

CHAPTER 22: Kokoda Trail Management - The Way Ahead

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PART 1

Background

Pilgrimage tourism is unique because it unites people who were once divided. It provides an avenue for the establishment of empathetic relationships between trekkers and tourists of various nationalities and subsistence villagers who are the guardians of sites sacred to Australia, the United States and Japan.

The potential of a wartime tourism industry is limited by an effective strategy supported by an appropriate organisational structure.

The Kokoda Trail is one of many jungles shrines littered with relics of desperate battles fought between Australian and Japanese soldiers in late 1942. It lay dormant in the minds of Australians for five decades until Paul Keating became the first Australian Prime Minister to visit the village that bears its name.

The Kokoda Trail is unique because there is no other known challenge in such a remote jungle environment with such a compelling story – an experience that allows modern day trekkers to conquer their own adversity as the wartime history of the Kokoda campaign unfolds.

Kokoda, like Gallipoli, is a wartime pilgrimage where heroic stories of courage, mateship, sacrifice, endurance, initiative, egalitarianism and leadership are experienced in a way that has no equal in today's civil society.

A public outcry over a threat to mine a large part of the Kokoda Trail in 2006 caused the Australian Government to consult with the PNG Government to seek ways of protecting this iconic part of our shared military heritage.

The Department of Environment was delegated responsibility for assisting the PNG Government to develop a case for the Owen Stanley Ranges to receive a World Heritage Listing. The Department of Veterans Affairs were not involved in this process, probably because military heritage is not a factor in assessing nominations for a World Heritage listing. The development of a master interpretive plan to protect the military heritage of the Kokoda campaign has therefore not received the priority it deserves.

A Joint Agreement was signed with the PNG Government and Australian advisers were dispatched to assist PNG manage the emerging Kokoda trekking industry. Staff numbers in the management

authority increased significantly; numerous consultants were engaged; and some \$40 million in aid money has been expended.

Despite this injection of support annual trekker numbers declined by 44 per cent from 5,621 to 3,156 during the period 2009 – 2012.

The establishment of The Kokoda Track (Special Purpose) Authority (KTA) as a statutory government body of the Koiari and Kokoda Local-level Governments in 2003 has not worked as it was envisaged. The KTA, through no fault of its own, is responsible to too many masters and does not have the expertise to meet the competing demands of all the relevant stakeholders.

Notwithstanding this there have been valuable lessons learned during this process and the numbers indicate that pilgrimage tourism across the Kokoda trail is now financially sustainable. But more importantly it has the potential to become a model for the development of a world class wartime tourism industry for PNG.

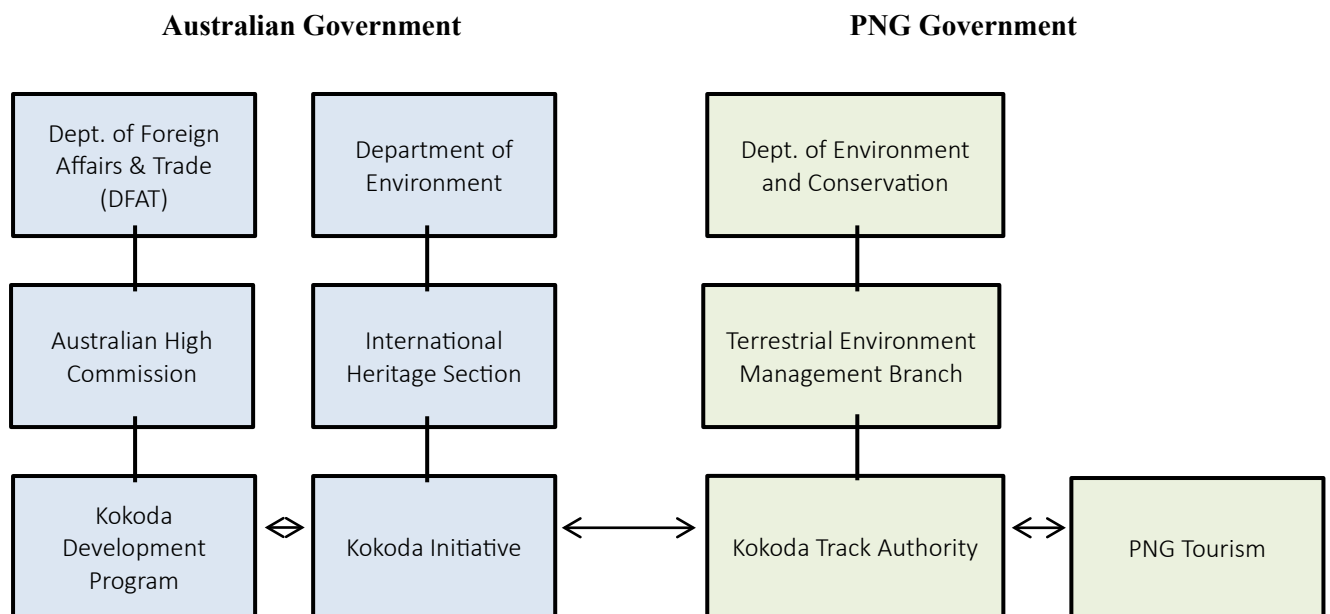
This will require a collaborative effort in formulating a wartime tourism strategy between the two governments.

