

Chronology of Wayne Wetherall's Involvement with the Kokoda Trail



So, Who is Wayne Wetherall?

So, Who is Wayne Wetherall? Where did he come from? Was he really a World Athletics Champion? Is he really an adventurer, an explorer? A historian? A philanthropist? Is he really the 'Spirit of Anzac'?

Or is he just a silver-tongued salesman?

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In the Beginning

Wetherall’s transformation from a suburban salesman to a Kokoda trekking ‘expert’ began in earnest after three Israeli’s were drowned on one of his early rafting expeditions on the Watut River in Morobe Province in May 2005.

He then turned his attention to the emerging interest in trekking across the Kokoda Trail.

To find out more, Wetherall and his business partner, Frank Husiuk, booked a trek with [Kokoda Treks and Tours](#) in 2003, a company owned by Mr Frank Taylor. They chose wisely, as Taylor was a long-term student of the Kokoda campaign and one of Australia’s foremost experts on both the campaign and the Trail due to more than two decades of research and trekking across it.

Within a short period, Wetherall and Husiuk had copies of all Taylor’s administrative documentation, his detailed trek itinerary, and historical information – all they then needed was some local assistance to operate in PNG.

During the trek, they befriended one of Taylor’s porters, [Defol Jabbar](#), a Research Officer in the National Parliament, and discussed the possibility of establishing a Kokoda tour company in PNG.

Upon their return to Australia, according to Jabbar, they communicated constantly with each other regarding the possibilities and opportunities for establishing a company to lead treks across the Trail and organise ‘wild-river’ rafting expeditions.

‘Fuzzy-Wuzzy Expeditions Ltd’

This led to Jabbar registering a company, [Fuzzy Wuzzy Expeditions Ltd](#), with the PNG Investment Promotion Authority (IPA) on 27 January 2004 to organise treks in partnership with Hasiuk and Wetherall. He then invited Hasiuk and Wetherall back to PNG to continue their discussions.

During this period, Jabbar noted that Hasiuk, a South-West Sydney real estate developer, seemed to be funding their research.

In the meantime, Jabbar’s company recruited two corporate groups in Port Moresby to trek with him – one from the Port Moresby Rotary Club and the other from a Qantas group in Sydney via his local contacts in the Port Moresby office.

During Wetherall’s return visit to PNG in October 2004, he made contact with [Colin Taimbari from the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority, who reported:](#)

‘In fact, rafting or whitewater rafting for that matter has never really taken my fancy until last week when two crazy, adventure seeking Australians strolled into the Papua New Guinea Tourism Promotion Authority office in downtown Port Moresby. Businessman Wayne Wetherall and property developer Frank Hasiuk, both from Camden in south-west Sydney, were eager and all excited about tackling the rugged Vanapa River in Central Province in a raft.’

Taimbari went on to report on their first rafting trip down the [Vanapa River](#):

‘The first chopper lift had Wayne, local guide Allan Malewa, our ever reliable and experienced expedition leader Osborne (Bonny) Bogajiwai and the folded paddle boat raft, which can comfortably take eight people, once fully inflated. I was in the second lift off, which also had Frank, TPA’s senior planning officer, Nathan Kumin and Defol Jabbar of Fuzzy Wuzzy Expeditions (FWE). Bonny and Allan are also of FWE – a newly established local tour company running treks along the Kokoda Track. Our two-day mission starting that Wednesday morning was more for research, to see if, after an 11-year absence, rafting on the Vanapa could be revived, more so as a tourist attraction.’

Kokoda Spirit Pty Limited

On Wetherall’s return to Australia, he registered ‘[Kokoda Spirit Pty Ltd with ASIC on 28 October 2004](#). Around the same time, he contacted the Qantas group after acquiring their details from Jabbar, who assumed they had a partnership. Wetherall later arranged for the Qantas group to book through his Australian company and quietly recruited Osborne Bogajiwai from Jabbar’s company, Fuzzy Wuzzy Expeditions, without his knowledge.

He returned to PNG in early January 2005 to conduct a rafting expedition down the [Angabanga River](#).

