

# Kokoda Trail Tourism - The Way Forward



## VISION

*'To develop the Kokoda Trail as a world-class pilgrimage tourism destination for the economic benefit of traditional landowner communities'.*

The Hon Charlie Lynn OAM OL  
Director, Adventure Kokoda  
14 January 2023

(Updated from paper submitted on 10 September 2015)

# Summary of Facts for Kokoda Tourism

**Kokoda Tourism is a K46 million industry**

## **KTA Income Sources:**

- KTA currently receives an estimated K1.2 Million in income from Trek Permit Fees and Licences<sup>1</sup>
- Village communities receive K3.3 million from campsite fees and on-Trail spending by trekkers – estimate based on 3,300<sup>2</sup> trekkers per year.

## **POTENTIAL INCOME SOURCES:**

### **1. Additional Levy Fees:**

The introduction of a levy for each of the following could generate an additional income of up to K2.6 million:

• Trail Maintenance Levy (K100):	K330,000 (Page 20)
• Community Development Levy (K100):	K330,000 (Page 20)
• Philanthropic Trust	K1,000,000 (Page 22)
• Significant Sire Levy (K15):	K544,000 (Page 23)
• Charity Levy	K250,000 (Page 23)
• Welfare Levy (K50):	K165,000 (Page 24)
<b>SUB TOTAL:</b>	<b>K2,619,000</b>

### **2. Ancillary Income Earning Opportunities**

The following Income earning opportunities are available for village communities:

• Sale of Brewed Coffee and Scones:	K1,000,000 (Page 25)
• Trekker laundry service:	K264,000 (Page 26)
• Village 'sing-sings' and reenactments:	K148,000 (Page 26)
• Sale of traditional 'Kokoda Trail' Bilums:	K495,000 (Page 26)
• Hot Showers:	K132,000 (Page 26)
<b>SUB-TOTAL:</b>	<b>K2,039,000</b>

**TOTAL: K4,658,000**

## **NOTE:**

The longer government takes to transfer responsibility for Kokoda Tourism from the Conservation Environment Protection Authority (CEPA) to the Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA) the longer traditional landowner communities across the Kokoda Trail will have to wait to realise their potential of earning up to **K4.7 million** for themselves.

## INDEX

Background .....	5
Evolution of Organization Structures .....	6
Kokoda Initiative Sustainable Development Master Plan+ .....	7
KTA Strategic Plan: 2012-2015 .....	9
Current Situation .....	10
Process of Reform .....	11
Vision .....	11
Recommended Organisational Structure for Kokoda Tourism Management .....	11
Conservation & Environment Management – Owen Stanley Ranges .....	12
.....	12
Kokoda Tourism Management .....	12
Financial Assumptions .....	13
Management Issues .....	14
Duty of Care .....	14
Current Tour Operator Licensing System .....	14
Proposed Tour Operator Licencing System .....	15
Peak and Non-Peak Trekking Periods .....	16
Campsites .....	16
Australian Army Assistance for Campsite Development .....	17
Welfare Protection - PNG Guides and Carriers .....	18
Executive Training .....	18
Fee Structures .....	19
Tour Operator Licence Fees .....	19
Trek Permit Fees .....	19
Campsite Fees .....	19
Campsite Audits .....	19
Campsite Register .....	20
Additional Levies .....	20
Trail Maintenance Levy .....	20
Community Development Levy .....	21

Philanthropic Trust.....	22
Significant Site Levy.....	23
Charity Levy .....	23
Welfare Levy: Guides and Porters .....	24
Ancillary Income Earning Opportunities for Villagers.....	24
• Owers Corner.....	24
• Brewed Coffee .....	25
• Bread Ovens.....	25
• Trekkers Laundry.....	26
• ‘Sing-Sings’ – Re-enactments.....	26
• Village Bilums .....	26
• Hot Showers.....	26
• Warehousing Facilities.....	26
• Kokoda Plateau .....	27
Summary .....	27
Conclusion.....	28
Recommendations .....	28
Essential Management Tools .....	29
KTMA Website Essentials.....	29
Application for Trek Permits .....	30

## **Background**

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 in 1992.

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 Trail 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 an area adjacent to the southern section of the Trail in 2006 caused the Australian Government to consult the PNG Government to seek ways of protecting such an iconic part of our military heritage.

The Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts was delegated responsibility for assisting PNG to develop a case for a World Heritage listing for the [Kokoda Track](#)<sup>3</sup> and Owen Stanley Ranges. The Department of Veterans Affairs was not involved in this process despite the fact the primary motivation was the protection of the military heritage of The Kokoda Trail .

A 'Joint' Understanding was developed in Canberra and signed in Madang in 2008. Australian environment officials were then dispatched to assist PNG in assisting PNG to develop a case for a World Heritage listing and to manage emerging Kokoda tourism industry. Staff numbers in the management authority increased significantly; numerous consultants were engaged; and more than \$60 million in Australian aid has been expended. No officials with expertise in military heritage were included in the delegation.

Despite this injection of support annual trekker numbers fell by 44 per cent from 5,621 to 3,156 during the period 2009 – 2012 under Australia's watch.

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

Notwithstanding this there have been valuable lessons learned during this process and the numbers indicate that 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 Kokoda 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, military heritage, cultural sensitivities,

environmental protection, personal safety, corporate governance, marketing, promotion and local community development.

The Kokoda Trail has emerged as PNG's most popular tourism destination however its potential has been limited by Australia's preference for it to be managed as an environmental bureaucracy rather than as a commercial tourism enterprise.

Australian officials will eventually have to acknowledge that the prime motivation for Australians to trek across the Trail is related to the military heritage of the place. Their failure to invest in the interpretation of a single battlesite anywhere across it over the past 20 years is indicative of their ambivalence towards military heritage.

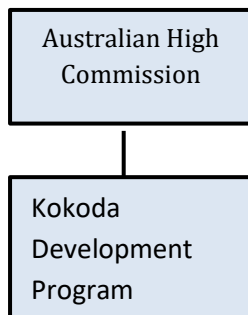
They must also acknowledge that the bureaucratic organization they have imposed on PNG is now beyond dysfunctional and tainted with allegations of nepotism and corruption.

The KTA was initially placed under the auspices of the Department of Provincial and Local Level Government Affairs (DPLLGA) because there was no precedent for the management of National Parks in PNG prior to 2002. The expectation at the time was based in its link to tourism - the Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA) therefore took the lead role in the emerging industry albeit, unofficially.

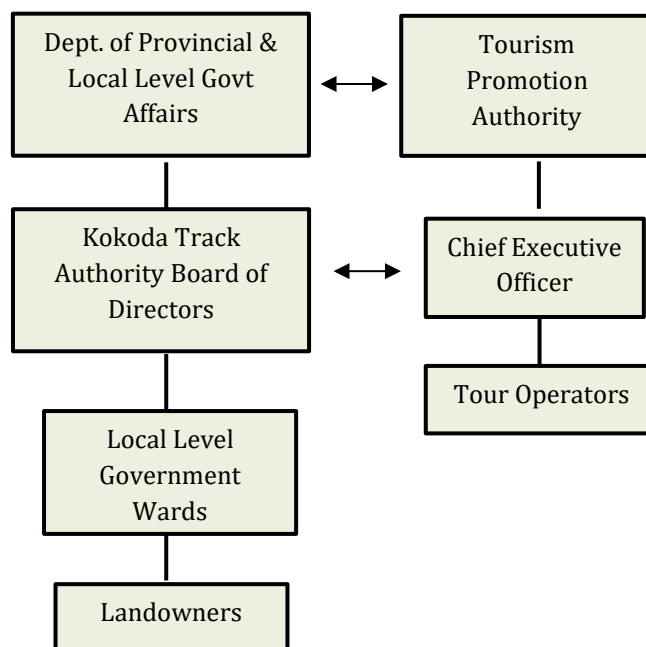
### Evolution of Organization Structures