It will also require a new management model which reflects the essential relationships between governments, tour operators and local communities. The model should address special legislation, infrastructure development, cultural sensitivities, environmental protection, personal safety, corporate governance, marketing, promotion and local community development.

PART 2

The Kokoda Tourism Business

Current Organization



The current organisation needs to be rationalised. There has been a disconnect between the Kokoda Development Program and the Kokoda Initiative because they are responsible to different masters.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, which is responsible for the WW1 Remembrance Trail in France and Belgium does not have a role in what is effectively our WW1 Remembrance Trail between Owers Corner and Kokoda.

The Kokoda Track Authority was initially placed under the auspices of the Department of Local Level Government because there was no precedent for such an organisation. It currently seems to have responsibilities direct to the Department of Environment in Canberra; the PNG Department of Environment and Conservation; the National Museum; and PNG Tourism. These diverse responsibilities, together with the demands of trek operators, Provincial and Local Level Government officials and landowners, have placed it in an invidious position.

Financial Assumptions

Over the past three years 10,000 trekkers have crossed the Kokoda Trail – an average of 3,333 per year. These trekkers would each invest around \$5 000 on airfares, accommodation, meals, clothing, camping gear and on-trail expenses in order to complete their trek. These amounts to a total spend of \$16.5 million per year. The annual GST dividend between the Australian and PNG governments is therefore in the region of \$1.6 million.

The gross income for villagers (the on-trail spend) in 2015 is estimated to be:

- \$600 000 in trek fees;
- \$250 000 in campsite fees;
- \$1.75 million in wages for guides and personal carriers;
- \$1.3 million in income for village fruit, vegetables, sing-sings, billum bags, carved trekking poles;
- \$500 000 in donated goods (boots, trekker clothing and gear based on an average of **K300** per trekker). This is a ‘hidden benefit’ of the trekking industry as the greater majority of trekkers donate gear to their guides and carriers.

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 the Kokoda trekking industry is now financially sustainable.

Government should therefore limit its contribution to infrastructure development i.e. the development of a master plan for the interpretation of the military history of the Kokoda campaign; facilitation for funding of appropriate memorials at significant sites, the maintenance of the road to Owers Corner; the maintenance of airfields at Menari, Efogi, Kagi and Kokoda; and a VHF communications system along the trail.

Management Issues

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 an effective management authority in place.

The management authority has a ‘duty of care’ to ensure licensed trek operators 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.

Licensing System

The current lack of due diligence in the licensing process for Kokoda trek operators means that anybody who applies for a license will be issued with one. There have been instances of unlicensed operators simply being issued with a license after they have been reported either because of intimidation or because it is the path of least resistance. There are no checks to verify if the applicant has a registered company; a Public Liability Insurance policy; communications equipment; training in advanced First Aid; or the means to protect the welfare of their guides and carriers.

There is no legislation to support a licensing system so conditions are easily and routinely ignored.

