

## CHAPTER 11

### A Discussion Paper on the Kokoda Trekking Industry

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#### **AUTHOR'S NOTE:**

Since the PNG Kokoda Track Authority (KTA) was established by the Minister for Provincial and Local Level Government Affairs in 2004, the number of trekkers crossing the Kokoda Trail had risen dramatically by 225 percent from 1584 in 2004 to 5146 in 2008.

Neither Government was prepared to provide any support so the management was left to a former Australian Kiap, Warren Bartlett, on a salary of \$11,000 (K25,000) with no office support (apart from a part-time assistant) and no allowances.

Mr. Bartlett was required to safeguard the funds collected for trek permit and assist villagers with the basics such as plastic toilet pots and portable ovens to assist them in meeting the demands of trekkers.

He also had to deal with increasing demands from more than 100 landowners, more than 50 tour companies, and various government officials at National, Provincial and Local.

But his greatest challenge was dealing with a Board of Directors which became increasingly corrupted as trek fee income escalated.

I then coordinated a discussion paper amongst our Adventure Kokoda trek leaders, mainly ex-military, to assist the PNG Government and the KTA in developing policy for what was emerging as PNGs most popular tourism destination.

Our paper called for:

- A booking system for campsites along the track
- Training programs for trek guides and carriers
- Training programs for campsite owner/operators
- A grading system for campsites
- Catering programs to assist villagers in food preparation for trek groups
- Programs to assist villagers in obtaining added value from trek groups
- A liaison system to ensure educational and health needs of villagers are satisfied
- Codes of conduct for managers, trek rangers, trekkers, trek operators and campsite owners
- A dispute resolution system
- A financial accounting system independent of the management agency for the track
- An independent auditing system

It is interesting that as of 2023, 16 years on, not one of the above suggestions had been adopted.

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## Executive Summary

On 10 August 2007 the Australian government announced that the listing of the Kokoda Trail as a place of significant historical interest. This is a welcome and timely initiative given the challenges we face in ensuring the Kokoda track is properly honoured and managed.

This paper will address the issues confronting the Kokoda track today. The information is based on the observations of a number of experienced trek leaders over the past two years.

It is clear that the organization established to manage and administer eco-trekking operations across the Kokoda track (the Kokoda Track [Special Purpose] Authority) is inappropriate for the proper development of the emerging industry. It is also clear that the rapid increase in trekker numbers and the threats from mining and logging activities along the track could endanger the potential for Kokoda to be a world class eco-trekking experience.

Our research indicates that the listing of the Kokoda Trail as a place of significant historical interest to Australia is largely symbolic and more needs to be done to protect war relics along the track.

This discussion paper suggests the management of the track should be removed from Local and Provincial Government level and re-established on a national level as a component of a PNG National Track Authority responsible to the Minister for Tourism.

The paper also suggests the Australian government should fund an organization to manage the Kokoda track for a period of three to five years. This organization would work in partnership with the PNG government and authorities to develop:

- legislation for areas of military historical significance as National Memorial Parks; and
- regulations, procedures and organizational structures for the proper management and administration of the Kokoda track.

The Australian government should also consider an exchange program between the PNG and Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service. These initiatives should be funded through AusAID and involve long-term programs for PNG rangers to work in our parks and for qualified Australians to work within the appropriate PNG Department in an advisory capacity.

## Introduction

Trekking the Kokoda Trail was restricted to small groups of diehard adventurers until the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Kokoda campaign in 1992. The resultant publicity stirred a dormant interest in our military history. Kokoda is unique because it offers the opportunity to 'experience' history by retracing the footsteps of our diggers across the track and learning of the battles that shaped the campaign.

During the early stages of this awakening the track was closed on many occasions as various landowners demanded compensation for a range of issues. In 2003 A Kokoda Track (Special Purpose) Authority (KTA) was established as a statutory government body of the Kokoda and Koiari Rural Local-level Governments to manage the emerging eco-trekking industry.

A trek fee was introduced to pay for the administration of the new authority and to initiate projects that delivered shared benefits to villages along the track. The following table illustrates the rapid growth in the number of trekkers in recent years:

Year	No of Trekkers
2001	76

2002	365
2003	1074
2004	1584
2005	2374
2006	3723
2007	4000+

Since 2003 these trekkers have generated PNGK2.5 million (A\$1.03 million) for the KTA in trek fees; PNGK2 million (A\$830,000) in campsite fees; and more than PNGK10 million (\$4.14 million) in payments for PNG guides and carriers. Unfortunately there is little evidence of any tangible benefits to villagers along the track as a result of this new income stream. For example as at July 2007:

- There is no co-ordinated booking system for campsites.
- There are insufficient and inappropriate shelters for trek groups at most campsites.
- Ablution facilities for male and female trekkers are inadequate.
- Toilets are generally rated as ‘disgusting’ by trekkers.
- There was not a single generator available for trekkers to recharge radio/satphone/camera batteries or for schools to use for educational purposes.

The rapid increase in trekker numbers has exposed some glaring deficiencies in the current management system. These are outlined in this report but in the meantime there is an urgent need for PNG Tourism to address some emerging issues that will impact on the sustainability of the new eco-trekking industry. This is particularly important in regard to ensuring:

- the historical and environmental integrity of the track is not compromised;
- village communities receive shared benefits from the industry; and
- the safety of trekkers is ensured.

This discussion paper will address some of the issues that should be considered by PNG Tourism to ensure the medium and long term viability of the Kokoda Trail as an eco-trekking destination is not compromised.

### The PNG Kokoda Track (Special Purpose) Authority (KTA)

The KTA was established with the best of intentions when it was proclaimed in 2003. Unfortunately the current organization is dysfunctional and the opportunity for developing a world class eco-trekking operation is being squandered.

