

CHAPTER 4: Proposal for a Master Plan to the develop the Kokoda Trail as a National Memorial Park

Contents

CHAPTER 4	1
Proposal for a Master Plan to the develop the Kokoda Trail as a National Memorial Park	1
Why Kokoda?	1
The Kokoda Campaign	2
Need for a Master Plan.....	3
Scope.....	3
Terms of Reference	4
National Park Assistance.....	4
Educational Memorials	5
Anzac Day – A Vision for PNG	7
Other Initiatives for Consideration	8
Conclusion	9

Why Kokoda?

The transformation of Gallipoli to accommodate the increasing number of young Australians who make their pilgrimage to the shores of Anzac Cove each year is now complete.

We must now focus on Kokoda.

The 60th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign on Anzac Day 2002 will focus national attention on the Kokoda Trail. As a result young Australians will be more aware of its significance and will begin to include it on their adventure travel itineraries.

The pilgrimage to Kokoda will differ from Gallipoli. Some will want to trek across it whilst others would want to drive from Port Moresby to the beginning of the Trail at Ower’s Corner.

For those who elect to trek across it we have a national duty of care to ensure they can do it safely. We also have a responsibility to ensure it is both a commemorative and educative experience for them.

Owers Corner provides a majestic view over the Owen Stanley Ranges and is ideally suited as a future location for an annual Anzac Dawn Service. The day would conclude with a beating of the retreat at Bomana War Cemetery.

To realize this vision we need to ensure:

- Central and Oro Provincial government personnel are trained and assisted to establish and operate the Kokoda Trail as a National Memorial Park.
- Local Koiari and Orokaiva guides are trained in the military, cultural and environmental history of the Kokoda Trail, communications procedures and first aid.
- Educational memorials are constructed at each of the battlesites along the Track.

- Defensive positions at selected battlesites are restored.
- Communications facilities (*VHF radio repeater stations and radio sets in all villages*) are in place with a base station in Port Moresby.
- A memorial site with suitable facilities for large groups of visitors is constructed at Owers Corner.
- In the longer term an all-weather road is constructed through to Owers Corner.

With proper planning these initiatives can be progressively included in Australia's aid budget to Papua New Guinea.

The Kokoda Campaign – A Background Brief

In 1933 General Sturdee warned that Japan would pose the major threat to Australian security.

Sturdee predicted:

'the Japanese would act quickly, they would all be regulars, fully trained and equipped for the operations, and fanatics who like dying in battle, whilst our troops would consist mainly of civilians, hastily thrown together on mobilisation, with very little training, short of artillery and possibly of gun ammunition.'

The Head of Strategic Studies at the Australian National University, Professor David Horner, recently wrote:

'It is now generally agreed that the Australian defence policy between the wars and until the fall of Singapore was, at the best, naively optimistic, and at the worst, some might say, close to treason.'

Whilst our political leaders may have neglected their defence responsibilities at that time our diggers answered the call – and the challenge!

The Japanese entered the Pacific War on 7 December 1941 and swept unchecked through Asia and the Pacific. They were well trained, battle hardened, fanatical, and superior in manpower, weapons and equipment.

On 27 July 1942, a superior Japanese force launched an attack on a small band of Australian defenders dug in on the Kokoda plateau. Their objective was to cross the Owen Stanley Range in Papua New Guinea and capture the strategic city of Port Moresby.

The Australian Diggers were young, inexperienced, outnumbered and outgunned.

During the ensuing three months, the Australians fought against overwhelming odds and forced the Japanese to contest every inch of the rugged and treacherous Kokoda Trail as they advanced towards their objective of Port Moresby. The first Victoria Cross won on Australian soil was posthumously awarded to Private Bruce Kingsbury of the 2/14th Battalion during the battle for Isurava.

The Australians rallied at the last ridge line, a mere 40 kilometres from Port Moresby. The Japanese had stretched their resources to the limit in attempting to annihilate the Australians and were ordered to conduct a fighting withdrawal to the beachheads of Buna and Gona on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea.

The Australians pursued the Japanese with great courage and vigour and re-occupied the village of Kokoda on 2 November 1942.

Those who have trekked across the Kokoda Track know what an impossible task this would have been against the overwhelming odds faced by our Diggers.

“Some of us may forget that of all the Allies it was Australian soldiers who first broke the spell of invincibility of the Japanese Army”

Sir William Slim

Need for a Master Plan

The Kokoda Trail has been neglected by successive Australian Governments for the past 59 years. This is easy to understand because the primary focus of post-war governments and veterans organisations was the repatriation of the servicemen and servicewomen who served.