The current system favours opportunistic trek operators 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 trek operators who apply for less than 100 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 to non-peak periods.

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

Campsites

Campsites should be a unique feature of the Kokoda experience. They should be built from bush material and should 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.

Ideally they should be segregated from villages so they do not impose on their day-to-day routine – particularly 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.

Tent 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.

Welfare of PNG Guides and Carriers

The 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 20 kg limit imposed by the Kiaps under the colonial regime has been ignored. 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!

'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.'

Deidre McKinnon
Trekker

Consideration should be given to developing an accreditation system for guides and carriers to enhance their status because they are, without question, PNGs best ambassadors.

Training

The lack of a strategy for training key stakeholders has been the major flaw in the development of the Kokoda trekking industry. KTA Board members were selected as a result of the positions they held in Provincial and Local Level government rather than as a result of their professional qualifications. There was no strategy to develop their understanding of the legal responsibilities of Directors. The executive staff of the KTA were never trained in the basics of management – none had any previous business experience. Campsite owner were never trained how to meet the basic needs of their clientele. Villagers were never trained in the basics of value-adding to the Kokoda trekking industry.

Effective raining requires a long-term commitment at every level of the Kokoda trekking industry if sustainable outcomes are to be achieved.

Fee Structures

Trek Fees

Trek fees for Kokoda should be sufficient to cover the cost of a functional management organisation.

The current trek fee of \$150 per trekker will raise \$500 000 per year based on the average number of trekkers over the past three years. This would be more than adequate to cover the cost of the office, staff and rangers necessary for the revised management functions at a more appropriate location such as the former Koiari Holdings property at 14-mile.

The Australian and/or PNG governments should fund three essential positions i.e. a Chief Executive Officer, a Commercial Business Manager 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.

Campsite Fees

The current campsite fee of \$10 for trekkers and \$2.50 for PNG guides could be increased by 50 per cent for those who meet the standards established by the management authority. This would potentially increase their combined income by up to \$125 000 a year. This could be further increased with the establishment and accreditation of a proper campsite booking system.

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 relatively easy task for Rangers to gather the details of payments from each trek group at each campsite and report the figures back to the KTA but for some inexplicable reason the KTA will not adopt such a system.

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 immediate after the trek operator reports that all facilities and services were provided (clean toilets, discreet ablution facilities, dining facilities, *haus drai*, firewood, accommodation for guides and trekkers, etc.).

Additional Levies

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.

Over the past decade some of the wealthiest and most influential people in Australia have trekked Kokoda. Many of these would have been willing to leave a substantial footprint behind through the support of community development initiatives in education, health, agriculture and village learning centres if they had been approached to do so. Unfortunately this did not happen because the management authority does not have a database or a system for recording basic contact information.

The multi-million kina ‘*village livelihoods*’ program initiated out of Canberra, without any consultation with the PNG Department of Community Development, tour operators or landowners has not generated a single toea in income or produced a single vegetable from the ground in spite of its stated aim ‘*to increase the capacity of Kokoda Track communities to develop skills and generate income from the tourism industry by adding value to the trekking experience*’.

Most of the achievements to date are clothed in ‘*political Aid speak*’ such as ‘*capacity building*’, ‘*mentoring programs*’, ‘*gender equity*’, improving ‘*quality of life*’ in communities, etc. None are measurable against key performance objectives in a Melanesian environment.

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.

The organisation would be responsible for:

- fundraising in Australia and PNG;
- the conduct of annual village workshops in the Koiari and Orokaiva areas along the trail to determine local development needs; and
- the co-ordination of community projects in the areas of education, health, agriculture and community learning.

A Community Development Levy of \$50 per trekker, for example, would provide an annual income of \$165 000 to directly support village projects along the trail based on the average number of trekkers over the past three years.

The benefits from the levy, combined with targeted fundraising campaigns, would allay many of the concerns of local landowners who currently regard themselves as mere spectators to the Kokoda trekking industry.

Network Kokoda (PNG) has the governance and the capacity to develop, manage and monitor philanthropic community development programs along the trail.