This is reflected in the organization in place under the auspices of the PNG Government between 2004 – 2009:

#### Australian Government



#### PNG Government

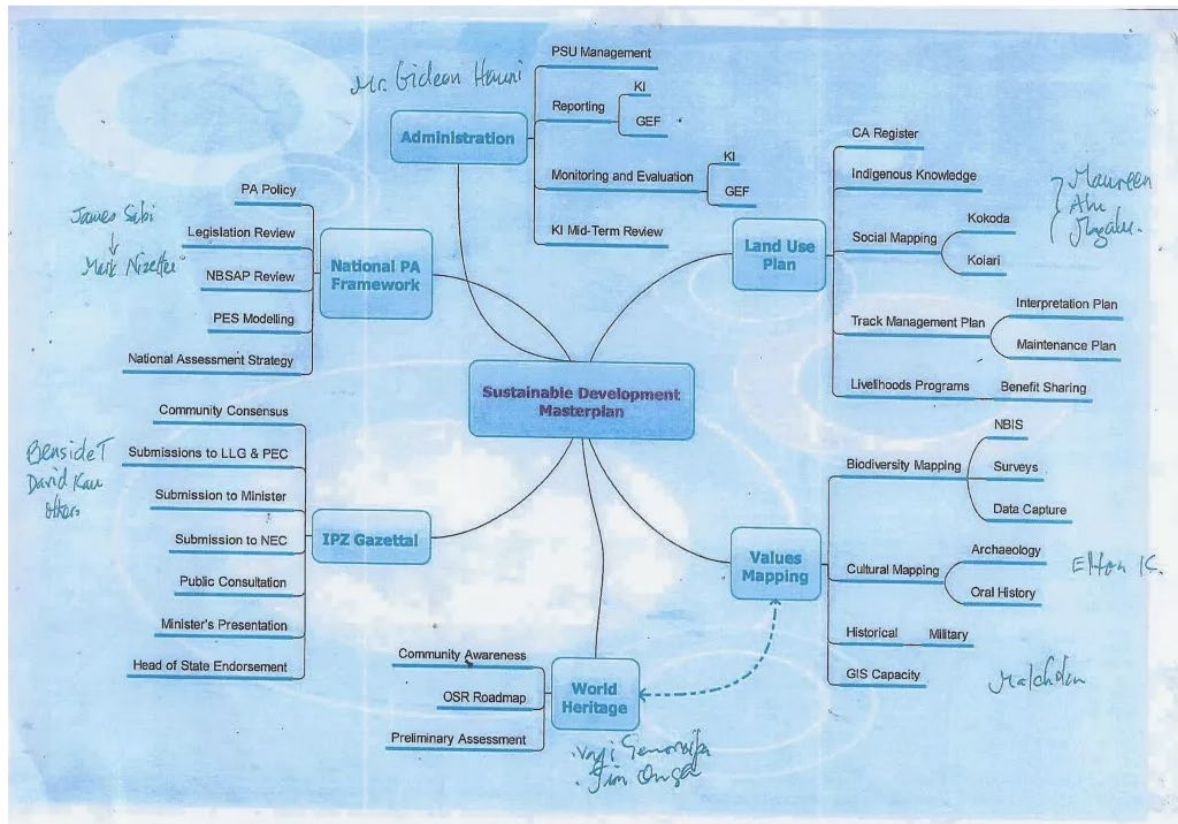


The arrival of Australian officials from the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and Arts in 2009 resulted in a 10-fold increase in staff and a multi-million dollar budget.



There was a flurry of activity as the new arrivals took to their whiteboards to work out what needed to be done.

### Kokoda Initiative Sustainable Development Master Plan+



Kokoda Initiative Sustainable Development Masterplan

It was clear from this diagram that their emphasis would be on World Heritage and social engineering - military heritage barely rated as a footnote in their deliberations.

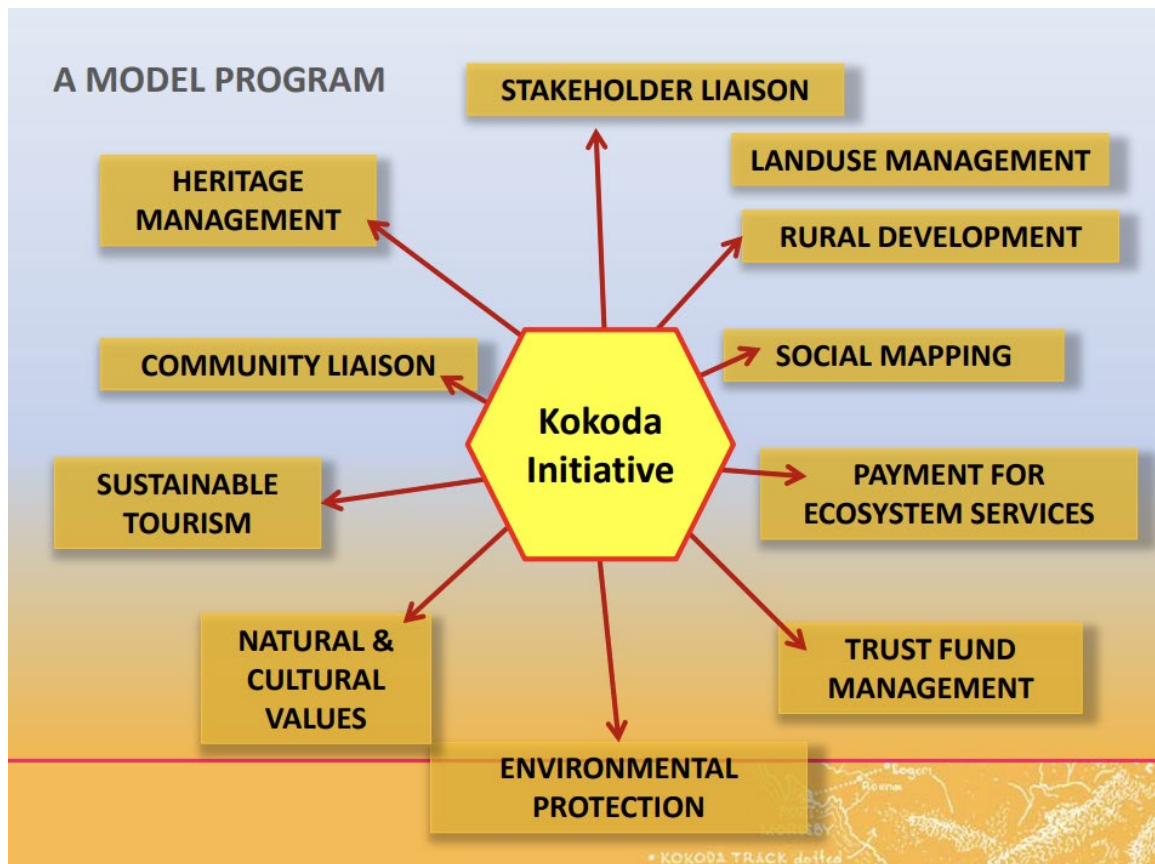
At this time the Australian High Commission was concurrently managing a 'Kokoda Development Program' under the auspices of AusAID while DFAT established their own 'Kokoda Initiative'. It was soon evident that both programs were operating in a parallel universe to each other with neither one related to pilgrimage tourism.