Over the years since the war a number of unit organisations have provided plaques at Owers Corner and a couple of small memorials on the Kokoda plateau. On the 50th anniversary of the campaign the Australian Government and Rotary International built a hospital and small museum at Kokoda and a medical aid centre at Menari. Captain Ross Bastian provided some more plaques at some of the battlesites.

There are some ongoing initiatives to provide radio communications in each village along the Trail and there has been some progress made in training guides. Unfortunately these have had little impact on providing incentives for people to walk the Trail.

The major problem appears to be the lack of a co-ordinated plan for the future development of the Trail. The Minister for Veterans’ Affairs has advised that there is no master plan.

Any plan that is developed should consider the fact that PNG does not have a welfare system and the Koiari and Orokaiva people who live along the Trail operate a subsistence economy. They are also the custodians of the land on which the battles that saved Australia were fought.

If we develop our long term plan around providing a regular source of income for them we can be assured that they will protect and honour the battlesites we restore, the educational memorials we build and the village museums we assist with.

The objective of the master plan should therefore be:

“To develop a sustainable eco-adventure trekking industry for the Koiari and Orokaiva people who live along the Kokoda Trail.”

Scope

The only effective way to address all the issues and properly honour the campaign is for a project team to be formed to develop a master plan for the Kokoda Trail.

The responsibility for preserving our military heritage crosses a number of departmental boundaries. The following departments should therefore be involved in the development of a master plan:

DEPARTMENT	RESPONSIBILITY
Foreign Affairs	Manages the AUSAID budget. Provide expertise in developing a plan and budget for the phased development of the Trail as a National Memorial Park.
Veterans’ Affairs	Design of educational memorials at each of the major battlesites along the Trail ie Kokoda, Deniki, Isurava, Eora Creek, Templeton’s Crossing, Myola, Brigade Hill, Ioribaiwa Ridge together with other significant sites such as Owers Corner, Imita Ridge, Menari, Efogi, Alola and Abuari.
Defence	Restore some of the significant battlesites ie Isurava, Brigade Hill, Eora Creek.

Education and Youth Affairs	Ensuring the study of the South West Pacific area campaigns are incorporated into our educational curriculum. Promoting the Kokoda Trek to secondary school students and youth groups.
Environment and Heritage	Provide expertise in the declaration and operation of national parks.
Tourism	Provide advice and expertise in promoting the Kokoda Trail as a destination for eco-adventure trekkers.
The Arts	Encouraging the production of films, documentaries and books about our campaigns in the South West Pacific area.

The RSL of Australia and Rotary International should also be included to represent the interests of the various service unit associations and community organisations.

In PNG the government should include representatives from:

- The Ministry for Tourism
- The National Cultural Commission
- The Governors' of Central and Oro Province
- Landowner representatives

The inclusion of landowners or their representatives is crucial to the success of the project because they are the custodians of the land which is sacred to our military heritage.

The project should be completed in two phases:

- PNG. All members of the project team should assemble in PNG and trek across the Kokoda Trail to inspect each of the battlesites and meet the villagers along the Trail. They would then remain in Port Moresby for two or three days to complete the first draft of the master plan.
- AUSTRALIA. The PNG members of the project team should visit the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway at Concord, the Australian War Museum in Canberra, the National RSL Headquarters and Parliament House. The final draft of the plan would be completed during this phase.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the project team should include all of the projects that will preserve, honour and respect the historical, cultural and environmental aspects of the Kokoda Trail.

The Trail was declared a National Park by the PNG Government almost 10 years ago. This has had virtually no impact on the area or in the villages along the Trail because of a lack of resources and a lack of expertise in PNG.

National Park Assistance

Australia should therefore offer to provide assistance to establish the infrastructure required to operate the Trail as a National Park. This would include:

Information Huts

Tourists who wish to trek across the Trail should be charged an entry fee designed to cover the cost of maintaining the information huts. In return for the fee each trekker would receive a briefing and a booklet in regard to the traditional culture of the Koiari people and the protocols to be observed in each village. They would also be briefed on the history of the Kokoda campaign, safety precautions to be observed and communications procedures.

Entry fees would be paid into a trust fund established and controlled by the landowners along the Kokoda Trail.

Training of Guides

Koiari and Orokaiva guides would be trained in expedition leadership to equip them with the skills necessary to lead tourists across the Trail. They would receive instruction in English, the Koiari/Orokaiva culture, the history of the Kokoda campaign, the environment, first aid, communications, etc. It would be mandatory for individuals and groups to hire guides at a standard rate. This will ensure the safety of the trekkers and provide the Koiari and Orokaiva people with an opportunity for regular employment.

Radio Communications

AusAID have recently installed some VHF repeater stations and these are most effective in ensuring trekkers can make contact with Port Moresby in the event of an emergency. VHF radios operating off solar powered batteries should be installed in each village along the way.