Soon after, unbeknownst to Jabbar, he visited LLLG Lawyers to arrange the purchase of a PNG shelf company, Kokoda Spirit PNG Ltd, which was registered on 26 January 2005.

When Jabbar enquired about the status of the trek with Qantas staff in Port Moresby, he was advised they were dealing with another company in Australia.

He was not aware of any further arrangements until he saw the group he had initially recruited with Bogajiwa and Wetherall, at Bomana War Cemetery, after their trek on Anzac Day 2005.

Whitewater Rafting Tragedy

The following month, a rafting expedition organised by Neharot Expedition on the Watut River was led by Wetherall's Chief Raft Master, Osborne Bogajiwa. [The expedition turned to tragedy when three Israeli rafters drowned.](#)

This created a diplomatic incident between Israel and PNG at the time, and allegations that no reparations were made for the boats damaged during the expedition led Wetherall to focus on the Kokoda Trail because it was not considered safe for him to return to Lae.

During the period 2003-2006, [according to his LinkedIn profile](#), Wetherall was the National Sales Manager for Refrigeration Equipment Supplies.

At the same time, according to his Kokoda Spirit website, his company was:

[‘at the forefront of new adventures in PNG. . . We are also opening up trips to Alotau at Milne bay and Buna and Gona on the North Coast. Kokoda Spirit has offices in both Sydney and Port Moresby.](#)

They were also supposedly running ‘small group trips’ to explore the history and sites of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, China and Borneo.

According to the Annual Returns lodged with the PNG Investment Promotion Authority (IPA) for Kokoda Spirit PNG Ltd, the company had NIL employees as of the date of the Annual Returns.

In Australia, until March 2006, the Australian office and operations comprised two people, Wayne Wetherall and Frank Husiuk. The post advised they were both:

[‘passionate about the Kokoda Track, the Australian history, the people and the culture’ and were ‘setting up trusts to supply much needed supplies of School \(sic\) books and equipment.’](#)

The boast that they were ‘*Setting up trusts to supply much-needed supplies of School (sic) books and equipment*’ proved to be the first of many unverifiable claims (some of these are alleged to be bogus) – there are no records of any ‘trusts’ ever being established in PNG or Australia (nor registration of charities with the ACNC in Australia).

[In June 2006, Husiuk's passion seems to have evaporated](#) as he was replaced by Wetherall's wife, Michelle, who was described as:

‘the boss of Kokoda Spirit, her enthusiasm, organisation and administration skills ensure that all facets of the business run smoothly . . . She has a wealth of knowledge about the Kokoda Track and travels frequently to PNG.’

In the early stages of his business in PNG, he proved to be ruthless in his engagement of local PNG head guides. According to Jabbar:

‘he dumped Bonny then used Gideon, Alan and Jeff. Then he dumped Gideon and ran with Alan, Jeff and Sai. Now he dropped Alan and Jeff, and he is running with Sai Lami as a head guide.

Wetherall then declared:

'Kokoda Spirit is passionately committed to the legacy and Spirit (sic) that our Australian Soldiers (sic) and their Papuan (sic) New Guinea Brothers (sic) have left for us on the Kokoda Track (sic). The Courage (sic), Endurance (sic), Mateship (sic) and Sacrifice (sic) on this sacred track have become legend. Kokoda Spirit are dedicated to providing our Trekkers (sic) and Rafters (sic) with the Experience (sic) of a Lifetime (sic), to Experience Adventure (sic), to Experience (sic) the Spirit (sic), to Experience (sic) the Culture (sic) and Experience (sic) the People (sic) this wonderful, fascinating and awe inspiring country provides'.

Apart from his mangled prose, he has never explained the connection between the 'legacy and spirit' of the trail and rafting – or even his own connection with the spirit of Kokoda.

Many trekkers are inspired by a family connection – a grandfather, an uncle, a 'friend of a friend'- or a desire as the result of a book, a documentary or a teacher. In the case of Wetherall, it would seem that this 'passionate commitment' was related to the business opportunity it presented.

Wetherall's shameless sales and marketing skills were paying dividends as Kokoda Spirit emerged as the leading trekking company on the Trail!