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

At this stage Australian Government officials seem to lose sight of the primary objective which was to assist PNG to manage the emerging Kokoda tourism industry in such a way that provided shared benefits from it.

Kokoda tour companies who had been operating across the Trail for the previous 20 years were desperate for a functional management system that allowed them to book campsites, provide employment to keep the Trail safe, assisting landowners to develop campsites, interpreting military heritage sites to enhance the value of the pilgrimage, and providing sustainable economic benefits to village communities.

But after three years in charge it was clear there was another agenda and it had little to do with military heritage or community development across the trail.



A presentation by the DFAT Strategic Advisor, Mark Nizette, to a Kokoda Initiative Stakeholders Forum in Sydney on 27 March 2012 provided an aid-funded empire building template which relegated ‘sustainable tourism’ as one of many parts while Military heritage did not rate a mention.

This is why Kokoda tourism numbers have dropped by 46 percent since Australia took control of the Kokoda Trail in 2009.

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

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

This made no difference to the management of Kokoda tourism as the same personnel responsible for its decline were simply transferred across to the Kokoda Initiative – it was akin to putting a new jockey on the same horse.

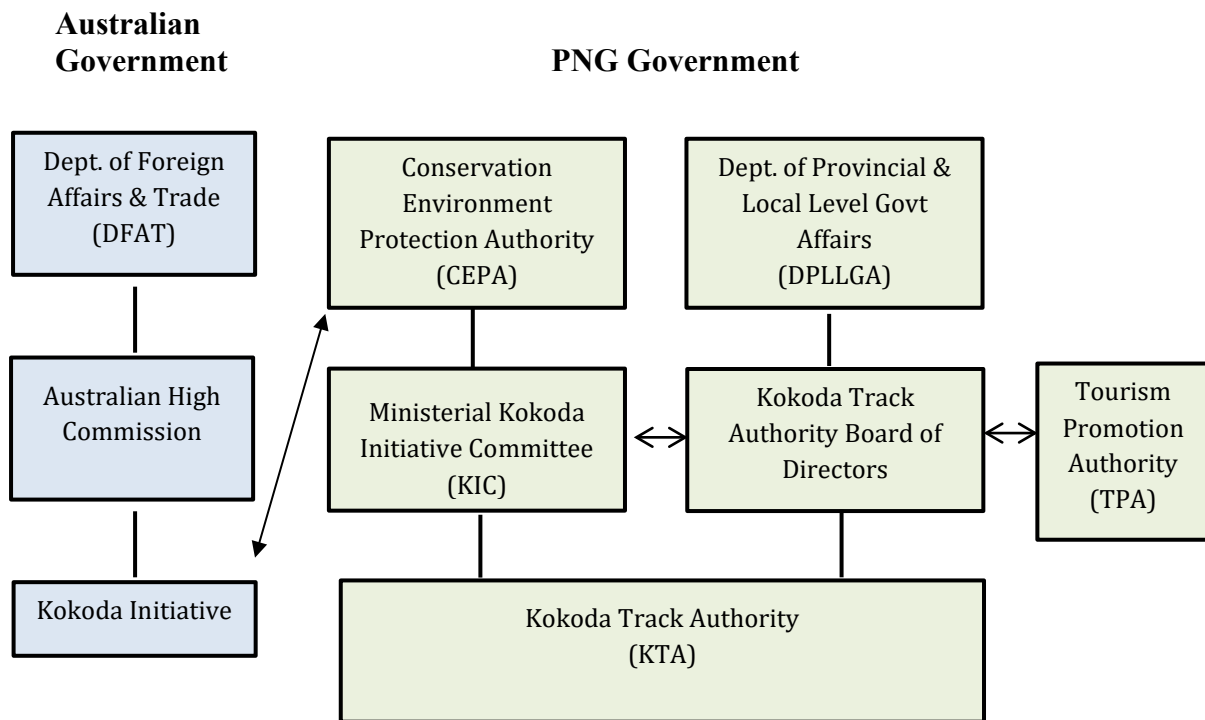
It also became apparent that the Board of Directors appointed by the Minister for Provincial and Local Level Government to oversee the KTA was not qualified for their role. Allegations of nepotism and corruption<sup>4</sup> soon began to surface along with their failure to comply with their statutory obligations saw them drift into irrelevance.



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

The DFAT Strategic Management Advisor was appointed secretary of the KIC which increased his influence over the management of The Kokoda Trail .

The management structure which evolved from this process can best be described as a ‘dog’s breakfast’!



In reality, while DPLLGA is the legal body responsible for the management of The Kokoda Trail, the Kokoda Initiative Committee assumed gradual control of Kokoda Tourism due to the influence of its Minister and the DFAT Strategic Management Advisor embedded in his department (CEPA).

TPA, which should have responsibility for PNGs most popular tourism asset, was relegated to membership of the Minister’s Kokoda Initiative Committee,.

**KTA Strategic Plan: 2012-2015**

In 2015 the KTA published the result of another whiteboard exercise under the guise of a ‘KTA Strategic Plan: 2012-2015’.

There was no consultation with Kokoda tour companies or landowner groups across the Trail in the development of the plan:



## KOKODA TRACK AUTHORITY



### STRATEGIC PLAN 2012 – 15

**Our Mission and Values**  
**Our Vision:**

To manage the Track with trust, respect and pride.

The values and legacy of a well-managed Kokoda Track bring increased financial, social, cultural and environmental benefits to the people.

**Our Planned Outcomes:** At the completion of 2015, KTA:

1. Has increased the benefits and opportunities for landowners and Track based communities.
2. Has preserved the unique values and legacy of the Track and enhanced the trekking experience.
3. Has facilitated improved mutual respect, trust and understanding between stakeholders.
4. Has put in place good Governance arrangements to guide and evaluate its operations, and
5. Is a sustainable and effective organization.

**What we do:** The KTA Draft Constitution provides for the following roles of the KTA:

1. To preserve the legacy of the Kokoda track
2. Promote trekking and tourism related activities along the track
3. Administer, facilitate and oversee the implementation of community development projects along the track. Alone or in collaboration with the PNG government, its agents or any other philanthropic organization and other donor agencies.
4. Collect and manage trekking fees;
5. Administer financial transactions and maintain accounting records;
6. Consult with landowners on their needs and priorities.