Network Kokoda was established as a Not for Profit company with a \$50 000 donation from Adventure Kokoda in 2010. The company has since raised \$150 000 for agricultural programs along the Kokoda Trail and currently employs one full-time agricultural field officer to manage approved projects.

The raison d'être of Network Kokoda is to honour the legacy of Australian and PNG veterans, including the wartime carriers, through the support of community development initiatives relating to education, health, agriculture and community learning.

Network Kokoda has two separate Boards – one in Australia and one in PNG. The purpose of the Australian Board, chaired by Brigadier Philip McNamara (former head of the Australian Army Special Forces; former CEO of the NSW State Emergency Services; and a former officer in the Pacific Islands Regiment) is to raise funds to support PNG community development initiatives.

PNG projects are managed through our PNG Board which includes Dame Carol Kidu and Marianna Ellingson as Directors. Network Kokoda (PNG) is in the process of engaging a PNG CEO who will be co-located with the CPL Group (*who have kindly offered to provide office, transport and warehousing support for our agricultural projects*).

Network Kokoda (PNG) currently has seven village agricultural projects operating on the Sogeri Plateau and has built three Community Learning Development Centres – one at Abuari and two at Kokoda. A major Agricultural Learning Centre at Sogeri is nearing completion.

Network Kokoda projects are based on Dame Carol Kidu's concept of 'Community Learning Development Centres'.

A brief on our Network Kokoda agricultural projects on the Sogeri Plateau is attached as Appendix 1. The website can be accessed at www.networkkokoda.org

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 the Australian government 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 \$50 per trekker. This would generate an income of \$165 000 for payment to villagers involved in trek maintenance each year.

The trail could be divided into the following sections:

- Section 1: Owers Corner to Ofi Creek;
- Section 2: Ofi Creek to Menari;
- Section 3: Menari to Kagi;
- Section 4: Kagi to Lake Myola
- Section 5: Lake Myola to Eora Creek
- Section 6: Eora Creek to Isurava Memorial; and
- Section 7: Isurava Memorial to Kokoda

An average of \$24 000 would be available for allocation to each section. This could be used to employ local guides and carriers during the off-trekking season and therefore extend their opportunities for employment.

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.

The following trail maintenance tasks would be included in the annual maintenance plan:

- Build and maintain ‘traditional’ bridges across all creeks and rivers. These could be modelled on the bridge recently been built across Eora Creek. They should be at least one metre wide with handrails on both sides and bound with natural fibres;
- Lay corduroy paths along the Nauro swamp area and other similar sections;
- Maintain steps (*golden staircase style*) on steep sections of the trail; and
- Cut a couple of parallel tracks (north-south and south-north) where there is serious erosion between the Kokoda Gap and Eora Creek the southern slopes of Imita and Ioribaiwa ridges and the Nauro swamp area – this will allow degraded areas to regenerate. The direction of each parallel track would be controlled by Rangers.

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 \$5 Significant Site Levy (*the price of a cappuccino in Sydney*) would raise \$175 000 (i.e. \$15 000 for each landowner) based on 2014 trekking numbers.

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

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 \$2.5 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>

I have attached a speech I made in the NSW Parliament on the background to the Kokoda Challenge as Appendix 2.

A ‘Charity Levy’ of \$1,250 per trekker for one-off charitable treks and \$2,500 per trekker for professional charities such as the ‘Kokoda Challenge would ensure that villagers along the trail would receive shared benefits from this side industry.

Ancillary Income Earning 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 by the Australian Government. 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.

The following ancillary income opportunities are yet to be realised:

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. See paragraph 6 b 2 below.

Brewed 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 trekkers brought just two cups of coffee a day at K5 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.

Bread Ovens

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. Unfortunately it has not operated for the past 10 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 from the KTA in 2007 and NGOs provided cooking classes. Unfortunately they never trained the villagers in basic business principles so when the ‘free’ flour was exhausted they stopped baking bread. Villagers had assumed trek operators would carry in the flour they needed for the bread and they would simply bake it. The NGOs had not consulted with trek operators in regard to this ‘capacity building’ initiative and not a single toea has been realised as a result.

Trekkers Laundry

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 K10 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 K200 000 per trekking season could be realised with this initiative.