The Board of Directors, appointed when the KTA was proclaimed, included representatives of the Central and Oro Provincial Governments and the Koiari and Kokoda Local-level Governments. It was unfortunate that none of these Members were trained or qualified to understand their proper roles and corporate responsibilities in overseeing an eco-trekking operation of the magnitude of Kokoda.

This is not a criticism of the individuals who have worked hard in their areas of expertise to assist in the development of the track. Unfortunately the system has failed them by not providing qualified staff or the necessary training to meet their responsibilities. The most cursory review of KTA operations over the past few years would reveal that proper governance is not possible and that large sums of money have been misappropriated.

The current system is reliant solely on the energy and commitment of the Executive Officer, Mr. Warren Bartlett. His duties include the management of the KTA office which is overwhelmed with daily demands for assistance from villagers along the track; personally processing all applications for trek permits; liaison with all trek operators; and the micro-management of all finances. He must also

manage the ever increasing demands of his Board members and he receives numerous requests to facilitate assistance between trekkers who have returned to Australia and wish to make a contribution to their personal carrier, a village school, or a medical aid centre.

It has been estimated that the Kokoda eco-trekking industry now generates approximately PNGK17 million (A\$7.04 million) a year into the PNG economy. The Executive Officer is paid a paltry salary of around PNGK25,000 (A\$10,350) to manage this entire operation without any qualified staff. Under this arrangement it is not possible to develop the necessary procedures and systems to properly manage and administer trekking operations across the Kokoda track.

Notwithstanding this, the KTA (or a similar specialist Authority) has the potential to be a pioneering national model for the development of a sustainable eco-trekking industry in PNG because it has an income stream independent of government and Aid agency funding.

### A National Track Authority?

In order for a PNG eco-trekking industry to be effective a National Track Authority should be considered. This authority should be responsible to the Minister for Tourism and comprise a number of management authorities charged with developing and managing various eco-trekking initiatives in other areas throughout PNG. A reformed Kokoda Track Authority could be the model for such a venture.

Any reorganization of the KTA from a Local Level/Provincial Government level to a national body would need to ensure Members appointed to the Board of Management were properly qualified and aware of their personal responsibilities in regard to proper corporate governance.

Consideration should be given for a separation of operational management and financial accounting responsibilities. It would be desirable for all financial matters to be delegated to an independent accounting firm to ensure proper governance. This agency would be responsible for:

- Developing necessary accounting procedures for the effective operation of the KTA
- drafting a code of conduct for Board Members
- training Board Members and executive staff in the execution of their duties
- drafting legislation for incorporation into the appropriate Act of Parliament
- acting as the approving authority for all expenditure derived from trek fees and other income sources.

An independent agency should also be appointed to audit the management and finances of the Authority.

The management of the Kokoda eco-trekking operation has been addressed by a consultant to the PNG Sustainable Foundation, Mr. Paul Mitchell, but the current status of the report is not known.

## ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

### Trek Permits

Trek operators are becoming more established with their operations on the track and there is an encouraging level of goodwill amongst many of them on the track. This will develop further when there is a credible management structure in place.

Trek operators invest a great deal of time, energy and money into marketing their treks in Australia. They are required to schedule treks up to 12 months in advance to secure bookings with airlines and hotels as part of their detailed logistic planning for their treks.

Trekkers also make a long term commitment (annual leave, family arrangements, etc) in response to these schedules.

The lack of an effective booking system for campsites along the track is a problem for all trek operators. The current system of 'first come – first served' is totally unsatisfactory. If trek operators are aware of 'double bookings' for sites in advance they can make alternative arrangements. It is too late when a number of groups appear at the same site on the same day.

It is therefore important for the KTA to require trek operators to submit trek itineraries with their applications for trek permits. The KTA should then liaise with trek operators and landowners where double bookings for campsites are apparent. The KTA could liaise with guesthouse/campsite owners to move groups to nearby sites to alleviate any potential problems where they might arise.

This would provide a beneficial service for guesthouse/campsite landowners by ensuring that peak trekking periods are shared. In the event of campsites being unavailable the KTA could require the trek operator to adjust their itinerary.

The establishment and management of a coordinated booking system for campsites should be a priority item for the KTA. Unfortunately this is not possible under the current management system.

### Campsites

The rapidly increasing number of trekkers has led to a proliferation of guesthouses along the track. The following picture was taken in July 2007 looking south towards Templeton's Crossing. It shows three new campsites being developed in addition to three sites already established at the crossing.

Trekkers are quite appalled at this type of unplanned development. One of the great attractions of the Kokoda track is the rugged beauty of the environment. If this is threatened by a proliferation of unplanned campsite developments the potential for eco-trekking across the track will be diminished.

The KTA should consider an accreditation system for campsites. If a site is located in an approved area and is developed according to an approved plan with appropriate shelter, toilet and ablution facilities then the KTA would list it for inclusion on trek agendas.

Consideration should be given to developing a campsite plan to suit a range of trek itineraries. Such a plan would require a great deal of liaison with landowners and clan leaders along the track.

### Campsite Booking System

A booking system needs to be developed to ensure campsites are available for trek operators who book treks in advance. There are increasing instances where trekkers are arriving at campsites without any notice. If the site is already occupied by a group they have to prepare a new temporary site for the night. This leads to unnecessary clearing and pollution of the track as they are not able to establish proper toilet/ablution facilities at such short notice.

The KTA should require trek operators/trekkers to submit a trek itinerary with their application for trek permits. This would allow them to monitor the capacity of the track and will help avoid potential disputes over occupancy of campsites.

This is not possible under the current system as the KTA does not have the expertise or the resources to undertake such a task.