Traditional Huts

Some of the huts along the Trail have been adorned with roofing iron, sheet metal, glass and plastic. Whilst these 'modern' items are no doubt attractive to the occupants it detracts somewhat from the perception a modern-day eco-trekker would have of a remote jungle village. Local villagers should be encouraged to construct their huts from traditional materials so they blend in with the natural environment. They could use modern insulation/decorative materials inside their huts but the 'natural' village environment created by constructing huts from traditional materials will be an attraction for future trekkers.

Guesthouses

Traditional guesthouses and toilet facilities should be constructed at each of the major campsites along the Trail. There should be separate guesthouses for male and female trekkers.

Statues

Statues depicting individuals, carriers, jungle patrols, planning sessions and actions would provide a haunting theme along the Trail. Private Bruce Kingsbury VC at Isurava, Brigadier Arnold Potts on Brigade Hill, PNG carriers with a wounded Australian on a stretcher at Templeton's Crossing, General 'Tubby' Allen in a planning session on the Maguli Range, a medical operating theatre at Lake Myola, a fighting patrol at Eora Creek are some of the possibilities.

Educational Memorials

The Kokoda Trail is a living shrine to the indomitable spirit of the Australian Digger and the PNG Carrier.

Unfortunately the Trail is a neglected shrine. Battlesites which bear witness to the first Victoria Cross awarded on Australian territory and to numerous other actions credited with saving Australia from invasion are unmarked and overgrown.

Modern technology now allows us to construct memorials which will tell the story of each action along the Trail. There would be no better way to educate trekkers on the significance of the Trail than by constructing educational memorials at each significant location. These would include:

Memorial Arches

A memorial arch should be constructed at each end of the Kokoda Trail (*Owers Corner and Kokoda*). These arches would symbolise the entry to an area deemed to be sacred in terms of our military history. A memorial wall should also be established with 'story-boards' cast in bronze mounted on each wall to explain the significance of the site.

The Golden Staircase

The Trail no longer proceeds over the area of Imita Ridge known as 'The Golden Staircase'. A track needs to be cut along the original route with a 'staircase' constructed and maintained. A memorial with photographs should be located at the top of the ridge and a rest area established. This would provide an opportunity for tourists visiting Ower's Corner to do a 'day-walk' and get a feel for the conditions along the Trail.

Ioribaiwa Ridge

The furthest point reached by the Japanese in their quest to capture Port Moresby. A memorial with photographs should be established at the top of the ridge.

Brigade Hill

The site of the biggest battle fought during the Kokoda campaign on 8/9 September 1942 when 1,000 men of the 21st Brigade dug in to face 6,000 advancing Japanese troops. It was a heroic defence against overwhelming odds.

Individual battalion positions should be identified and memorials erected to tell the story of the battle.

There is also a significant grave-site on the top of Brigade Hill. There has been much speculation about site however it is most likely one which was used as an interim gravesite after the advancing Australian troops had recovered the bodies of those killed in action. It was the practice in those days to remove the skull and a thigh bone to the official war cemetery at Bomana and leave the remainder of the body in-situ.

Australian remains have been identified at this site. It should therefore be officially recognised as a grave-site with a suitable memorial erected.

Lake Myola

The site of our major logistic support base for the campaign. It was a pioneering base for the infamous 'biscuit bombers'. A Ford Tri-Motor aircraft was recovered from Lake Myola to Port Moresby by the RAAF in 1979 for restoration. It is currently located at the Port Moresby Military Museum and is in worse condition than it was when it was recovered. It should be restored and relocated to Lake Myola. It is an ideal site for a theatre type memorial.

Templeton's Crossing

Some of the most bitter fighting of the campaign occurred between Templeton's Crossing and Eora Creek. It took the Australian's 13 days to fight their way through an area that takes modern trekkers about six hours to traverse. The country is wild and spectacular. Many of the Australians listed as missing-in-action would have perished in the treacherous creek crossings in this area.

Scale models of the campaign through this area could be located at Templeton's Crossing No 2 and at Eora Creek.

Alola – Abuari Villages

These two villages straddle each ridge dominating the Eora Creek valley. They were crucial in the early stages of the campaign because once the Japanese over-ran the Australian 53rd Battalion at Abuari the 39th, 2/14th and 2/16th battalions had to withdraw from the crucial battle at Isurava.

During the advance these locations were major staging areas.

Isurava

The Isurava battle-site has recently been found - 57 years after the battle! A recent party has discovered the weapon pits and shallow graves containing the remains of Australian soldiers.

This battle has been acclaimed by Professor David Horner as 'the battle that saved Australia'.

The odds the Australian soldiers faced at Isurava were greater than the odds faced by the Texans at the Alamo.

The first Victoria Cross won on Australian soil was posthumously awarded to Private Bruce Kingsbury during the battle.

