoda Track Authority (as a result of intense lobbying by the Australia Kokoda Tour Operators Association) is 22.5 kg.

According to our observations and a review of some Kokoda ranger reports the recommended maximum weight is often exceeded.

Whilst young porters are strong enough to carry excess weight it is inevitable they will have longer term medical issues with their backs, knees and ankles. Many will not be able to tend to their gardens in older age as a result.

The Kokoda Track Authority therefore has a duty of care to prevent them from exploitation to ensure their porters are not overloading by imposing a maximum weight limit of 18 kg.

- [Kokoda Tour Operators Association: A Shameless Australian Lobby Group](#)

6. Annual Pay Adjustments

The past neglect of the welfare of PNG guides and carriers needs to be addressed. Many are overloaded, underfed, ill-equipped and poorly paid. How do we know? Because they speak with our guides and carriers on the trail during our treks!

Their welfare has been ignored by management officials for too long. In 2009 the Australian KTA CEO declared that the maximum weight for local carriers would be 25 kg. This is a weight he would not have been capable of carrying as far as the first ridge on the trail!

Our recommendation that the limit be reduced to the 18 kg limit imposed by doctors during the Kokoda campaign. It has since been reduced to 22.5 kg but this is still too heavy and will have detrimental long-term impacts on their hips, knees and ankles.

There is considerable scope for an improvement in the working conditions for guides and carriers.

Weight limits are too easily bypassed by rogue operators and should be replaced with a proportionate number of guides per trekker. It should be mandatory for trek operators to establish bank accounts for guides and carriers and to pay them on the day they finish their trek – or place them on full pay until they are paid! Trek guides and carriers should be provided with a trek uniform comprising a cap, shirt, shorts and poncho as well as an individual sleeping bag and mat. Rangers should conduct check-point audits to ensure they are not overloaded and that they are properly clothed, fed, equipped and paid on-time. All they have to do is ask them!

Consideration should now be given to developing an accreditation system to acknowledge their role in the successful development of Kokoda tourism.

A 'Kokoda Logbook' would be a welcome initiative to have each of their treks recorded and signed by their trek leader just as people do for scuba-diving and parachuting. Log books could then be used as a reference for them if they wish to apply for another job.

Village Communities

Villagers across the Kokoda Trail are strict adherents to the Seventh Day Adventist faith. They attend church twice daily and most of Saturday. They live a subsistence lifestyle with their time divided between working their gardens and attending to church activities.

The Seventh Day Adventist Church have their own primary and secondary schools and a university. They also operate health centres and a hospital.

Much could be gained by working with church authorities to coordinate educational, health and community programs across the Trail as pilgrimage tourism is their only source of income.

The first priority would be to identify village based clan leaders and landowners then establish 'Incorporated Landowner Groups' across the Trail.

A 'Clan Leaders Advisory Council' could then be established to conduct annual village-based workshops across the Trail to advise the 'Kokoda Trail Management Authority' of their local needs.

Village Based Workshops

A Koiari Census conducted by Pacific Islands Projects in 2014 revealed that 1220 live in villages on the Trail and a further 1660 from those villagers now live in Port Moresby.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Kokoda Initiative has found it easier to deal with Port Moresby based landowners who will generally sign up to any initiative that has an aid-dollar attached to it.

In the meantime the needs of village-based communities are ignored and they are therefore disenfranchised from the potential benefits of pilgrimage tourism.

The conduct of village based workshops to understand their needs are time-consuming and expensive in resources however they are an essential component establishing partnerships with a Melanesian context.

The Kokoda Track Foundation developed a successful village based workshop model from 2004-2006 however it was ignored by Canberra officials after they assumed responsibility for the Trail in 2009. Our work in developing the model and the outcomes can be viewed on these links:

- [Template for the conduct of village-based workshops across the Kokoda Trail](#)
- [The Kokoda Track Foundation: 2003-2006](#)

Micro-Business Opportunities for Villagers

Villagers along the trail are currently denied the opportunity to obtain added value from trek groups because trek operators have never been consulted to see what services their clients would pay for and the villagers have never been trained to meet trekkers needs.