However, a review of Internet Archive files reveals that his company, Kokoda Spirit, and his reputation as an '*adventurer, explorer, historian and philanthropist*', was built on a series of bogus claims that saw it emerge as the leading Kokoda tour company on the Kokoda Trail.

Kokoda – The New Black!

Within five years of Wetherall's claimed '*discovery*' of Kokoda, trekking across it had become the fashionable 'new black' for Australian bucket-listers and baby-boomers, with numbers increasing by 255% – from 1,584 in 2003 to 5,621 in 2008.

Kokoda Trail Management Authority Limitations

The management authority established by the PNG Government in 2004 was limited to a CEO and a part-time assistant. The office was soon overwhelmed with their responsibilities for licensing new trek operators; issuing trek permits; developing campsites; maintaining the trail, and meeting the increasing demands of traditional landowners.

The CEO of the authority, Warren Bartlett, was a former Australian kiap. He had worked in PNG for 40 years as a Government Administrator, was fluent in Tok-Pisin and understood the complexities of Papuan culture. The feedback he received from villagers along the trail in 2008 indicated that there were many more trekkers than trek permits (although this was anecdotal).

Bartlett quietly appointed a local ranger, Mr Landy Noel of Efogi village, halfway along the trail, to audit the number of trekkers from each company as they passed through. Noel used a simple technique of seeking information from local guides and carriers in Tok Pisin, then relaying the figures back to Bartlett via VHF radio.

When Bartlett reconciled the figures at the end of 2008, he discovered that Wetherall's company, Kokoda Spirit, had applied for 378 trek permits – but Landy Noel had counted 855 trekkers passing through his village of Efogi!

Marketing ‘Without Borders’

As the number of trekkers increased rapidly from 2005, Wetherall appeared to take advantage of the fact that PNG authorities did not have the expertise, resources, or interest in monitoring copyright transgressions or truth in advertising (conduct that would be referred to as “misleading and deceptive” under Australian consumer law) – there were no borders!

His marketing strategy was therefore based on creating his own myth, plagiarising material from other websites with impunity, and making fallacious statements (the veracity of which was never proven) to enhance his reputation.

Copy-Cat Marketing

On 2 February 2011, I wrote to the CEO of the PNG Kokoda Track Authority (KTA), Rod Hillman, to express my concern over a number of claims contained on the Kokoda Spirit website. I advised him of my belief that they were false and misleading, and the proprietor of Kokoda Spirit, Wayne Wetherall, was a plagiarist and a hoaxer.

When he first established his Kokoda Spirit website in 2004, he sought credibility by claiming to be a former world athletics record holder and by copying material directly from our Adventure Kokoda website. He never provided any verification for his claimed world records.

Following is an excerpt he shamelessly copied from our Adventure Kokoda website without any form of attribution:

Extract from Adventure Kokoda blog at: http://blog.kokodatreks.com/2011/05/13/kokoda-spirit-or-kokoda-copy-cat/	
Adventure Kokoda Original Itinerary	Kokoda Spirit Copy-Cat Itinerary
Original Trek Itinerary ‘Continue to Naduri Village – meet Ovoru Indiki, one of the few surviving ‘fuzzy-wuzzy angels’. Ovoru was in Port Moresby when the Japanese first bombed the city. He did not understand what was going on and he fled to the bush in fear. Over the next couple of days Ovoru made his way back to his village – only moving at night because of fear. He told his people what had happened and they began to make arrangements to ‘go bush’. Lieutenant Bert Kniezle of the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit eventually came to the village and enlisted Ovoru and the other men in the village to help the Australians. Ovoru then spent the next three months carrying supplies forward to our troops and carrying our wounded back across the track. It is a great honour to meet the few remaining carriers such as Ovoru during the trek.’	Kokoda Spirit Copy-Cat Itinerary <i>‘Continue to Naduri Village – meet Ovoru Indiki, one of the few surviving ‘Fuzzy-Wuzzy angels’. Ovoru was in Port Moresby when the Japanese first bombed the city. He did not understand what was going on and he fled to the bush in fear. Over the next couple of days Ovoru made his way back to his village – only moving at night because of fear. He told his people what had happened and they began to make arrangements to ‘go bush’. Lieutenant Bert Kienzle of the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit eventually came to the village and enlisted Ovoru and the other men in the village to help the Australians. Ovoru then spent the next three months carrying supplies forward to our troops and carrying our wounded back across the track. It is a great honour to meet the few remaining carriers such as Ovoru during the trek.’</i>
Adventure Kokoda Original Itinerary	Kokoda Spirit Copy-Cat Itinerary <i>‘... the forming-up place for the Japanese</i>