Strategy 1: Increase the benefits and opportunities for landowners and track based communities.	Strategy 2: Preserve the unique values and legacy of the Track and enhanced the trekking experience.	Strategy 3: Facilitate improved mutual respect, trust and understanding between stakeholders.	Strategy 4: Set in place good Governance and Management arrangements to guide and evaluate its operations.	Strategy 5: Work to become a sustainable and effective organisation.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1. Increase tourism services payments</li> <li>1.2. Increase maintenance agreements payments</li> <li>1.3. Implement guest house certification &amp; booking systems</li> <li>1.4. Develop capacity of tour operators</li> <li>1.5. Developed and implemented (in partnership with TPA and Tour Operators) a strategic marketing plan to increase trekker numbers</li> <li>1.6. Implement Standards for porters and guides</li> <li>1.7. Develop livelihoods opportunities</li> <li>1.8. Develop cultural tourism opportunities (links to Strategy 2)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1. Clearly identify the values that need to be preserved and have them recognised formally in planning and other processes (eg Sustainable Master Plan).</li> <li>2.2. Implemented Track Management Guidelines.</li> <li>2.3. Reinforcing and regulating tour operator licensing system supported by capacity building.</li> <li>2.4. Put in place sustainable maintenance programs for track infrastructure and services, in partnership with relevant stakeholders.</li> <li>2.5. Maintain a focus on improving standards of tour operator behavior, customer service and providing an authentic experience.</li> <li>2.6. Developed a capacity strategy that provides trekker number targets that maintain the desired trekker experience.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1. Establish MoU's and MoA's with all key stakeholders clarifying roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>3.2. Maintain and extend opportunities to engage all stakeholders (eg: Consultative meetings with landowners and communities, tour operator forums, newsletters, website, events and workshops)</li> <li>3.3. Provide training and support for landowner representatives on the Management Committee to effectively represent their constituents.</li> <li>3.4. Ensure local communities cultural values and belief systems and practices are respected and observed.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1. Finalise and implement Governance review outcomes.</li> <li>4.2. Ensure effective participation by all Management Committee members.</li> <li>4.3. Ensure the Management Committee members clearly understand and fulfill their roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>4.4. Develop capacity of Management Committee members to communicate and work as a team</li> <li>4.5. Develop and use agreed plans and processes such as a Strategic Plan, Business Plan, Communication Strategy, Monitoring &amp; Evaluation Strategy to assist good management practice.</li> <li>4.6. Devise and implement a marketing strategy to increase tourism yield.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5.1. The Management Committee supplies clear guidance and evaluation to Management.</li> <li>5.2. Attract, support and retain good staff through competitive conditions and implemented Personal Development Plans.</li> <li>5.3. Develop, use and evaluate performance against clear operational plans linked to the Strategic Plan.</li> <li>5.4. Develop, maintain and update internal financial and administrative processes and procedures.</li> <li>5.5. Develop sustainable revenue streams and ensure adequate financial reserves are maintained.</li> <li>5.6. Provide clear reports on finances and performance to KTA's stakeholders (link to Strategy 3)</li> <li>5.7. Honour our legal and legislative responsibilities.</li> <li>5.8. Maintain contacts and knowledge through attendance and participation at relevant conferences and workshops.</li> <li>5.9. Explore opportunities to benefit tour operators by exploiting total buying power (ie bulk purchase of hotel accommodation, insurance, flights)</li> </ol>
<p><b>Who we are:</b></p> <p>a. The Kokoda Track Authority (KTA) is a Special Purpose Authority (SPA) of the Kokoda and Koiari Local-Level Governments. It has the responsibility to manage the trekking industry, and the trekking experience, on the Kokoda Track and provide benefit to the landowners/community from the trekking.</p> <p>b. The KTA is controlled by a Management Committee which is a collection of National, Provincial and Local-Level Government appointments and landowner representatives.</p>		<p>c. The KTA is established and governed through the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments 1995.</p> <p>d. The KTA has responsibility for implementing the Kokoda LLG &amp; Koiari LLG Kokoda Track Permit Law 2009.</p> <p>e. The KTA is managing National issues in an International environment and is a key partner within a bilateral agreement between the PNG and Australian Governments (The Kokoda Initiative).</p>		

A review of the strategy can be read on this link: [KTA Strategic Plan: 2012-2015 – Fail!](#)

The review reveals that not one of the five (5) 'Key Strategies' or 33 objectives was achieved - it has since been quietly shelved and not replaced.

In early 2018 the KTA Board of Directors held its final meeting and drifted into oblivion due to a lack of government support. This left the KIC as the de facto management body in charge the Kokoda Trail.

Since then the dysfunctional management of Kokoda Tourism has drifted into irrelevance while the DFAT Strategic Management Advisor used the cover of Covid to draft a clandestine Bill for the establishment of a new 'Kokoda Track Management Authority'. If successful it would provide CEPA with the legal authority to permanently manage The Kokoda Trail as an environmental issue.

An analysis of the proposed bill can be read on this link: [New Kokoda Management Bill: A Suicide Note for Pilgrimage Tourism.](#)

### Current Situation

The failure of the management system put in place by Australia environment officials has been documented on this link: [The Kokoda Trail – Chronology of Mismanagement 2009-2019](#)

Suffice to say, after 15 years under their watch:

- There is not a single management system or protocol in place;
- There is no accounting system in place – not a single annual financial report has ever been published;
- It is still not possible to book a campsite;
- There is no campsite development plan in place;

- Not a single dollar has been invested in any military heritage site across the 138 km Kokoda Trail;
- There is still not a single toilet that meets the most basic of hygiene standards for trekkers;
- There is no environmental management plan in place;
- There is not a single environmental interpretation sign (common in Australian national parks) anywhere across the Trail;
- There is no philanthropic plan to support health and education initiatives across the ;
- There is no welfare protection plan in place for PNG guides and porters;
- Not a single micro-business initiative has been introduced to assist villagers in earning additional income through the provision of goods and services to meet the needs of trekkers.

### **Process of Reform**

The most important factor in the reform process is to acknowledge that the primary motivation for Australians to trek across the Trail is related to the military heritage of The Kokoda Trail campaign.

The first step in the process is therefore to separate the gazetted boundaries of The Kokoda Trail from the environmental management of the wider Owen Stanley Ranges as designated by the current Joint Understanding.

This is in accord with the findings of a World Heritage expert team in 2015 which revealed that the Kokoda Trail does not meet the requirements for a World Heritage listing. The report can be accessed on this link: [Kokoda World Heritage - Fact or Fallacy?](#)

A major plank of the Joint Understanding, which led to the pursuit of a World Heritage listing, was based on the Brown River catchment area (which includes the Nauro swamp) as a *'future water and power supply opportunity for Port Moresby'* has been negated with the recent opening of the Chinese funded [Edevu Hydro Power Project](#) on the Brown River.

It is therefore timely for the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is responsible for our wartime heritage at Gallipoli and our WW1 Remembrance Trail in France and Belgium, to establish a ['Joint Understanding for the Commemoration of our shared wartime heritage between Australia and Papua New Guinea'](#).

### **Vision**

The vision statement detailed in the current Joint Understanding for the Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges<sup>5</sup> is not specific to Kokoda Tourism.

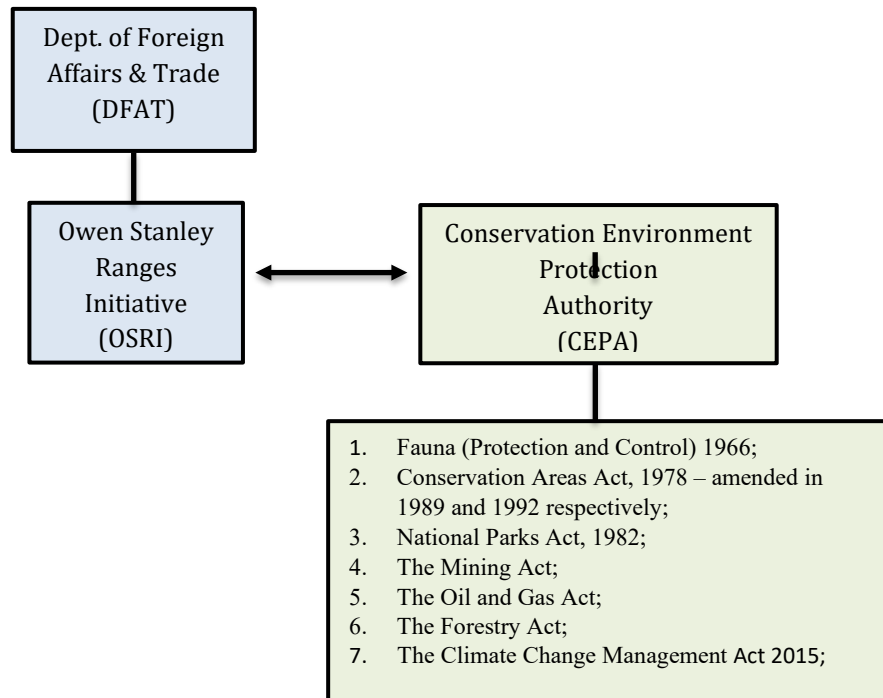
A more appropriate vision for Kokoda Tourism would be:

***'To develop The Kokoda Trail as a world-class pilgrimage tourism destination for the economic benefit of traditional landowner communities.'***

### **Recommended Organisational Structure for Kokoda Tourism Management**

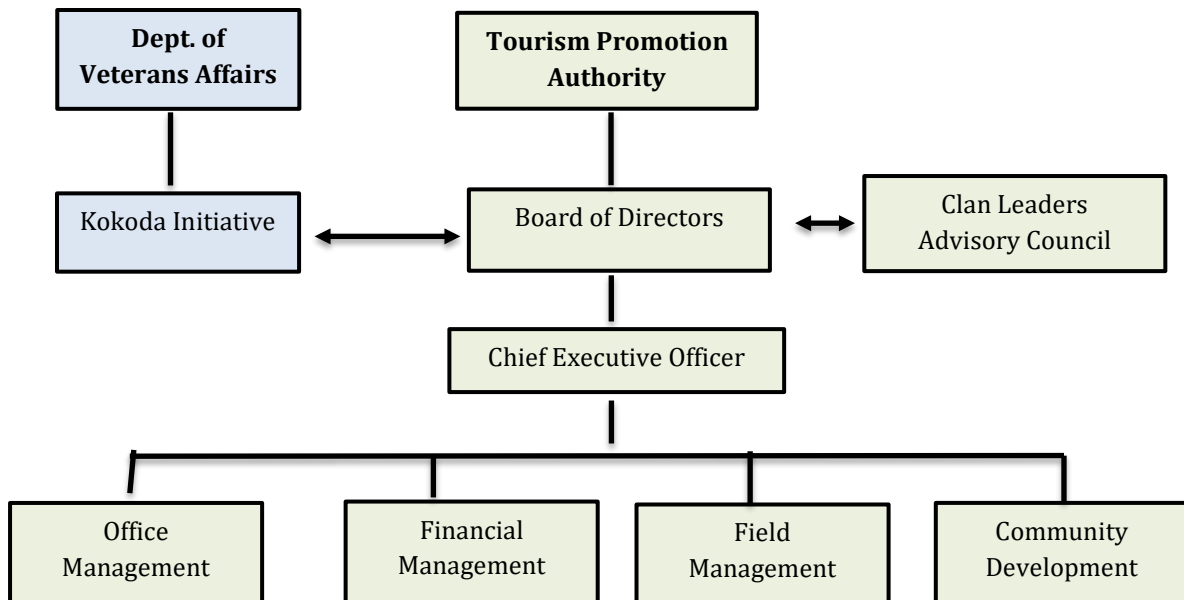
The division of responsibility between conservation and environment in the wider Owen Stanley Ranges and pilgrimage tourism across the Kokoda Trail is illustrated in the following charts:

## Conservation & Environment Management – Owen Stanley Ranges



.....

## Kokoda Tourism Management



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, governance, accounting and military history.

An Advisory Council should include representatives from the Koiari and Kokoda Local Level Governments, Ward Chairmen from each sector along the Trail; the Port Moresby RSL; and a tour operator's representative on an annual rotational basis.

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 historical 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.

Kokoda Tourism should be supported by a licensing system and a Code of Conduct which reflects local cultural traditions and provides a level playing field for all Kokoda tour operators. It should have a professional website linked to a database and an online booking system. 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.

### **Financial Assumptions**

Since 2002 more than 56,000 Australians have trekked across the Kokoda Trail.

During the period 2003-2008 the KTA, under the stewardship of a PNG CEO, managed a 423% increase in trekker numbers from 1074 to 5621.

During the period 2009-2019 the KTA, under Australian management, resulted in a 46% decrease in trekker numbers from 5621 in 2008 to 3033 in 2014.

The decrease, measured against the 2008 benchmark of 5621 trekkers has resulted in a cumulative loss of an estimated K50 million for villagers along the Kokoda Trail in foregone wages, campsite fees and local purchases.

It is estimated annual trekker numbers are now in the region of 3300 per year.<sup>6</sup>

An average investment of K12,500 (\$5,000) is required for airfares, accommodation, meals, clothing, camping gear and on-Trail expenses in order to complete their trek. These amount to a total spend of K41.2 million (\$16.5 million) per year. The annual GST dividend between the Australian and PNG governments is therefore in the region of K4 million (\$1.6 million).

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

- K1.5 million (\$600 000) in trek permit fees;



- K630,000 (\$250 000) in campsite fees;
- K5.4 million (\$1.75 million) in wages for guides, porters and staff;
- K3.3 million (\$1.3 million) in income for village fruit, vegetables, sing-sings, billum bags, carved trekking poles;
- K1.2 million (\$500 000) in donated goods (boots, trekkers clothing and gear based on an average of K350 per trekker (\$150)<sup>7</sup>. 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 ‘charity levy’; a significant site fee; a peak-non-peak season system for licensing Kokoda tour operators; a campsite audit system; training of villagers in the provision of goods and services for trekkers; and the employment of a commercial business manager and a chief ranger for Kokoda Tourism Management.

The figures indicate that industry is financially sustainable.

Government should therefore limit its contribution to infrastructure development i.e. the development of a Military Heritage Master Plan to enhance the value of the pilgrimage; 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, Naduri and Kokoda; and a VHF communications system along the .

There is no requirement for further aid-funded projects along the Kokoda 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 body in place.

The management body has a ‘duty of care’ to ensure licensed tour 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 valid Travel Insurance Policy which provides for emergency evacuation by helicopter from anywhere along the Trail.

Licensed tour operators must also be held responsible for the evacuation from anywhere along the Trail to the Pacific International Hospital, and their welfare whilst they remain as a patient in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

### **Current Tour Operator Licensing System**

The potential of a credible licensing system was undermined by the failure of Australian managers to clearly understand their role from the time they assumed control of the Kokoda Trail in 2009.

The new CEO, Rod Hillman, had no understanding of the complexities of the Melanesian Way and was quickly overwhelmed with the demands of a corrupt Board of Directors, up to 80 tour operators, more than a hundred landowners, Ward Councillors and Provincial Government officials all seeking a slice of the action with many ‘on the make’.

Hillman had not trekked across the Trail to better understand the needs of his paying customers or traditional landowner communities.

Rather than seek to understand them he sought to appease them.

He did this by establishing the parameters of a tour operator's licencing system then ignoring them to avoid confrontation.

A credible licencing system should be based on compliance the PNG Investment Promotion Authority (IPA) Act.

The IPA Act is quite clear. If a registered Australian company wishes to conduct business in PNG they must be registered as a Foreign Enterprise and work through a registered PNG company.

Unfortunately a lack of enforcement by both the KTA and the IPA has allowed opportunistic Australian companies to non-compliant PNG companies as 'shop fronts' for them to conduct their business illegally without fear of prosecution in PNG.

Under this system their PNG contacts are used as casual employees and payments are drip-fed to them to complete their allocated tasks. They are therefore able to avoid transferring larger sums of money to PNG. They are also available to avoid their taxation obligations in PNG.

DFAT Kokoda Initiative and KTA officials have been made aware of the blatant disregard for the provisions of the IPA Act but have turned a blind eye to it. In one case they assisted an illegal Australian tour operator to circumvent the system.