### Campsite Disputes

An important function of the KTA should be the resolution of campsite disputes. The outstanding issue at Lake Myola is a good example. This is an important campsite for those who are interested in the military history of the Kokoda campaign. It is also strategically located for trekking itineraries.

The campsite has been 'closed' for the past 7 years because of a land-ownership dispute between the Kekev/Miria clans of Kagi and Gagamu/Beliki clans of Naduri. The Gagamu/Beliki clans have been

operating the guesthouse without interruptions since 1990 and have evidence of their continued occupancy of the land since independence in 1975.

During the period 1992 to 2000 the Gagamu/Beliki clans constructed a guesthouse with bunks on their site together with a cookhouse, shower and sheltered areas. They introduced trout into the creek running through the lake and it was the only campsite along the track to offer an evening meal and cooked breakfast as part of their package.

This came to an end when the Kekev/Miria lodged their claim of ownership on the land. This claim is vexatious. The Deputy Chairman of the KTA is a member of the Kekev clan and a brother of one of the litigants. This is a serious conflict of interest and highlights the need for the Board to have an enforceable code of conduct for its Members.

It is not currently possible for trek operators to obtain a status report on the situation. We have received conflicting advice over the past two years as it is apparent that some trek operators are allowed to stay whilst others are not – some say it is closed and other say it is open. We have also been advised that it is before the courts and a decision is ‘pending’.

In the meantime it is obvious that some operators are allowed to stay at the campsite and others are not. This is obviously not a satisfactory situation.

It is imperative for PNG Tourism to take a leadership role in the resolution of such disputes as it is beyond the capacity of the KTA to resolve.

When disputes of this nature arise the managing authority should open a trust account to hold campsite fees until it is resolved. When a decision has been reached the monies held in trust can then be paid to the rightful owner or apportioned amongst the parties contesting the claim as directed by the appropriate court or by the KTA as appropriate.

The current vexatious dispute has cost the Gagamu/Beliki clans of Naduri (who operated the campsite) at least PNGK400,000 (A\$165,000) in lost income from campsite fees.

#### Campsite Toilets

The condition of toilets along the track is the most negative of the responses we get from trekkers. An example of the comments we receive on our feedback sheets includes:

- *‘They were terrible – after gagging a couple of times, you tend to get used to it quite quickly’.*
- *‘Very ordinary’*
- *‘These varied from campsite to campsite. It was a shame that Isurava’s latrines were some of the worst.’*
- *‘What I expected in PNG.’*
- *‘I don’t know how I can be constructive in my criticism here, but the smell was appalling!! I’m sure you have considered it but don’t they use lime or something in the Army which is supposed to help? Other than that they were as expected ... I suppose they were better than having to squat behind a bush, but only marginally!’*
- *‘Pretty scary to say the least, but I guess it wasn’t the Hilton.’*

Many of the trekkers accept the squat toilets – they regard it as part of the Kokoda ‘experience’ – but it is essential that they be kept clean, that a spade is located in each toilet in case somebody misses the hole, a cover is provided for the hole when it is not in use, and lime is available for the landowner to treat them at the end of each day.

The location, construction and treating of toilets needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Some of the toilets are located too close to waterways. We have already had trekkers diagnosed with giardia

on our treks. The following photo of a campsite under construction at Eora Creek shows toilets that could cause seepage into the waterway.

### Campsite Shelters

Landowners of campsites are now receiving a substantial income with the increasing number of trekkers – more than PNGK2 million (A\$828,000) since 2003. Trekkers expect a basic standard of shelter for them and their carriers at each site in return for the fee they pay. This should include sheltered areas for:

- meal preparation and cooking (with tables built from bush materials);
- drying areas (with a fire) trekkers for trekkers (four logs in a square with a fire in the centre);
- accommodation areas for carriers

Each sheltered area for trekkers and carriers should have sufficient firewood for the night.

PNG Tourism should engage a local architect to develop a standard design for bush shelters, meal preparation areas, ablution blocks and toilets for campsites. They should then work in partnership with campsite owners who wish to develop sites that are approved as part of an overall development plan for the track. A micro-finance program could be developed to assist them with initial funding for their site.

They should also consider a campsite training program for landowners. This would involve campsite development, location of male/female screened ablution blocks, male/female toilets, water points, construction of sheltered areas for trekkers and carriers, hygienic requirements of toilets and cooking areas, etc.

### Trek Hygiene

Increasing numbers of trekkers are suffering from *Guardia* after their trek. This is most likely caused by polluted water and/or contaminated village food. This is a recent development and has only occurred since toilets have been located close to watercourses. It may also be attributable to poor hygiene in the preparation of village food.

This issue needs to be addressed as a matter of priority because it is becoming a topic amongst trekkers. If it becomes a common complaint people will associate it with poor hygiene and will have second thoughts about wanting to trek Kokoda. Bad news travels fast in Australia

### Disposal of Rubbish

The increase in trekker numbers has led to a problem in the management of rubbish disposal along the track. This will create environmental problems if systems are not developed to encourage trek operators and trekkers to carry their rubbish out and have it brought back to Port Moresby for disposal.

Trek operators should be required to carry out all rubbish as a condition of receiving a permit. A 'Rubbish Disposal' plan should be developed to retrieve all rubbish to Port Moresby for proper disposal.

Trek operators could also be invited to contribute towards funding a 'Rubbish Patrol' at the end of each trekking season. This would involve the provision of a number of their trek guides to participate in a regular clean-up of the track.