<p><i>‘... the forming-up place for the Japanese attack on Brigade Hill – 6000 fanatical Japanese soldiers prepared to attack 1000 Australian defenders in what was to be the biggest battle of the Kokoda campaign – the Japanese referred to it as the ‘battle of the Owen Stanley Range’ – the Australians refer to it as the ‘battle for Brigade Hill’ – follow the wartime track to Efoge Creek then climb to our campsite at Efogi village.’</i></p>	<p><i>attack on Brigade Hill – 6000 fanatical Japanese soldiers attacked 1000 Australian defenders in what was to be the biggest battle of the Kokoda campaign – the Japanese referred to it as the battle of the Owen Stanley Range – The Australians refer to it as ‘the battle for Brigade Hill’ – trek down to Efogi Village to guest house for the night.’</i></p>
<p>Adventure Kokoda Original Itinerary <i>‘Follow track to the Nauro swamp area -cross the Brown River – climb to the campsite at the village of Nauro. The village of Nauro has only recently been moved to the current location on the Maguli Range. It was previously on the Nauro River with a good airfield but some say fear of sorcery caused the villagers to move up the mountain.</i></p>	<p>Kokoda Spirit Copycat Itinerary <i>‘Follow track to the Nauro swamp area -cross the Brown River – climb to the campsite at the village of Nauro. The village of Nauro has only recently been moved to the current location on the Maguli Range. It was previously on the Nauro River with a good airfield but some say fear of sorcery caused the villagers to move up the mountain.</i></p>
<p>Adventure Kokoda Original Itinerary <i>‘Climb the mighty Maguli Range to the top at Mogolonumu – follow track south – inspect Japanese delaying defensive position with weapon pits and communication trenches. Your trek leader will give a briefing at this point – continue down to your campsite on Ofi Creek.’</i></p>	<p>Kokoda Spirit Copycat Itinerary <i>‘Climb the mighty Maguli Range to the top at Mogolonumu – follow track south – inspect Japanese delaying defensive position with weapon pits and communication trenches. Your trek leader will give a briefing at this point – continue down to your campsite on Ofi Creek.’</i></p>

Wetherall also plagiarised content from other websites regarding the history of the Kokoda campaign. He did not reference any of these sources and now claims to be a ‘historian’. His material was carefully crafted and presented to create this impression.

No action was taken by Rod Hillman, who was besotted by Wetherall’s charm by 2011 – he later wrote him a glowing personal reference.

‘Click-Bait’ Marketing

Wetherall was a pioneer of ‘clickbait’ marketing for Kokoda. He quickly realised his target market knew little about the Kokoda campaign or Papua New Guinea. He therefore utilised social media to make unsubstantiated statements supporting his claims to be an:

‘Adventurer, Businessman, Founder and Owner of Life Changing Adventure Companies; as well as an ‘expert trekker and passionate historian’ who ‘sees things as an explorer, historian and adventurer that military trekking companies cannot’; that he ‘has been instrumental in some of the great discoveries along the famous Kokoda Track’; that ‘No white man had trekked this toughest section of the track’ on Sandakan since the war; that ‘he has become a voice for the thousands of brave Aussie Men who never came home’; and has ‘set up trusts’ to help village schools’ etc, etc. etc.

He also advises that *‘Wayne’s expertise in Business, IT and Tourism provides the professional support and infrastructure to our teams in the countries we operate.’*

What Wetherall fails to mention is that, prior to his ‘*discovery*’ of the Kokoda Trail in 2004, he was a suburban air-conditioning salesman in Sydney with no prior record of military service, no connections with veterans organisations, and no accreditation as an adventurer, explorer, historian, or philanthropist.