The current dysfunction of KTA management ensures there is no integrity in the current tour operator licence system. As a result anybody who applies for a license will be issued with one. There are no due diligence checks to verify if the applicant complies with the requirements of the Investment Promotion Authority (IPA) Act; has a registered company along with a current Public Liability Insurance policy; emergency communications equipment, training in advanced First Aid; or the means to protect the welfare of their guides and porters.

The current KTA website contains details of tour operators who have wound up their business years ago but does not contain any details of those they have issued licenses to in recent years.

### **Proposed Tour Operator Licencing System**

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

The bond will be refundable if the tour operator decides to surrender their licence.

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

They should be registered as a 'Foreign Enterprise' in PNG as required by the IPA Act and be required to submit annual returns.

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

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

Our Adventure Kokoda contract with Sogeri Enterprises for the personnel and logistic support for our treks from 2004-2018 required us to transfer K5500 (\$2200) for each trekker on an 8-day trek; K5750 (\$2300) for a 9-day trek; and K6000 for a 10-day trek. This payments were required by Sogeri Enterprises 30 days prior to the start of each trek.

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

The annual licence fee should be K10,000 (\$4000) to cover the cost of administration and compliance by Kokoda Tourism Management.

A refundable bond of K5000 (\$2000) should apply.

### **Peak and Non-Peak Trekking Periods**

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

The records also show that many opportunistic tour operators '*cherry-pick*' peak season periods and do nothing to build their business to generate local employment at other times.

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

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

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

### **Campsites**

Campsites should be a unique feature of the Kokoda Trail experience<sup>8</sup>. They should be built from bush material and contain tent sites with drainage, a kitchen and dining area for individual trek groups, separate sleeping huts and for male and female support crew, a *haus drai* for both trekkers and support crew and hygienic ablution blocks with showers, latrines with privacy screens. They should also contain sufficient 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 opportunity for theft and 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 15 years. 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. Village huts could be utilised to assist in meeting peak season demands.

There is scope for landowners to operate sites as micro-business enterprises.

In the longer term tents could be provided by Kokoda Tourism Management for each site on a repayment basis.

These tents would be stored by the landowner and erected when Kokoda Tourism Management advised them of the number required and the dates according to their booking system.

Campsite fees owed by trekkers could be pre-paid to Kokoda Tourism Management and deposited directly into each landowner’s bank account prior to the arrival of each group.

The concept of ‘trekkers huts’ should be discounted apart from peak-season periods. 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 ventilated 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 along the Trail as fewer carriers would be required. The money saved by tour operators as a result of not having to purchase, maintain and store tents and employ additional porters would benefit landowners who would receive increased campsite fees.

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

### **Australian Army Assistance for Campsite Development**

Australian army engineers could be invited to provide standard designs for designated campsites in consultation with tour operators. These would include standard designs for a kitchen, dining hut. *Haus Drai*, toilets and sleeping huts for PNG support crews (male and female).

Villagers would be engaged to provide the labour to build them from bush material under the supervision of army engineers.

## **Welfare Protection - PNG Guides and Carriers**

The neglect of the welfare of PNG guides and porters is an ongoing scandal which needs to be addressed. Many are overloaded, underfed, ill-equipped, and poorly paid. How do we know? Because they speak with our Adventure Kokoda guides and carriers on the Trail during our treks!

Their welfare has been ignored by management officials for too long. In 2009 the Australian CEO declared that the maximum weight for local carriers would be 25 kg. He had never trekked across the Trail before making this decision – and it is a weight he would not have been capable of carrying himself as far as the first ridge on the Trail!

Our recommendation that the limit be reduced to the 18 kg limit imposed by army doctors during The Kokoda Trail campaign has been consistently ignored due to the influence of the [Australian Kokoda Tour Operators Association \(KTOA\)](#) which was established to protect their business model which is based on minimising their expenses in PNG. It has since been reduced to 22.5 kg by the current Acting CEO and who would be incapable of carrying such a weight up single flight of stairs and who is physically incapable of trekking across the Trail.

Unless the maximum weight is reduced to the wartime maximum of 18 kg it will obviously have a detrimental long-term impacts on the hips, knees and ankles of porters.

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

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 porters should be provided with a trek uniform comprising a cap, shirt, shorts and poncho screened with the name of the tour operator 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 quietly in the own language as they pass through their areas! They can then file reports to the Chief Ranger.

*‘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 along with log books for guides and porters to enhance their status because they are, without question, PNGs best ambassadors.

## **Executive Training**

The lack of a strategy for training key stakeholders has been a major flaw in the development of Kokoda Tourism. KTA Board members were selected as a result of the



positions they held in Provincial and Local Level governments rather than as a result of their professional qualifications.

There was no strategy to develop their understanding of the legal responsibilities of Directors or good governance.

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 opportunities presented by Kokoda Tourism.

Effective training requires a long-term commitment at every level of Kokoda Tourism if sustainable outcomes are to be achieved.

## **Fee Structures**

### **Tour Operator Licence Fees**

The annual licence fee should be K10,000 (\$4000) to cover the cost of administration and compliance by Kokoda Tourism Management.

A bond of K5000 (\$2000) should apply. The bond will be refundable on the surrender of their licence by a Kokoda Tour Operator.

### **Trek Permit Fees**

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

The current trek fee of K350 includes an unofficial ‘marketing levy’ of K50 (which has never been spent on ‘marketing’). This needs to be removed.

A K300 fee for a trek permit would raise K990,000 to cover the cost of administrating the management body which includes an office, staff and Tourism Rangers.

The Australian Government<sup>9</sup> should fund three essential positions i.e. a Chief Executive Officer, a Commercial Business Manager, and a Chief Ranger for the first five (5) years after the responsibility for Kokoda Tourism has been transferred to TPA. The remainder of the positions in the management authority should be funded by trek fees.

Levies should be introduced for maintenance, significant sites, community development, PNG support crew welfare, and charities.

### **Campsite Fees**

The current campsite fee of K20 (\$8) for trekkers and K5 (\$2) for PNG guides could be increased by up to 50 per cent for those who meet the standards established by Management.

This would potentially increase their combined income by up to K50,000 (\$20,000) a year - it could be further increased with the establishment and accreditation of a proper campsite booking and audit system.

### **Campsite Audits**

There is an urgent need for a ‘Campsite Audit System’ to ensure local landowners receive the full amount owing to them. Such an audit has been recommended many times in

recent years but has never been implemented. As a result local campsite owners are being seriously short-changed by unscrupulous tour operators. It is a relatively easy task for Tourism Rangers to gather the details of payments from each tour group at each campsite and relay the figures back to the Chief Ranger. For some inexplicable reason the KTA has refused to 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 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 approved trek itineraries. These could be deposited into campsite owners bank accounts immediately 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**

The introduction of the following levy payments in addition to Trek Permit fees would have the potential to raise an additional K2.6 million for Kokoda Tourism Management:

#### **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 in 2009. Australian ‘volunteers’ were flown into locations along the Trail (to do work local villagers have been doing for generations) at significant cost to the taxpayer. Very little follow up maintenance has been completed since they left.

The resources of tour operators, who have a vested interest in the safety/maintenance of the Trail, to provide updated reports were ignored in this process.

The solution to the challenge of maintenance is relatively simple and could be solved with a ‘Trail Maintenance Levy’ of K100 (\$40) per trekker. This could generate an income of K330,000 (\$132,000) for payment to villagers involved in trek maintenance each year.

The 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 K47,000 (\$18,000) would be available for allocation to each section. This could be used to employ local guides and porters during the off-trekking season and therefore extend their opportunities for employment.

Tour operators could be invited to provide reports at the end of each trek to the Chief Ranger.

They could also report on the standard of work carried out by maintenance crews and make recommendations as appropriate.