The following table provides an estimate of how long rubbish left of the track will take to decompose:

<b>Cigarette butts</b>	<b>1-5 years</b>
<b>Aluminium cans</b>	<b>500 years</b>

<b>Glass bottles</b>	<b>1000 years</b>
<b>Plastic bags</b>	<b>10-20 years</b>
<b>Plastic coated paper</b>	<b>5 years</b>
<b>Plastic film containers</b>	<b>20-30 years</b>
<b>Nylon fabric</b>	<b>30-40 years</b>
<b>Leather</b>	<b>Up to 50 years</b>
<b>Wool socks</b>	<b>1-5 years</b>
<b>Orange &amp; banana peel</b>	<b>Up to 2 years</b>
<b>Tin cans</b>	<b>50 years</b>
<b>Plastic 6-pack holders</b>	<b>100 years</b>
<b>Plastic bottles &amp; Styrofoam</b>	<b>Indefinitely</b>

### Track Clearing

Many trekkers are now commenting adversely on the unnecessary clearing of the track.

Track maintenance that improves the safety of the trek is warranted. Recent work along the Brown River and Brigade Hill and new bridges over some of the more dangerous creeks are good examples. However there are also many instances where local villagers have undertaken to 'widen' the track and then submitted accounts for payment to the KTA for the work. This work actually detracts from the trekking experience and should be approved by the KTA prior to being carried out.

Australian trekkers want to walk the track as it was in 1945 and would like to see it remain in its natural condition as far as possible.

### Village Cooperatives

A recent paper published by Ben Scott of the Lowy Institute (re-imaging PNG) concluded:

*'the top-down approach Papua New Guinea's governments copied from their colonial predecessors has not worked . . . taking better account of the reality of traditional groups is the central challenge of building, from the ground up, the state and nation of Papua New Guinea. Social engineering aimed at moulding a new national identity is unrealistic and making the state 'more traditional' misses the point. The goal should be to build on the positive dimensions of traditional groups (such as internal cohesion and pluralism), deal more directly with the negatives (nepotism and fragmentation) and channel traditional loyalties and rivalries in the most productive way. Official acknowledgment of the reality of ethnic identity is a step back from the ideals of liberal democracy, but it may be necessary to keep moving forwards.'*

There seems to be a great deal of mutual mistrust between landowners along the track. The concept of working together to obtain shared benefits from trekkers seems difficult for them to grasp. For example we are constantly badgered to stay in a particular campsite at Templeton's Crossing. The landowners are first cousins from the same village. On a recent trek neither of their sites was large enough for our trekkers and guides. We therefore suggested that our trekkers stay in one and our guides in the other as the campsites are co-located. This was not acceptable and both landowners wanted us all to stay in their particular site and did not want the other landowner to have anybody!

The need for trek leaders to carry a large amount of cash is also a concern and should be addressed. On 9 August 2007 a trek leader from Adventure Kokoda had K4,000 stolen from his pack at Isurava

Memorial. All trek guides and carriers were searched but the money was not recovered. This obviously creates a lot of angst amongst those who believe they are being wrongfully accused.

Local villagers and guides are aware that each trek leader has to carry a significant amount of cash to pay for campsite fees, visits to various sites and village sing-sings.

Clans/landowners should be encouraged to establish 'cooperatives' with their own bank accounts in Port Moresby. This would allow trek operators to lodge funds via the KTA for deposit into their respective accounts prior to each trek. The operator would receive a receipt from the KTA to present to the respective campsite owners along the track.

Such a system will benefit campsite owners as it will provide an opportunity for the KTA to ensure trek operators and individual trekkers are paying the correct amount for their campsite fees.

It is possible that landowners would be satisfied if they were aware that the KTA was protecting their interests by ensuring they were paid the full amount. This cannot, and will not happen while the system is based on cash payments.

In the short term consideration should be given to issuing each landowner with an official KTA Receipt Book. The receipt book should allow the landowner to record the number of trekkers, the number of carriers and the amount he receives from the trek leader. This would allow the KTA to conduct random audits to ensure trek operators and trekkers are meeting their responsibilities.

A training plan needs to be developed to demonstrate the benefits of working together on a village basis. This will not be possible until a proper management structure is in place for the KTA.

#### Council of Clan Leaders

There are ongoing concerns from villagers along the track that the Board of the KTA is not representative of their clans or their views. They believe Members of the Board spend too much time in Port Moresby and not enough time on the trek.

The establishment of a 'Council of Clan Leaders' as an advisory/feedback body should be explored. The first step would be to register the names of all the clans along the track and to identify the respective leaders. A copy of the clans that we have identified during recent treks is attached.

KTA Management should meet with this body twice yearly to brief them on their plans and activities and to seek their feedback on issues in regard to campsites, environment, village protocols, educational/health developments, village cooperatives, etc.

#### Landowner Registration

An important part of a satisfactory dispute resolution system is the registration of customary owners of the land along the track. This task should be a prime responsibility of the KTA to assist in arbitrating disputes.

It is also important for trek operators to know who they have to pay. Registered landowners should be issued with a form of identification which acknowledges their ownership. This will assist trek operators in ensuring the proper people receive the campsite fees and avoid the obvious embarrassment that occurs when two or three people claim to be landowners and demand payment.

#### 17. Trek Operator Registration

Trek operators should be registered by the KTA. As a suggestion the registration should include a requirement that registered trek operators:

- pay their guides/porters/carriers a minimum daily rate as determined by the Authority;

- pay campsite owners a minimum fee for trekkers and guides/porters/carriers as determined by the Authority;
- only allow guides/porters/carriers to carry a maximum backpack weight as determined by the Authority;
- provide guides/porters/carriers with suitable clothing and individual sleeping bags and mats;
- provide return airfares to either Port Moresby or Kokoda for guides/porters/carriers at the completion of their trek;
- ensure the group leader is qualified in First Aid;
- ensure each group has a VHF radio and a satellite phone for safety purposes;
- establish emergency evacuation procedures which indemnify the KTA from the cost of the operation; and
- ensure each operator has an appropriate public liability insurance policy which indemnifies the KTA from any potential claim by a trekker suffering a permanent injury or disability.