However, he was aware that whenever he was called out for his bogus claims, he could simply amend or remove the information and move on.

Bogus claim to be a World Athletics Champion

Wetherall’s first bogus claim was based on unverified athletic achievements, which included:

- One (1) world athletic record;
- One (1) Australian athletic record;
- Four (4) New South Wales athletic records;
- One (1) Trans-Tasman athletics championship;
- 26 New South Wales athletic championships; and
- One (1) Australian cycling championship

He then modestly added: [‘You might say Wayne is a pretty fit bloke’](#).

These claims were published from 2006 to 2007 and, if true, would have established him as a household name within the athletic community.

When he was called out, he quietly removed them from his website and continued to grow his business model on bogus claims, using them as clickbait to attract potential trekkers.

Bogus Claim re Wayne Wetherall’s Kokoda Spirit Book

He next bogus claim announced the imminent arrival of his Kokoda Spirit book – ‘In the footsteps of Hero’s (sic)’ which would include:

‘Stories of our Australian Soldiers(sic) and the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels who assisted them during World War II; Trekking the Kokoda Trail information, pictures, maps, past trekkers information and advice, personal experiences; and a close and personal look at the ancestors of the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels their triumphs, challengers (sic) and opportunities . . . this book is a must read for those that have an interest in PNG, the Kokoda Trail and our PNG brothers.’

- [Kokoda In the footsteps of hero’s \(sic\) In the footsteps of my Brothers \(sic\)](#)

The book was never published, and the claim was quietly removed from his website after it served the purpose of enhancing his status as a ‘*historian*’.

Bogus Claim re his establishment of a ‘Spirit Foundation

He then took his bogus claims to a new level to establish himself as a ‘*philanthropist*’ when he announced the establishment of a ‘Spirit Foundation’ to develop education programs and opportunities for people along the Kokoda Trail and further afield in Papua New Guinea. He advised their focus was to ‘*identify and assist these students to have access to education and employment skills*’. He went on to boast that it would ‘*provide scholarships at primary, secondary and tertiary level, provide school resources to and supplies to village schools across the Trail.*’

- [Kokoda Spirit announces the Spirit Foundation](#)

Spirit Foundation

‘The Spirit Foundation principle focus is on the development of education programs and education opportunities for the people along Kokoda and Papua New Guinea.

‘The Spirit foundation believes that investment in education is essential for social and economic change in PNG. Over ninety five percent (95%) of PNG children/students drop out of the PNG education system. Our focus is to identify and assist these students to have access to education and employment skills.

‘The Spirit Foundation was created with a desire to assist the people along the track with real and achievable educational and vocational opportunities. The Foundation is supported by the management of Kokoda Spirit and a large number of trekkers who have walked the track. These trekkers have returned from PNG with a real desire to put something back into the country and the people along the track.

‘The Spirit Foundation provides scholarships to children in PNG predominantly from the Kokoda Track, Oro and Central Provinces region and of Kiorai or Orokaivan descent to help them to attend elementary, primary and secondary school. The Spirit Foundation will also continue funding and support of the students as they progress through University, College or Vocational training. The selected students are those whose families cannot normally afford to send them to school but who have demonstrated promising academic progress in their studies thus far. Scholarship students are selected on a basis of need, effort and achievement.

‘The Spirit Foundation is also providing school resources and supplies to all of the primary and elementary schools along the Kokoda Track. The Spirit Foundation will also support the "School Mates Reading Program" in the Villages along the Kokoda Track. The "School Mates Reading Program" is a home reader style program where trekkers are invited to support an hour of their time on their trek to read to the children in the Villagers.

‘The Spirit Foundation will also be providing funding for educational programs and resources to selected secondary schools. The secondary schools that the Spirit Foundation will sponsor provide education to more than 2800 students throughout the Oro and Central provinces whilst the primary and elementary schools service over 800 local village children when the schools are operating effectively.