The following 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 cane bridge across Eora Creek. All bridges should be at least one metre wide with handrails on both sides and bound with natural fibres;
- Lay and maintain corduroy paths along the Nauro swamp area and other similar sections;
- Maintain steps (*golden staircase style*) on steep sections of the ; and
- Cut a couple of parallel tracks (north-south and south-north) where there is serious erosion between the Kokoda Trail 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.

### **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.

A model for such a consultation process can be read on this link: [The Kokoda Trail Track Foundation: 2003-2006](#).

This will ensure a continuous review of objectives, partnerships and commitments.

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

## **Philanthropic Trust**

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 community and development needs;
- the co-ordination of community projects in the areas of education, health, agriculture and community learning; and
- The Community Development Levy of K100 (\$40 per trekker), for example, would provide an annual income of K330,000 (\$132,000 to directly support village projects along the Trail based on the average number of trekkers over the past three years.

### **The Potential:**

**More than 56,000 Australians have trekked across The Kokoda Trail over the past 20 years. These include some of our most wealthiest and most influential people.**

Many of these would have been willing to leave a 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 and they knew there was a system based on good governance..

This did not happen because the management authority has never developed a philanthropic database despite being urged to do so.

It worth noting that if just 20 percent of trekkers agreed to donate the cost of a cappuccino and scone per week, the Philanthropic Account would now have an automatic income stream of K860,000 (\$34,000) per year to assist with school fees and health supplies.

An additional K100 (\$40) 'Community Development Levy would provide for a further K330,000 (\$132,000 per year into the fund

**This has the potential of providing the Community Development Fund with an income stream upwards of K1 million per year.**

The benefits from a Community Development Levy and an independent Philanthropic Trust, combined with targeted fundraising campaigns, would allay the concerns of local landowners who rightly feel they are missing out on their fair share of benefits from Kokoda Tourism.

### **Significant Site Levy**

There is considerable angst amongst landowners of significant sites across the Trail because they are missing out on a large share of potential benefits due to the lack of any accounting/banking system to support them.

The Management could assist by collecting fees in advance and paying them directly into each landowner's bank account. This would require Kokoda Tourism Management 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.

A K15 (\$6) Significant Site Levy (*the price of a cappuccino in Sydney*) has the potential to raise K544,500 (\$217,000) (i.e. K49,500 (\$20,000) for each landowner).

Significant site landowners would be required to maintain the site in a clean and safe condition. They would have further opportunities to earn additional income through the sale of brewed coffee, scones, fresh fruit, bilum bags and carved sticks.

But first government has to restore each site with significant interpretative memorials.

Until then the owners of sites sacred to our shared military heritage will be denied an income stream to maintain and protect these sacred places.

### **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 their trekkers witness the needs of villagers along the Trail!

There are three professional charities who use The Kokoda Trail as a primary source of fundraising. They do not seem to have any moral conflict about using a Trail in a 3<sup>rd</sup> world country to raise funds for well-meaning causes in the '*land of plenty*'.

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 in Queensland for Australian youth. The 'Kokoda Challenge' has since 'diverted' more than \$7 million (\$2.8 million) from the intended recipients in PNG to young Australians who already have access to an abundance of generous government support programs in this area.

Another professional Australian charity, [Inspired Adventures](#) has raised an estimated K7.5 million (\$3 million) from fundraising treks across the Trail. We are not aware of any funds being donated to charitable causes anywhere across it.

There are also hundreds of individuals and organizations who use the Trail for a 'one-off' fundraiser for their local cause. Collectively they have raised many millions of Kina but have left virtually nothing behind.



This issue was first raised in 2008 on this blog: [‘Kokoda Villagers Need Charity Too’](#) – it was ignored!

The only effective means of ensuring village communities receive their fair share of income from charitable causes is to introduce a ‘Charity Levy’ for each trekker.

This should be based on K1250 (\$500) per trekker for ‘one-off’ charities and K2500 (\$1000 per trekker for professional charities. It has the potential of raising an additional K250,000 per year for local community development.

These can be easily monitored by establishing a ‘Google Alert’ for ‘Kokoda Charity’.

As of January 2024 there are seven (7) Australian charities who have scheduled treks to raise funds for their local causes – none have indicated any desire to leave any funds behind in PNG!

### **Welfare Levy: Guides and Porters**

It is not possible to obtain travel insurance cover for guides and porters. Consideration should therefore be given to introducing a ‘Welfare Levy’ of K50 to cover costs for emergency evacuation and hospitalisation in the event of a guide or porter being seriously injured or becoming seriously ill. Such a levy would raise an additional K165,000 per year.

### **Ancillary Income Earning Opportunities for Villagers**

Villagers along the Trail are currently denied the opportunity to earn additional income from tour groups – because they have never been taught how to provide services and goods to meet the needs of trekkers.

This is probably because none of the executives within The Kokoda Trail Initiative-CEPA-KTA-KIC alliance, nor those engaged in management, have never trekked across the Trail with a professional pilgrimage group to understand the reality of pilgrimage tourism.

Tour operators who understand the risk of running a business and generating their own income have suggested ways local communities could earn additional income – but they have been consistently ignored by those in distant offices on secure salaries.

Following are some of the suggestions that have been offered in the past:

- **Owers Corner**

This area has the potential to be PNGs most popular tourism attraction however it is the gateway to the neglect of our military heritage across the Trail as illustrated in this link: [Owers Corner – Neglected Gateway to The Kokoda Trail](#).

Its capacity to earn considerable income is due to its ready access to the nation’s capital by road.

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 Koiari village with a coffee shop; an arts and crafts centre; a welcome ‘sing-sing’ and traditional dance 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.

- **Brewed Coffee**

PNG coffee is the best in the world.

Despite this there is not a single place 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 K10 (\$4) each during an 8-day trek they could increase village ancillary earnings by up to K528,000 (\$212,000) per trekking season!

If they offered an additional hot scone or biscuit K10 (\$4) the income potential would increase by 100 percent to K1 million (\$424,000) per year!

- **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 Lake 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.

They harvested fresh trout in the stream that runs through the lake and served them for breakfast.

They also had a guesthouse with 16 rooms – each one had its own bed and mattress.

They cooked pizza dishes for dinner and were in the process of planting their own coffee beans when a vexatious land dispute initiated by a corrupt KTA Board Member from a nearby village, and which the KTA failed to mediate, put an end to the campsite.

They ran sheep and cattle and the site had its own airfield’

The site has now been abandoned for more than 15 years and remains as a monument to their failure.

The site could be rebuilt – but not until there is a change of management.

A couple of villages were issued with drum ovens from the KTA in 2007 when it was under PNG management and NGOs provided cooking classes. Unfortunately the NGOs 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 who left with a good-feeling about themselves had not consulted with trek operators in regard to this ‘*capacity building*’

initiative and so not a single Kina has been realised as a result.

- **Trekkers Laundry**

One of the onerous tasks for trekkers is the washing and drying of muddy/sweaty clothing at the end of each day. Most trekkers would gladly pay K10 (\$4) to have their clothes washed each night, dried in a local hut or *Haus Draï* and delivered back to their tent the next morning.

Potential earnings of up to K264,000 (\$106,000) per trekking season could be realised with this initiative.

- **‘Sing-Sings’ – Re-enactments**

Over the past 30 years I have witnessed some spectacular local ‘*sing-sings*’ and re-enactments of wartime carriers. Trekkers gladly pay K15 (\$6) each for such occasions but the idea of a consistent co-ordinated plan has obviously not been part of any Aid-funded ‘*capacity building*’ program. If a *sing-sing* was planned for just three (3) locations during an 8-day trek it could result in additional earnings of K148,500 (\$60,000) per year.