‘Sing-Sings’ – Re-enactments

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.

Village Bilums

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. Most trekkers would purchase at least one and many would take the opportunity to purchase a complete set.

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.

Warehousing Facilities

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.

Recharge Facilities

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.

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 trek operators 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 Aid/NGO bodies that exist by putting their hands in the taxpayers pocket with no personal accountability for success or failure.

Summary

The rapid increase in trekker numbers from 2004 overwhelmed the management system which has been unable to cope with the diverse range of demands placed on it. A strategy to manage expectations of subsistence villagers in accordance with established principles of integrated community development policies was never implemented. Effective training systems for each component of the trekking industry were never developed.

As a result the economic potential of the emerging trekking industry has not been realised and the welfare of guides, carriers and campsite owners has been ignored. Aid funded initiatives have not been effective due to a lack of coordination/consultation with key stakeholders

The current management system is now beyond dysfunctional. There is an urgent need for a new strategy to be developed and implemented for the Kokoda trekking industry to realise its potential.

The potential of a wartime tourism industry is currently limited by an effective strategy supported by an appropriate organisational structure.

If we procrastinate and allow such sacred land to be lost to other emerging economic opportunities in PNG (mining, forestry, farming) subsequent generations will never forgive us.

If we allow the system to continue as it has over the past decade the only growth industry will be conflict management. But if we use the lessons we have learned since the 50th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign that put 'Kokoda' back on the radar we will be only limited by the imagination of current and future generations who seek to walk in their footsteps.

PART 3

2017: 75th Anniversary of the Kokoda Campaign

“With the economic boom attracting increasing numbers of visitors to Port Moresby, Owers Corner has an opportunity to be the most visited tourist attraction for the nation’s capital because of its historical significance.”

The 75th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign will be commemorated in 2017. It will be the last significant anniversary with surviving veterans who are now in their early 90s. It will be the last hurrah for a significant commitment to the Kokoda campaign by the Australian Government.

The following opportunities are available as a 75th anniversary initiative:

- Develop a Master Interpretative Plan to honour the military heritage of the Kokoda campaign;
- Develop a Military Historical – Koiari Cultural Centre at Owers Corner
- Develop a ‘Historical Military and Cultural Precinct’ on the Kokoda Plateau

Military Historical - Koiari Cultural Centre: Owers Corner

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 Ranges at the point our veterans stepped onto the trail.

With the economic boom attracting increasing numbers of visitors to Port Moresby, Owers Corner has an opportunity to be the most visited tourist attraction for the nation’s capital because of its historical significance.

A replica village featuring Koiari tree-houses; a coffee shop; an arts and crafts shop; a ceremonial welcome area; A building with a diorama and audio visual presentation of the Kokoda campaign (see <http://www.gettysburgdiorama.com>).

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

Historical Military – Cultural Precinct on the Kokoda Plateau

The Kokoda plateau has the potential to be the second most popular tourist destination in PNG after Owers Corner and certainly the most visited in Oro Province – particularly if ‘Kokoda Day’ is proclaimed on 3rd November in accordance with my original submission (copy attached) – unfortunately it was changed to ‘Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel Day’ which has no marketing resonance in Australia.

The Kokoda plateau should be accorded its proper place as a military historical – precinct. It represents the only time in Australian history where Australian troops were attacked by a hostile foreign aggressor at a place 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. 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 ‘Historical Military – Orokaiva Cultural Precinct’ on the Kokoda Plateau would extend the tourist potential of the area to the wider Australian population who are not physically capable of completing

the arduous trek but would like to be able to visit such a spiritual place and pay their respects. It would also be a gateway to further historical developments in the Buna-Gona area.

An earlier proposal to proclaim the 3rd November as Kokoda Day was amended by the National Executive Council to 'Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angel Day'. Unfortunately this amendment defeated the purpose of the original proposal and 'Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angel Day' has failed to resonate.

Consideration should be given to adopting the original proposal attached as Appendix 3.

What's in a Name?

Ownership of the naming rights for the Kokoda Trail is a keenly contested point of debate in Australia.