Trek operators were excluded from the initial ‘Village Livelihoods Study’ group in 2009 Canberra officials. Indeed the study group did not include a trek operator or anybody with PNG business experience yet their purpose was to ‘develop a concept for a pilot-scale rural micro-business scheme along the Track corridor’. This is probably why the project has been such a demonstrable failure.

On 26 May 2014 a ‘KTA Livelihoods Project’ conducted by Pacific Enterprise Projects revealed:

‘during the period 2011-2013, only around 1% of KI expenditure went to income generation activities and 21% went to basic services (mostly health and education) along the track through KDP.’

The following ancillary income opportunities are yet to be realised:

1. **Owers Corner**

This area has the capacity to earn considerable income because it is located on an accessible road from Port Moresby which is experiencing rapid economic growth. This had been negated because of our patronising dealings with local landowners and our lack of historical awareness. As a result the campsite built with AusAID funds has never been used and the area has nothing to attract visitors. The opportunity to develop a traditional village with a coffee shop; an arts and crafts centre; a welcome ‘sing-sing’ area; an audio-visual centre which tells the story of the Kokoda campaign and escorted day treks down to the Goldie River or Imita Ridge is yet to be realised.

2. **PNG Coffee**

PNG coffee is the best in the world. Despite this there is not a single facility along the trail that offers a hot cup of brewed coffee. This is in spite of significant amounts of Aid/NGO funded ‘capacity building’ programs along the trail. If 60% of trekkers brought just two cups of coffee a day at K10 each they could increase village ancillary earnings by up to K300 000 per trekking season! If they offered a hot scone or biscuit the income potential would increase by 100 percent.

3. **Fresh Bread**

After a couple of days on the trail trekkers develop a craving for fresh bread and toast. In the early 1990s the campsite at Myola operated an oven which baked bread and heated water for the shower. They served toast with long-life butter and jam in the morning.

This was the most anticipated service by trekkers who paid an additional K10 per serve.

Unfortunately it has not operated for the past 15 years due to a vexatious land dispute, however the demand exists – and trekkers will willingly pay for it. A couple of villages were issued with drum ovens by the KTA in 2007 but there was no follow up action.

If just trekkers were provided with a serve of toast with butter and jam each day at K15k they have the potential to earn an additional K50,000 per year.

4. **Campsite Laundry Service**

One of the onerous tasks for trekkers is the washing and drying of dirty/sweaty clothing at the end of each day. Most trekkers would gladly pay K20 to have their clothes washed each night, dried in a local hut and delivered back to their tent next morning. Potential

earnings of up to K250 000 per trekking season could be realised with this initiative.

5. Village ‘Sing-Sings’

Over the past 25 years I have witnessed some spectacular local ‘sing-sings’ and re-enactments of wartime carriers. Trekkers gladly pay up to K20 each for such occasions but the idea of a consistent co-ordinated plan has obviously not been part of any Aid funded ‘capacity building’ programs. If sing-sings could be organised at just four locations villagers would increase their earnings by more than K250,000 per year.

6. Traditional Village Bilum Bags

Trekkers rarely purchase a bilum along the trail because they are no different to those they see in Port Moresby. Traditional string bags made from twisted bark fibre with the name of the villages and ‘Kokoda Trail’ screened onto them would fetch a premium price of K150. Most trekkers would purchase at least one and many would take the opportunity to purchase a complete set. These would realise up to K500,000 each year in additional earnings.

7. Hot Showers

Trekkers gladly pay K5 for a hot shower at Bombers Campsite. They used to do the same at Lake Myola until it was put out of action by a vexatious land claim that the Australian CEO refused to address at great cost to the local landowners. Campsite owners could easily be assisted in building a hot-shower facility as a means of providing a sought after service for trekkers and earning additional income as a result.

Trekkers would pay K10 per shower each day which would realise up to K250,000 in additional earnings.

8. Village Storage Facilities for Tour Companies

There are no logistic support facilities along the trail for trek operators. As a result they are required to charter an aircraft to deliver supplies for the second half of their respective treks. This is an expensive option and subject to the vagaries of aircraft availability and weather. There is an opportunity for a warehouse to be established in either Menari or Efogi villages to store food and equipment on behalf of trek operators who could rent secure storage space. Such a facility could be combined with a village store to service local community needs. Consideration could later be given to the establishment of a Supa V Stoa franchise which would provide villagers with a wider range of grocery and pharmaceutical goods and access to e-banking and Digicel services.