- **Village Bilums**

Trekkers rarely purchase a bilum bag along the Trail because they are no different to the coloured woollen ones they see in Port Moresby. Traditional string bags made from twisted bark fibre with the name of the place 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.

If each trekker purchased just one for K150 (\$60) each it could increase village earnings by up to K495,000 (\$200,000) per year.

Carved ‘Kokoda Trail’ sticks are popular items with trekkers at K50 (\$20) each – this could raise an additional K16,500 (\$6,600) per year.

- **Hot Showers**

Trekkers gladly pay K5 (\$2) 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 at great cost to the local landowners. Campsite owners could easily be assisted by army engineers in building a hot-shower facility as a means of providing a sought after service for trekkers and earning additional income as a result.

One hot shower per day over an 8-day trek at K5 (K2) would increase village earnings by up to K132,000 (\$53,000).

- **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 subject to the vagaries of aircraft availability and weather.

There is an opportunity for containers to be used as a warehouse in either Menari, Efogi or Naduri villages to store food and equipment on behalf of tour operators who could rent secure storage space.

Such a facility could be combined with a village store to service local community needs.

- **Kokoda Plateau**

The Kokoda Trail plateau has 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 philanthropic marketing campaign and become a source of national pride throughout the country.

The above initiatives provide an opportunity for additional income of up to K2 million per year by meeting the needs of Kokoda tourists during their trek however it will require a coordinated plan, a realistic timeframe, and a considerable amount of training.

The opportunity is real because trekkers are currently returning with considerable amounts of unspent cash because of a lack of opportunity to spend it.

### **Summary**

The rapid increase in trekker numbers from the time the Isurava Memorial was opened on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The Kokoda Trail campaign in 2002 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 Kokoda Tourism were never developed.

A successful model developed by the Kokoda Track Foundation from 2003-2006 was ignored.

As a result the economic potential of Kokoda Tourism has not been realised and the welfare of guides, porters and campsite owners has been ignored. Aid funded initiatives have not been effective due to a lack of consultation and coordination 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 Kokoda Tourism to realise its potential as a world-class pilgrimage tourism destination for the economic benefit of traditional landowner communities.

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 as has recently occurred with a year-long blockade at Kovello.

But if we use the lessons we have learned since the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kokoda campaign that put the Trail back on the public radar we will be only limited by the imagination of current and future generations who seek to walk in their footsteps.

### **Conclusion**

The current management system imposed on the Kokoda Trail by Australian environment officials since 2009 has collapsed and is beyond repair.

The root cause of the decay has been the focus on environment at the expense of tourism; its dependence on aid-funding; its incompetence; and the insidious cancer of nepotism and corruption.

The DFAT Strategic Management Advisor seems to have recognised this and has attempted to divert attention to the management failures under his watch by attempting to sneak a bill into the PNG Parliament for a new ‘Kokoda Track Management Authority’. This is akin to putting a new jockey on the same lame horse and will inevitably fail - the horse needs to be put down!

As a result of the management dysfunction villagers across the Trail have been denied the potential to increase employment opportunities; establish a sustainable philanthropic fund; and generate additional income streams of up to K2 million per year in addition to the K1.15 million they collect for trek permit fees.

It is now clear that the Kokoda Track (Special Purpose) Authority is well beyond its use-by date and should be wound up.

### **Recommendations**

1. Wind-up the Kokoda Track (Special Purpose) Authority;
2. Remove the gazetted boundaries of the Kokoda Trail from the existing ‘Joint Agreement for The Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges’;
3. Redesignate the CEPA ‘Kokoda Initiative’ as the ‘Owen Stanley Ranges Initiative (OSRI);
4. Invite Australia to develop a ‘Joint Agreement for the Commemoration of our Shared Wartime Heritage between Australia and Papua New Guinea’;
5. Assign responsibility for Kokoda Tourism Management to TPA; and
6. Reassign the term ‘Kokoda Initiative to TPA’

The Hon Charlie Lynn OAM OL  
5 January 2023

### **ATTACHMENT**

Brief for Management Authority Website

## Attachment 1: Brief for Kokoda Management Authority Website

### 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 Essentials

<p><b>About Us</b> KTMA Board Members Organisational Chart</p>	<p><b>PNG Visitor Information</b> Papua New Guinea Central Province Oro Province Kioari Local Level Government Authority Kokoda Local Level Government Authority</p>	<p><b>The Kokoda Trail</b> History Map Campsites</p>
<p><b>Community Development</b> Our Commitment Our Partnership Network Kokoda</p>	<p><b>Licensed Trek Operators</b> License Number Name of Company Public Liability Insurance Policy Number Code of Conduct Contact Details</p>	<p><b>Trekker Survey</b> 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 –</p>

		Good – Fair – Poor – Comment) i. The (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 Trail trekking experience.
<b>Niusletas</b>	<b>Blog</b>	

### **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 14-days 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 management 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 Management 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> The KTA does not publish financial reports so nobody knows where the money goes – there is anecdotal evidence the since Acting CEO Wargiral was appointed all of the funds are spent on administering itself rather than managing Kokoda Tourism.

<sup>2</sup> The KTA stopped publishing trekker data in 2014 so this figure is a best estimate' based on KTA records from 2004-2013.

<sup>3</sup> The official name 'Kokoda Trail was proclaimed by the PNG Government in 1972 – it is also the official name of the Battle Honour awarded to the Papuan Infantry Battalion and the 10 Australian infantry battalions who fought in the Kokoda campaign in 1953. Despite this Australian government officials refuse to recognise these historical facts or PNGs sovereign right to name their own geographic features.

<sup>4</sup> In 2008 a KTA Board Director established a separate 'KTA account' in a different bank and used his network of 'wantoks' to assist with transferring K250,000 into it. The former CEO discovered the illegal heist and reported it but the incoming Australian CEO, Rod Hillman, refused to have the corrupt official prosecuted.

<sup>5</sup> **Vision**

The Governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia have a vision for the future of the Kokoda Track and the Owen Stanley Ranges that includes:

- Sustainable development of people and communities along the Kokoda Track corridor, including improved economic opportunities and livelihoods, health, education, transport and related services.
- Preservation of the historic values of the Kokoda Track, and maintenance of the integrity of the Track and of the special qualities of the trekking experience.
- Preservation of the water catchment in the Owen Stanley Ranges for future power and water supply for Port Moresby.
- Maximising the potential forest carbon benefits.
- Recognition of the World Heritage cultural and biodiversity values of the Owen Stanley Ranges.

<sup>6</sup> This is an estimate as the KTA stopped publishing newsletters and monthly trekker numbers 2014

<sup>7</sup> When I led my first trek group in 1992 almost all our PNG support crew trekked in bare feet or thongs. They later graduated to K26 running shoes and today, 32 years later, many are wearing top of the range Italian scarpa and similar brands which cost around K900 per pair.

<sup>8</sup> In French Polynesia all hotels are required to ensure the exterior of their accommodation rooms are built to a 'traditional design' with bush material covering each roof. This has created an industry where local groups specialise in prefabricated natural roofing components which are replaced every couple of years. For the visitor it creates an impression of a native nirvana. A similar vision for Kokoda campsites would have a similar impact on trekkers and ensure a constant flood of idyllic pictures for social media.

<sup>99</sup> The Australian Government has to accept responsibility for the demise of Kokoda Tourism since they assumed responsibility for the Kokoda Trail in 2009. They should therefore accept the fact they have a responsibility to towards safeguarding our military heritage across the Kokoda Trail and other significant campaign sites in Papua and New Guinea. Lest We Forget!