All current trek operators should be consulted as part of the process in formulating a registration system.

In the longer term trek permits should only be issued to registered trek operators or to individuals who agree to abide by the conditions established by the KTA in regard to the engagement of local carriers, the payment of campsite fees and safety.

#### Emergency Evacuation System

The increasing number of people requiring emergency evacuation is a concern.

It is therefore imperative that the KTA develop a coordinated system for emergency evacuation. Emergency helipads should be established and given an identification tag to assist pilots to fly direct to the required location.

Trek operators/trekkers should be required to agree to the conditions and procedures for emergency evacuations established by the KTA as part of the process of obtaining a Trek Permit.

The following suggestions are offered for consideration:

- Trek operators/trekkers be required to lodge a bond which will cover the cost of an emergency evacuation by helicopter. These bonds should be held in a trust account and only used for emergency evacuation.
- If the operator/trekker has a need to evacuate one of their group then KTA can draw on the fund to pay for the helicopter. It is then up to the trek operator to liaise with the trekker to lodge a claim for the travel insurance to refund the money.
- If individual trekkers who do not go through a registered trek operator complete the trek and do not require evacuation then the bond is refunded to them on completion of the trek.

This will be difficult issue to work through. The Board should seek the views and suggestions of other trek operators then publish a draft set of procedures for comment before implementing any system.

#### Village- Stakeholder Workshops

Soon after the KTA was proclaimed a number of village workshops were conducted between landowners and clan leaders to inform them of the intentions of the new organization and to obtain their input and feedback. The theme for the workshop was ‘working together for good tourism.’

These workshops, facilitated by Templeton-Galt, the PNG World Wide Fund for Nature and the University of Technology Sydney, were held in Efogi Village (Central Province) and Kokoda (Oro

Province). The participants displayed genuine enthusiasm in working through the various processes to arrive at a short term action plan for each village.

Unfortunately there has been no follow up action since then and the concept of 'working together for good tourism' has faded.

These workshops should be conducted on an annual basis. It is also important that they be conducted in a village environment to enable as many villagers – male and female – to participate as possible. The purpose of the workshops should be to review the previous 12 months trekking activity and its impact on villagers along the track, discuss any issues of concern, and then develop a co-ordinated action plan for the next 12 months.

#### Awareness Patrols

After the conclusion of the workshops between key stakeholders and clan leaders/landowners, the Board of the KTA conducted an 'awareness patrol' across the track to engage in further dialogue with villagers. This was an excellent initiative and provided good feedback.

Unfortunately none have been conducted since and there has been little progress in assisting villagers to fully benefit from the opportunities of eco-trekking.

These should be re-established in partnership with individual trek operators who could be asked to cover their expenses within their particular groups. Such a system will allow Board members to discuss issues with trek operators, trekkers, carriers, clan leaders and campsite owners along the way.

Board members should visit each village/campsite on an annual basis. This will provide the Board with a valuable insight into the ongoing needs of all stakeholders involved in eco-trekking across Kokoda.

## THREATS

### Mining and Logging

Major threats to the environmental integrity of the Kokoda track are posed by logging and mining activities. This threat has been realized with the approval for an Australian company (Frontier Resources Limited) to mine the Ofi Creek area. The sound of bulldozers operating in the area of the Maguli Range and the emerging scar on the opposite ridge is cause for great concern. The following picture was taken from the eastern ridge of the Maguli Range in April 2007 and shows a bulldozer building a road on the range adjacent to the track in the Ofi Creek area.

The Australian Government was quick to react to the news of the mining activity on Kokoda. The Prime Minister appointed an interdepartmental committee under the leadership of Mr. Hugh Borrowman to address the issue. Committee members have since met with the PNG Government, the Kokoda Track Authority, the management of Frontier Gold and the landowners at Nauro village. A number of the committee members also trekked from Nauro to Owers Corner and were able to discuss the issue with a number of trekker groups along the way.

The issue is quite complex because the land is owned by the traditional landowners of Nauro village. These people are very poor. They exist within a subsistence economy without any health or education facilities and no job prospects. The lure of income from potential mining royalties, employment opportunities and infrastructure development is a most attractive option for them.

According to the Nauro landowners the executives of Frontier Resources have agreed to construct a road from Owers Corner to the airfield at the old Nauro village site via the eastern side of the ridge adjacent to the Maguli Range. They have also agreed to relocate the village from its current site to the top of the range and build a school and water supply system for them.

Whilst this might seem attractive at first glance it would be interesting to know what guarantees will be put in place to provide for long term sustainable benefits for the landowners and surrounding areas. The impact on the local environment should also be examined in view of the considerable pollution that has already occurred in Ofi Creek.

A study released earlier this year titled 'Mining and Chemical Pollution of Indigenous PNG People' by Dr Sylvester Kotapu, revealed that high levels of arsenic, zinc, mercury and lead were found in 500 blood samples taken from Goilala and Mekeo people living along the Auga and Angabanga Rivers in Central Province. This was attributable to a foreign owned gold mine which allegedly dumps its waste tailings into the Auga River. According to Dr Marat, Chairman of the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission, PNG and West Papua are the only places in the world that allow mines to operate without a tailings dam. The planned mining operations of Frontier Resources in the vicinity of the Kokoda track needs to be closely monitored in view of this report by Dr Kotapu.

A mining company negotiating deals with villagers who are barely literate would seem to weigh the odds heavily in their favour. If the KTA was properly managed by qualified staff they could play a vital role in facilitating discussions between the various parties to ensure the villagers receive a fair deal for the long term and that the historical and environmental integrity of the track in the area was not compromised.