Do they belong to the nation which retains sovereign ownership of the land between Owers Corner and Kokoda i.e. Papua New Guinea?

Or the Papuan Infantry Battalion and the 10 Australian Battalions who were awarded the battle honour 'Kokoda Trail'?

Or the custodians of political correctness amongst the Australian commentariat who dislike the name 'trail' because of its American connotation?

The Kokoda Trail is the name of the Battle Honour awarded to the Papuan Infantry Battalion and the 10 Australian battalions who fought in the Kokoda campaign by the Australian Battles Nomenclature Committee in 1958. 'Kokoda Trail' was officially gazetted by the PNG Government in 1972 as a result of a recommendation by a Place Names Committee to identify the geographical features in the emerging nation.

The official name 'Kokoda Trail' should therefore be incorporated into the name of the management authority and in all commemorative services conducted in PNG.

For more information click on this link: [Kokoda 'Track-Trail' Debate: Who Owns the Naming Rights?](#)

PART 4

The Way Ahead

Need for Reform

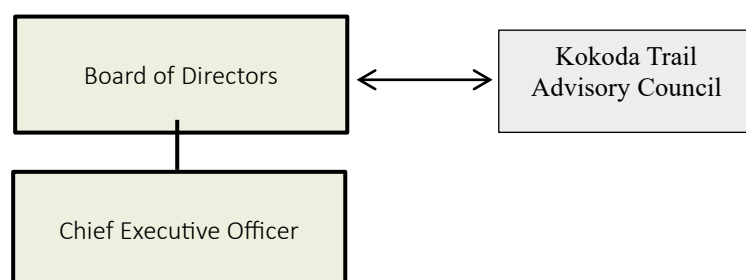
There is now an urgent need for the Kokoda tourism industry to be rationalised and managed as a commercial enterprise with a clear division of responsibility between:

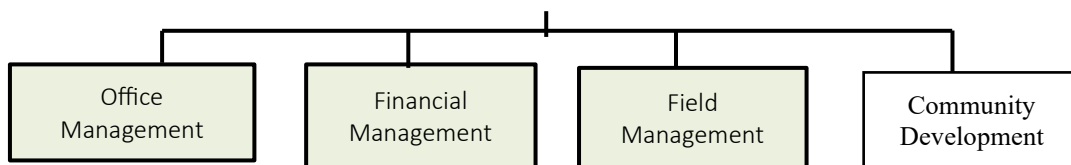
Government which should provide infrastructure support (road to Owers Corner; airfields at Menari, Efogi, Kagi, Kokoda; VHF communications; and interpretative memorials);

a commercial management enterprise to provide operational management of the trekking industry; and

a philanthropic entity to manage community development along the trail.

Recommended Management Structure for the Kokoda Trekking Industry





The Board of Directors should include a representative from the Office of Tourism Arts and Culture; the Oro and Provincial Governments; and professionals with expertise in business, law, accounting and military history.

An Advisory Council should include landowners groups from each village across the Trail.

The operational management structure should comprise the following functions:

- **Offices management** to operate the website, database and online booking system and routine office functions to support the administration of the authority.
- **Financial management** responsible for all financial transactions and the provision of financial reports to the CEO and the Board of Directors.
- **Field management** to protect the wartime heritage and environmental values of the Kokoda Trail and manage rangers, liaise with landowners, manage checkpoints, conduct campsite audits and supervise track safety/maintenance.
- **Community Development** responsible for the conduct of village 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 all licensed tour companies. 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 from vested interests.

A suggested brief for a professional website is attached as Appendix 3.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are considered necessary to allow the Kokoda trekking industry and wartime tourism to achieve its potential:

1. Disband the Kokoda Track (Special Purpose) Authority.
2. Rationalise the Kokoda Development Program and the Kokoda Initiative under the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
3. Establish the Kokoda Trail Management Authority as a business entity under the auspices of the Independent Public Business Corporation (IPBC) as a precursor to the establishment of a National Wartime Tourism Corporation.
4. Appoint a Board of Directors which includes the Secretary of the Office of Tourism, Arts and Culture, the Secretaries of the Oro and Central Provincial governments; a corporate executive; a senior lawyer; a senior accountant; and a qualified military historian.
5. Appoint a Kokoda Trail Advisory Council with representation from the Koiari and Kokoda Local Level Governments; Ward Chairmen from each sector along the trail; the Port Moresby RSL; and a trek operator’s representative.