9. Village Generators-Solar Power

Generators or solar panels with battery storage and inverters should be considered an essential item for delivering shared benefits for villagers along the trail. They also present an opportunity for obtaining additional income as trekkers invariably have a need to recharge batteries for cameras, satellite phones and VHF radios. They would be more than willing to pay for such a service.

10. Kokoda Plateau

The Kokoda plateau has great potential as a major wartime tourism hub because of its

airfield and its proximity to the Isurava memorial. The plateau lends itself to the establishment of a Military Historical Precinct and an Orokaiva Cultural Centre. The proclamation of 'Kokoda Day' by the PNG Government on 3rd November would provide a focus for a national marketing campaign and become a source of national pride throughout the country.

The above initiatives provide an excellent opportunity for additional income but none are available at the present time so trekkers return home with unspent money.

The foregone ancillary earning opportunities for local villagers indicates that Kokoda tour companies and trekkers who have to put their hands in their own pockets are more aware of the opportunities to generate additional income for villagers than Government/NGO bodies which exist by putting their hands in the taxpayers pocket with no personal accountability for success or failure.

Financial Assumptions

Trekker numbers peaked at 5624 under PNG management in 2008 however since Canberra assumed responsibility for the Trail these have dropped to an average of 3300 per year.

Trekkers invest around K12,000 on airfares, accommodation, meals, clothing, camping gear and on-trail expenses in order to complete their trek. This amounts to a total spend of K40 million per year. The annual GST dividend between the Australian and PNG governments is therefore in the region of K4 million.

The gross income for villagers (wages, campsite fees, rations, donations) is estimated to be in the region of K7 million.

There is scope for this income to be significantly increased through the introduction of a community development levy; a significant site fee; a campsite audit system; a peak season trek operators' license; training of villagers in the provision of goods and services for trekkers; and the provision of a business manager and chief ranger for the management authority.

The figures indicate that Kokoda tourism is now financially sustainable.

Government should therefore limit its contribution to the development of a Military Heritage Master Plan for the Kokoda Trail; facilitation for funding of appropriate memorials at significant sites; the maintenance of the road to Owers Corner; the maintenance of airfields at Menari, Efogi, Naduri, Lake Myola, Kagi and Kokoda; a VHF communications system along the Trail, and funding for the training and development of micro-business initiatives.

Conclusion

The rapid increase in trekker numbers from 2004 overwhelmed the PNG management system which was under resourced and unable to cope with the diverse range of demands placed upon it.

After Canberra assumed responsibility for the Kokoda Trail under a Joint Agreement signed in 2008 environment issues relating to the protection of the Brown River Catchment and a bid to assist in its listing as a World Heritage site took priority over tourism management.

This has been negated by the findings of the 2006 Rapid Assessment and Prioritisation of Protected Area Management (RAPPAM) report; the construction of the Edevu Hydro Power Project on the Brown River; and the expert report advising that the Kokoda Trail does not meet the criteria for a World Heritage listing.

In the meantime the Kokoda Trail emerged as PNGs most popular tourism destination based on its military heritage, however no management systems have been implemented to support its potential as a world-class pilgrimage tourism destination for the economic benefit of landowner communities.

It's now timely for the PNG Government to formally transfer responsibility for the management of the Kokoda Trail between Owers Corner and Kokoda from the Minister for Provincial and Local Level Government, and the aid-funded influence of the Minister for Environment, Conservation and Climate Change, to the Minister for Tourism, Arts and Culture.

The Australian Government should now assign the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) as the lead agency to establish a Joint Agreement for Commemoration of our shared military heritage with PNG and to develop a Military Heritage Master Plan for the Kokoda Trail.

PNG now has a choice. It can continue to allow the Kokoda Trail to be managed as an environment park for the benefit of foreign aid-funded officials, or it can seek to realize its potential as a world-class pilgrimage tourism destination by managing it as a commercial enterprise for the economic benefit of the traditional landowner communities.