The Australian Government must take a leadership role in resolving this and other potential issues along the Kokoda track because of the historical significance of the area. Leadership initiatives should include:

- Establishing a joint-working party with the PNG Government to develop legislation to declare the environs of the Kokoda track as a National Memorial Park;
- Funding a management organization for the Kokoda track for a period of three to five years as an official Aid project.
- Establishing an exchange program to allow PNG personnel to work with our National Parks and Wildlife Services in Australia and Australian personnel to work on the Kokoda track. The duration of such exchanges should be for a minimum of 12 months.

The objective of these initiatives would be to develop a model for an eco-trekking industry in PNG.

#### Disturbance and Removal of War Relics

There is a need for the Australian Government to work in partnership with the PNG Government to protect war relics along the track. These relics have been rusting in the jungle for the past 65 years and are now being rearranged and removed as souvenirs.

According to some research conducted by one of our trekkers the recent announcement of Kokoda as a place of significant historical interest is virtually meaningless.

It seems that a section (390K) was inserted in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act in February 2007 as part of the most recent amendments to the EPBC Act (and further amendments are planned) to establish a list of important heritage sites overseas.

This list sits alongside the National Heritage List and the Commonwealth Heritage List - all Australian sites which have robust protection. The aim of the section is supposed to give some recognition to overseas heritage sites that have a special place in Australia's history. The list is named "Overseas Places of Historic Significance to Australia" (L OPHSA). While this recognition is timely it does not seem to provide adequate protection.

This is because when the Heritage amendments were made to the EPBC Act in 2003, they provided for overseas places to be included on the National Heritage list. Old subsections 15C(11) and

(12) contained offence provisions relating to actions taken outside the Australian jurisdiction where there is or may be a significant impact on a National Heritage place located outside the Australian jurisdiction. SS5(3) limited the application of these offence provisions to Australians.

Section 324J(2A) provided that the Minister could not include in the National heritage List a place that is wholly or partly in a foreign country unless the Minister is satisfied that the national government of the foreign country has agreed to the inclusion in the List of the place so far as it is in the country. It is this last section that caused the problems that exist with the current legislation.

It seems that problems arose with this listing provision as soon as Australia sought to utilise it in relation to the Gallipoli road issue. It was obviously not possible to get foreign countries to agree to the listing as they were concerned with the issue of sovereignty. Part of the problem seems to be the offence provisions (even though they only applied to Australians) and partly to the fact that we were proposing to list the places on the National Heritage List which would not have been acceptable to the Turkish Government. As a result amendments were made to completely disconnect the listing of overseas places from the National Heritage List and the inclusion of any offence provisions was abandoned. The result is that the list of overseas places of Historic importance to Australia is merely symbolic.

It does not seem that the Government now intends to apply offence provisions to section 390K. This should be reviewed the contentious issue was with purporting to control the actions of foreign countries. All the other offence provisions in the EPBC Act apply to Australians anywhere in the world. A separate list with offence provisions applying only to Australians would solve the problem and also provide an enforceable deterrent to the removal of war relics from the Kokoda track.

Whilst the Government may argue that the EPBC Act really doesn't provide protection for movable artefacts of significance they should realise that like the parts of any ecosystem, or important parts of a heritage building, they may be covered if they are listed as part of the values of a listed place.

We have a national responsibility to preserve the war relics across the track for future generations. The Government should not be deterred from ensuring this happens due to the complexities involved in negotiation with foreign countries. It is therefore recommended the issue be re-examined with a view to crafting offence provisions in the EPBC Act to ensure they cover the theft and removal of artefacts from foreign countries.

## VALUE ADDING

### Value Adding Opportunities

Villagers along the track are currently denied the opportunity to obtain added value from the eco-trekking groups as they have not been advised or trained to take advantage of the new industry. Following are some value adding opportunities that could be easily implemented with a proper management system:

#### Generators

Generators should be considered an essential item for delivering shared benefits for villagers along the track. 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.

On my latest trek in July 2007 there was not a single generator available in any village to allow this to happen.

#### Coffee

PNG has world class coffee in abundance. Unfortunately it is not possible for trekkers to purchase a single cup of brewed coffee anywhere along the track.

Trekkers would be more than willing to pay market rates for a cup of brewed coffee at each village and campsite along the track - but nothing is available.

#### Fresh Bread

After a couple of days on the track trekkers develop a craving for fresh bread. They are also more than willing to pay market rates for toast, sandwiches and scones.

A couple of villages have received drum ovens from the KTA but they are never used.

#### Village Laundry Services

One of the difficult tasks for trekkers is the washing and drying of clothing at the end of each day.

Trekkers would be willing to pay a fee to have local villagers wash and dry their gear at each campsite.

#### Village Bilum Bags

Most trekkers wish to purchase a souvenir of their visit to PNG. Bilum bags are a popular choice and are usually purchased in Port Moresby at the end of their trek. Many have expressed an interest in purchasing a bilum with the name 'Kokoda Trail' and/or the name of a village along the track.

These initiatives provide an excellent opportunity for additional income but none are available at the present time.

## JOINT GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

### Australian Government

The announcement of the Kokoda Trail as a place of significant historical interest to Australia is timely in view of the current situation on the track. The Australian government should now commit to a partnership agreement with the PNG Government to establish and fund a proper joint management structure for the Kokoda Trail. The objective should be to aim towards an effective self-sustainable operation within a period of three to five years.

This agency would have the task of drafting legislation for the track and its environs to be proclaimed as a national memorial park. Its role would include the development of proper management systems including accounting and budgeting; the employment of qualified staff, the provision of a fully equipped office; and the development of enforceable regulations to govern the operation of the KTA, landowners/clan leaders and trek operators.