It was the first time that the Australian Militia Forces and the Australian Imperial Forces fought together on Australian territory in defence of Australia.

If Gallipoli was our baptism as a nation then Isurava was our confirmation.

The significance of Isurava is such that the entire battle-site should be restored with appropriate educational memorials established to tell the story of the battle.

Deniki Village

Deniki is now an abandoned village site. It was the site of a short but intense battle after the Australian 39th battalion had been forced to withdraw from Kokoda.

Kokoda Village

This is the main village on the northern edge of the Owen Stanley Ranges.

The village is well serviced by a road from the coastal city of Popondetta and an airfield.

Rotary Australia have built a modern hospital at Kokoda as part of the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the campaign. The Australian government has erected a museum which contains photo's and a broad description of the campaign.

Unit Associations have constructed some memorials on the edge of the Kokoda plateau where the 39th Battalion first made contact with the invading Japanese army.

The original defensive position of the 39th Battalion should be restored with maps on display. A small theatre could be erected to show films on the campaign and to provide trekkers with a 'virtual experience' of the Kokoda campaign.

Village Museums

There is a considerable array of military ordnance along the Trail. Some has been recovered and is located in various village huts. Some of these .303 rifles, ammunition and ordnance could be taken to Australia for restoration and returned to the villages for display in small village museums. They could subsequently charge a small fee to trekkers proceeding through their villages and would add to the meagre income they currently have.

These could be located at Nauro, Menari and Efogi villages and at Lake Myola.

Anzac Day – A Vision for PNG

The current format for Anzac Day in Port Moresby involves a Dawn Service at Bomana War Cemetery, a 'gunfire breakfast' at the racecourse and a march in Port Moresby.

Consideration should be given to changing the format to include:

- A Dawn Service at Owers Corner at the start of the Kokoda Trail in full view of the imposing Owen Stanley Ranges;
- The march in Port Moresby (no change to the current format); and
- A beating of the retreat at Bomana War Cemetery at sunset.

This format would allow Australians to visit the start of the Trail at the spot where our Diggers commenced the trek across the Owen Stanley's. It would also allow for the more adventurous to trek back across the Trail from Kokoda and join the Dawn Service.

The major limitation for this initiative is the poor condition of the road between Port Moresby and Owers Corner. The final 20 kilometres (approximately) is unsealed and very rough. It is impassable to tourist buses after rain.

There have been many plans to seal the road over the years but none have come to fruition.

A sealed road would link Port Moresby, Bomana War Cemetery and the start of the Kokoda Trail. It would then become a significant tourist attraction for older Australians.

The construction of a sealed road is an expensive budget item. It should therefore be included in the plan and developed in a number of stages over a number of years.

Other Initiatives for Consideration

Two of the major issues for the people living along the Trail are health and education.

Initiatives which could either be included in the plan, or set aside for development in the future, include:

- **Trek Doctor Service**

Young doctors and nurses from our Repatriation Hospitals could be encouraged to establish a regular trekking doctor service.

This would involve young medical doctors and nurses organising treks to do health checks for people in villages along the Trail while learning about the campaign.

When they return from the trek they would have greater empathy for the veterans they treat in our Repatriation hospitals.

- **Sister School Relationships**

Schools in Australia could be invited to establish 'sister-school' relationships with village schools along the Trail. This would involve assisting with school and sporting materials and visits.

- **'Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angel' Scholarship Fund.**

A fund could be established to provide scholarships to village children to attend Popondetta or Sogeri High School and Port Moresby University.

This would be established well after consistent numbers of trekkers have been across the Trail after its establishment as a National Memorial Park.

- **Medals – PNG Carriers (Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels)**

This issue has been put in the 'too-hard basket' for too long. We need to work closely with the Government of PNG to identify those PNG citizens who were indentured to carry our supplies forward and who kindly and unselfishly carried many of our wounded soldiers to safety. A medal should be designed and issued to the survivors and to the families of those who are deceased. We could start by identifying those from Central and Oro Province and

having a presentation on Anzac Day 2002. Other Provinces would be asked to identify their own carriers as a longer term project.

Conclusion

The leadership and funding for this initiative must come from the Australian Federal Government.

The invitation to proceed with the project must come from the PNG Government.

The project team must include representatives from those Federal Government Departments with a responsibility for working closely with our closest neighbour and those with an interest in educating our young people and preserving our military heritage.

It must also include members of the PNG National Government with an interest in preserving the cultural and environmental history of the Koiari and Orokaiva people as well as their economic advancement.

Once a model for the establishment of a national memorial park has been established and proved it can then be applied in other areas of PNG to attract eco-adventure tourists to their country and provide self-sustaining tourism activities in other areas.

Charlie Lynn
26 August 1994