6. Develop legislation to support the Kokoda Trail Management Authority – a Military Heritage Act.
7. Develop a master plan to protect and interpret the military history of the Kokoda campaign.
8. Develop a plan to establish a military historical-cultural precinct centre at Owers Corner and Kokoda to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign.

The Hon Charlie Lynn OL
10 September 2015

Appendices:

1. Brief for Management Authority Website
2. Proposal for Kokoda Day
3. Official Naming Rights for The Kokoda Trail

Brief for Kokoda Trail Management Authority Website

If the KTMA is established to professionally manage the Kokoda Trail as a world class trekking destination the potential is enormous.

Some of Australia's wealthiest and most influential people have trekked across the Kokoda Trail. Many of these people would be willing to contribute to the ongoing develop of villagers along the trail however there is no management mechanism for them to be identified. Effective management tools are based on a professional website, an effective database and a social media strategy. The absence of such is one of the greatest failures of the Rod Hillman era of management.

Professional management will enable campsite and battlesite owners to increase their income through a system of pre-payments into bank accounts and detailed audits of payments received from trek operators.

Realistic training programs can be developed to create financial opportunities for villagers to earn additional income through the establishment of a trekker laundry service, a coffee and scone service, the production of Kokoda Trail billum bags with village names, the sale of carved trekking poles, stalls selling tropical fruits, sing-sings, the construction of a hot shower facility at K5 each (see Bomber's Campsite), etc. If each trekker spent **K500** during their trek, and this is possible, the villagers would earn a combined income of almost **K2 million** per year.

The current 'KTA marketing levy' should be scrapped as marketing is not a function of the management authority. It should be replaced by a K100 'Community Development Levy' which would raise K350,000 each trekking season for village community projects to be managed by Network Kokoda in partnership with the KTMA.

The Australian student discount for campsites must be scrapped. It is immoral to require local campsite owners to provide a 50 per cent subsidy for student trekkers who come from some of the wealthiest private schools in Australia. These students pay full price for their Air Niugini ticket. They pay full price for the accommodation in Port Moresby. Why should local villagers be required to provide a 50 per cent discount?

There is scope for an increase in peak season trek fees which would substantially increase income for the KTMA. Trek operators will require at least 12 month notice of any proposed changes to the current system to allow them to budget accordingly. They would also need to be reassured that any increase in fees was commensurate with an increase in management effectiveness.

Essential Management Tools

The essential tools for an effective management system are:

1. A Head Office;
2. a modern, relevant 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.

KTMA WEBSITE

- **About Us**
KTMA Board Members
Organisational Chart
- **PNG Visitor Information**
Papua New Guinea
Central Province
Oro Province
Kioari Local Level Government Authority
Kokoda Local Level Government Authority
- **The Kokoda Trail**
History
Map
Campsites
- **Community Development**
Our Commitment
Our Partnership
Network Kokoda
- **Licensed Trek Operators**
License Number
Name of Company
Public Liability Insurance Policy Number
Code of Conduct
Contact Details
- **Niusletas**
- **Blog**
- **Trekker Survey**
 - a. Why did you trek? (Physical Challenge – Wartime History – Bucket List – Adventure – Culture – Environment)
 - b. Did your trek experience meet your expectations? (Yes – No – Comment)
 - c. Your Trek Operator (Name of Company – Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - d. Standard of meals provided by your trek operator (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - e. Battlesite Briefings (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - f. Campsites (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
 - g. Toilets (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)

- h. Showers (Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
- i. The Trail (Safe – Unsafe – Comments)
- j. Bridge Crossings (Safe – Unsafe – Comments)
- k. Tents provided by your trek operator (Yes – No – Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor – Comment)
- l. 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.

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:
 - Name
 - Travel Insurance (Company & Policy Number)
 - Contact Phone Number
 - Email address
 - 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.