### PNG Government

The most positive feedback we receive from trekkers is in regard to the PNG guides and carriers who accompany them across the track:

- *'The strongest, toughest, most capable group of men I have ever seen, and also they are polite, cooperative, patient and gentle in looking after the well-being and physical safety of middle-aged gumbies like me. Could not have done it without them'.*
- *'They were unbelievable ... a true highlight of the trek'*
- *'What can you say...? Truly wonderful people'.*
- *'The porters were incredible. As Charlie highlighted, some might have paid for a single porter, but the dedication to bringing each trekker home safely each day demonstrated there were no such boundaries or set job descriptions. They made sure we were safe, looked after with food, accommodation and they always had a smile on their face!! Truly wonderful people'.*

- *'They went above and beyond so many times, I thought it was shown particularly by those porters who after a long day of trekking to the campsite would dump their packs, grab a torch, and head back out there to help the older ladies who were a few hours behind'*
- *'The boys could not do enough for us. Always ready for a laugh or to give a helping hand'.*

Whilst the people are PNG's greatest asset there are a number of shortcomings that need to be addressed by the PNG government if they wish to develop the eco-tourism potential of their country to benefit their people. Some of these issues are outlined below:

#### International Air Travel

Trek operators are often restricted in the number of trekkers they can accept due to the limited number of aircraft seats available during peak trekking periods. These periods coincide with the Anzac commemoration service and school holidays.

Air Niugini often overbook their flights. This has resulted in trekkers with paid tickets not being able to board their flight. This is not acceptable as trekkers plan their commitment months in advance. This involves taking holidays from work, purchasing trekking gear they require and committing to a rigorous training program. Such cancellations are not covered by travel insurance so the trek operator has to wear the cost and the trekker has to wear the consequences. It is not an option for them to offer a flight the next day as trekkers are committed to briefings, equipment issues and charter aircraft schedules.

Air Niugini also seems to have a large number of interruptions to their scheduled flight itineraries. These cause considerable disruption to trek operator plans and much inconvenience to trekkers.

#### 25.2 Reception at Port Moresby

The temporary visa queue at Jacksons International Airport causes considerable and unnecessary delay to trek groups arriving in Port Moresby. During peak trekking periods it can longer to clear this queue than it does for the flight between Brisbane and Port Moresby.

The processing of the temporary visas' is left to one customs official and one assistant. The customs officer checks each passport and his/her assistant completes the visa and manually seals it in each passport. As the other queues are cleared in the terminal the customs officials leave their respective posts.

Consideration should be given to allowing other customs officials to assist in issuing temporary visas' when they have cleared their respective queues. This simple action would solve the problem.

This is important because it is the first impression trekkers have of PNG and causes much negative feedback:

- *'The time to take to get thru Customs was a joke – 2 hours, not a good way to greet tourists!!'*
- *'In terms of the service at the airport – BAD'*

#### Hotel Accommodation in Port Moresby

The hotel accommodation in Port Moresby is of a good standard but there are not enough rooms to cater for all trek groups during peak trekking periods. This should be addressed as part of a national tourism strategy to increase capacity in this area.

#### Charter Aircraft

The reliability of charter aircraft for the movement of trek groups between Port Moresby and Kokoda can be problematical due to the lack of aircraft and/or the availability of pilots with sufficient flying hours.

Trek operators often have to change the direction of their trek at the last moment. This causes considerable disruption to trek itineraries and can lead to difficulties in securing campsites along the track.

#### Upgrade of Kokoda Airfield

The Kokoda airfield should be upgraded to accept a Dash-8 aircraft. This is not a major project but it would ease the problem caused by a lack of the smaller Twin Otter aircraft.

This initiative would also allow for direct flights to and from Cairns and would ease the pressure caused by the lack of suitable hotel accommodation in Port Moresby during peak trekking periods.

#### Road from Depot to Owers Corner

The road from Depot to Owers Corner is dangerous – particularly in the wet season. The road needs to be upgraded to an all-weather road to allow safe access for trekkers traveling in local buses. An upgrade of the road would also allow more short-term visitors in Port Moresby the opportunity to visit the start of the track at Owers Corner.

#### Conclusion

Trekking Kokoda is an expensive commitment in both time and money for most people. Those who pay for a trek expect their operator to confirm all campsites before they arrive and for these sites to have hygienic ablution blocks, clean toilets and adequate shelter.

All who do it are touched by the friendly hospitality extended to them by villagers and by the caring support they receive from their guides and carriers during the trek. This goodwill will quickly dissipate if disputes develop over campsites and trekkers become ill because of a lack of hygienic facilities along the track.

It is apparent that proper management of the track is not possible under the current structure.

This issue has been addressed in a separate report commissioned by the PNG Sustainable Foundation. We are unsure of the current status of this report however we believe it should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

#### Recommendations

These recommendations are based on our collective experiences over the past two years. It is fair to assume that other trek operators would have constructive suggestions to offer and we would recommend that PNG Tourism seek their views which could then be discussed before any decisions are implemented.

We also believe it is imperative that these suggestions be jointly addressed by the Australian and PNG Governments before the end of the year so that remedial action can be implemented before the trekking season begins in April 2008.

We strongly recommend that the Australian government, through AusAID, provide funding to establish a properly resourced and appropriate management -administrative structure for the effective operation of eco-trekking along the Kokoda track. The following systems need to be developed as a matter of urgency:

- A booking system for campsites along the track
- Training programs for trek guides and carriers
- Training programs for campsite owner/operators
- A grading system for campsites
- Catering programs to assist villagers in food preparation for trek groups
- Programs to assist villagers in obtaining added value from trek groups

- A liaison system to ensure educational and health needs of villagers are satisfied
- Codes of conduct for managers, trek rangers, trekkers, trek operators and campsite owners
- A dispute resolution system
- A financial accounting system independent of the management agency for the track
- An independent auditing system

We recommend the PNG Government develop a national eco-trekking strategy that seeks to provide certainty for trek operators in regard to aircraft and hotel bookings; enforceable regulations for eco-trekkers.