1. PNG National Executive Council (NEC):

- a. Declare the gazetted area of the Kokoda Trail as a National Memorial Park and use the provisions of the Lands Act to acquire the gazetted area as a National Tourism Asset.
- b. Transfer responsibility for the management of the Kokoda Trail to the Minister for Tourism, Arts and Culture;
- c. Establish a 'Kokoda Trail Management Authority' responsible to the Minister for Tourism, Arts and Culture.

2. Australian Government:

- a. Rebadge the 'Kokoda Initiative' as the 'Owen Stanley Ranges' Initiative to properly reflect its role in Protected Area Management for the environment;
- b. Assign responsibility for the Kokoda Trail to the Minister for Veterans Affairs;
- c. Fund key positions within the Kokoda Trail Management Authority for a period of 5 years (CEO; Financial Manager; Chief Ranger; Field Ranger);
- d. Fund a Military Heritage Master Plan by an accredited military heritage architect

Charlie Lynn OAM OL
30 January 2025

ATTACHMENT A: Essential Management Tools

The essential tools for an effective management system are:

1. A Head Office;
2. a relevant interactive website;
3. a comprehensive database management system;
4. an Online Booking System;
5. a social media strategy;
6. a VHF communications system; and
7. trained rangers.

ATTACHMENT B: KTMA Website

1. About Us
2. KTMA Board Members
3. Organisational Chart
4. PNG Visitor Information
 - Papua New Guinea
 - Central Province
 - Oro Province
 - Kioari Local Level Government Authority
 - Kokoda Local Level Government Authority
5. The Kokoda Trail
 - History
 - Map
 - Campsites
6. Community Development
 - Our Commitment
 - Our Partnership
 - Network Kokoda
7. Licensed Trek Operators
 - License Number
 - Name of Company
 - Public Liability Insurance Policy Number
 - Code of Conduct
 - Contact Details
8. Niusletas
9. Blog
10. Trekker Survey
 - Why did you trek? (Physical Challenge – Wartime History – Bucket List – Adventure – Culture – Environment)
 - Did your trek experience meet your expectations? (Yes – No – Comment)
 - Your Trek Operator (Name of Company – Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - Standard of meals provided by your trek operator (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - Battlesite Briefings (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - Campsites (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - Toilets (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - Showers (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - The Trail (Safe – Unsafe – Comments)
 - Bridge Crossings (Safe – Unsafe – Comments)
 - Tents provided by your trek operator (Yes – No – Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - PNG Guides and Support Crew (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - j. Please comment on any suggestions you have to improve the Kokoda trekking experience.

ATTACHMENT C: Online Application for Trek Permits

The online Application for Trek Permits would be the basis of a comprehensive database management program. Trek Operators would be required to submit the following details via an Excel spreadsheet up to two weeks prior to their scheduled trek:

1. Name of Trek Operator
2. Public Liability Insurance Policy Details (Name of insurer, policy number, date of currency)
3. Date of Trek
4. Direction of Trek
5. Trek Itinerary
6. Trekker details:
 7. Name
 8. Travel Insurance (Company & Policy Number)
 9. Contact Phone Number
 10. Email address
11. Emergency Contact Details (Name, phone, email)

Trek Permits would not be issued until all fields had been entered and all fees had been received.

The Excel spreadsheet would automatically update the KTMA database which would list each group, their respective trek itineraries and their campsite bookings.

Rangers would then audit respective trek groups by counting the number of trekkers and carriers as they pass through various trek groups. They can also identify if there have been any injuries and/or evacuations and report to the KTMA accordingly.

One week prior to the start of each scheduled trek the KTMA would credit campsite fees and significant site fees to the respective landowners bank accounts.

Trek operators would then be issued with a receipt for their trek fees and a confirmation of their booking for each campsite according to their respective trek itineraries.

ⁱ Michael Pender, Military Heritage Architect, HPA Projects

ⁱⁱ In 2008 a KTA Board Director established a separate 'KTA account' in a different bank and used his network of 'wan-toks' to assist with transferring K250,000 into it. The former CEO discovered the illegal heist and reported it but the incoming Australian CEO, Rod Hillman, refused to have the corrupt official prosecuted.

ⁱⁱⁱ KTA Livelihoods Project – Final Report. Pacific Islands Projects. 26 May 2014