The PNG Government must also seek to ensure their national airline and other airline operators, increase their reliability performance and provide a guarantee to eco-trekkers that airline tickets purchased for a particular flight to and from PNG will be honoured.

This is a unique opportunity for Australia and PNG to establish a model which would form the basis of a world class eco-trekking industry in PNG.

It would be a tragedy if this opportunity was squandered because of a lack of government/Aid agency support in establishing, training, and resourcing a proper management system for the Kokoda track.

Charlie Lynn MLC  
15 August 2007

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#### The Kokoda Track- Clans & Landowners

<b>Imita Ridge</b>	<b>Landowners:</b> Gamia Veksy Noboea Kise John Noboea Norrin Noboes
<b>Adavamuna Village</b>	<b>Iahe Clan:</b> Peter Boraru Puksy Peter
<b>Nauro Village</b> 'Vabara'	<b>Guesthouse:</b> Jacob Dabave  <b>Landowner of 'Vabara'</b> Phillip Oemi
<b>Agulogo Campsite</b>	<b>Havoi Clan:</b> Sobi Auad (landowner from Agulogo Village)  <b>Niguea Clan:</b> Daoui Ladana (landowner from Nauro Village)
<b>Menari</b> (Pop: 250+)	<b>WW11 Carriers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faole Bokoi</li> <li>• Guia Kerea</li> <li>• Tavu Taete</li> </ul> <b>Vamai Clan:</b> Silver Eldo (Sons: Silver & Charlie – Daughters: Jenny & Eight) <b>Wamai Clan:</b> John Dagu <b>Golebi Clan:</b>

	<p>Soli Ioe  <b>Uluve Clan</b>  Dove Ilube</p>
<p><b>Efogi</b>  (Pop: 300)</p>	<p><b>Wese Clan:</b>  Siosi Laimo  Gaksy Siosi  <b>Oagi Clan:</b>  Omi Aubi (brother of Fred)  Chris Aubi  Willie Aubi  <b>Eloki Clan:</b>  Fred Aubi (brother of Omi)  <b>Elomi Clan:</b>  John Lauli  <b>WW11 Carrier:</b>  Bokoi Elomi  Landy Noel (owner of guesthouse near airfield)</p>
<p><b>Kagi Village</b></p>	<p><b>Guesthouse Owner:</b>  Gai Amiri (Cousin brother to Alex and Francis)  Sons: Peter, Dick and Ernie)</p>
<p><b>Naduri Village</b>  (Pop: 250+)</p>	<p><b>Wagi Clan:</b>  Mala Batia Soi</p> <p><b>Vovoli Clan:</b>  Vavela Siga</p> <p><b>Niguli Clan:</b>  Robert Beliki  Mark Kerea</p> <p><b>Wagi Clan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ovoru Indiki. Carrier Serial No C9299 – Nadunumu (Naduri) Sub Province: Sogeri. Province: Central</li> <li>• Andy &amp; Delman Ovoru: Ego (boy), Gola (girl)</li> <li>• Jeffery Ovoru</li> <li>• Nelson Ovoru</li> <li>• Mark Ovoru (Son: Max)</li> <li>• Betty Ovoru (Daughter: Lilienn)</li> <li>• Beatrice Ovoru</li> <li>• Meylin Ovoru</li> </ul> <p>Kobi Siga  Kabson Maul</p> <p><b>Health Nurse:</b>  Joe Abavu  (Attended Popondetta Medical Services Training Centre – 1 year course)  Short on medical supplies</p>
<p><b>Myola Guesthouse</b></p>	<p><b>Landowners:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mark Kerea</li> <li>• John Kerea</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robert Beliki</li> </ul>
<b>Myola 2</b>	Haoda Sihare – Kagi Village
<b>Templeton's No 1</b>	<p><b>Niguli Clan:</b> Minoa Gabuve (Luth – Lona and Norin) Minoa is from Maraba Village and owns the land at Templeton's. Maraba has 74 people and is 2 hours away from Templeton's. Joe Gabuve</p>
<b>Templeton's Crossing No 2</b>	<p><b>Vovori Clan</b> Obo Niberi (Landowner from Lamagi Village)</p>
<p><b>Alola</b> PO Box 43 Kokoda Oro Province</p>	<p><b>Babila Clan:</b> Manassa Sailini</p> <p>Kennedy Siga</p> <p>Ida Moni (Manassa's sister) Mina Manasi (Abuari Bilum Bag)</p>
<p><b>Abuari</b> PO Box 43 Kokoda Oro Province</p>	<p><b>Babila Clan:</b> Lilo Alola (Landowner of Eora Creek &amp; Clan Leader)</p> <p><b>Nigueri Clan:</b> Lovei Dalebe</p> <p><b>Badia Guesthouse</b> (PO Box 15, Kokoda) Naden Lovei (Daily tours to Munevi crash site and Maeaka Waterfall)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steven Tuperi</li> <li>• Kila Teio</li> <li>• Peter Lilo</li> <li>• Skyven Kila</li> </ul>
<b>Isurava Guesthouse</b>	<p><b>Babila Clan:</b> Loa Nave</p> <p>Ivan Nitua PO Box 51 Kokoda</p> <p>Dennis Gobula Deputy Chairman Koiari Local Level Govt POBox 7757, Boroko, NCD 321 5942/3</p> <p>Joe Embihi</p> <p>Zedee Holeve PO Box 51</p>

	Kokoda Oro Province
<b>Kovello</b>	<b>Babila Clan:</b> Sidney Toroi
<b>Kokoda</b> 'Koko' - <i>scull</i> 'Da' - <i>village</i>	<b>Police:</b> Major Nathan Evari (Requires a mobile VHF handset)