‘The Spirit Foundation will fund a new scholarship program for students that show outstanding potential in education and leadership. This sponsorship will carry on throughout their senior high school and university years and they will be given a number of leadership, educational and community oriented opportunities. The aim of this new project is to discover and foster PNG's future leaders.

‘The Spirit Foundation is committed to ensuring that the people of PNG and predominantly the people along the Kokoda Track have an ongoing opportunity for access to education and vocational training. These opportunities are essential for the ongoing development of social and economic change along the track and in PNG.

‘For more information regarding the Spirit Foundation check out our web site or Contact Wayne at Kokoda Spirit kokodaspirit@bigpond.com or Contact Kevin at Kevin@kokodaspirit.com 07 54452758’

Visit <http://www.kokodaspirit.com>

Labels: Spirit Foundation

POSTED BY WAYNE'S KOKODA SPIRIT BLOG AT 8:36 AM 0 comments

These were noble objectives; however, a fact check with the Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) revealed the ‘Spirit Foundation’ did not exist! After this fact was exposed, Wetherall simply removed the claim from his website and moved on!

Bogus Claim re discovery of 'Wartime Kokoda Track'

In an endeavour to establish his credentials as a Kokoda 'explorer and historian', Wetherall claimed to have [rediscovered the 'Wartime Kokoda Track'](#), on 10 March 2008:

'The Kokoda Track is one of the World's great treks, surrounded by impenetrable jungle, raging rivers that have cut deep into the [brooding mountains](#) and then plunge into ragged, tortuous valleys that crisscross the track.

'There has been recent media attention regarding mining along the track and claims from "Track Historians" and "Kokoda Track Specialists," that parts of the Kokoda Track are not original "War Time" tracks but merely easier "Tourist Tracks". I also had reservations about the authenticity of the track that we were walking on and decided to investigate deeper.

'We engaged the assistance of the local Koiari landowners, Village Elders and our local PNG Trek Masters to ascertain their understanding of the location of the "Original War Time Kokoda Track." We also spoke to Lt Nicholas Walsh, Engineer in Charge of Owers Corner. This local knowledge was backed up with my recent survey of the area by helicopter, World War 11 maps, survey maps from 1966 and 1973 and Global positioning technology.

'Armed with my trusted band of guides, landowners, Elders, GPS and World War 11 maps, survey maps and my recent fly over of the area we set off to put the discussions to rest.

'It has a [surreal feel](#) as we veer off the ridgeline into the partially cleared former village.

'Our search of the area revealed numerous war artefacts including, metal boxes, containers, Dixies, water bottles, ammunition, weapon pits and cable.'

He followed this up with another post on 12 March 2008, where he advised, *'It is important to remember that there are many alternative routes across Kokoda'*, as if he needed to convince himself!

On 11 October 2008, he announced he had discovered the original Wartime Kokoda Track, which had been ['hidden under 66 years of dense Jungle growth'](#).

He went on to claim:

'Original sections of the Kokoda Track have been recently discovered by Historian (sic) and Adventurer (sic) Wayne Wetherall from specialist trekking company Kokoda Spirit. After extensive research of old survey maps, WW11 maps, and a extensive helicopter survey, Wayne finally cut and trekked through the Jungle (sic) to discover sections of the original "Golden Stairs" across Imita Ridge not seen since the bloody battles of 1942 . . .'

[Wetherall neglected to mention that organised groups had been trekking across the section known as the 'Golden Staircase' for more than 20 years before his 'discovery'. He also failed to provide any GPS data to support his claim.](#)

On 15 October 2008, he set out to differentiate himself against tour companies led by former servicemen by advising that he saw ['things as an explorer that tourist and Military trekking companies cannot.'](#)

He continued with a rant directed at Adventure Kokoda:

'There is some (sic) Kokoda trekking Companies (sic), that pump their chests and tell you how good they are, how professional they are and how they are the only ones that have true Military Leaders (sic) as guides and the only ones to walk the original Wartime Track (sic). These same

companies walk you in 'Platoon' (sic) size (33 trekkers plus) to give you the real military (sic) feel. Multiply these trekker numbers with nearly twice as many porters and you have a huge congo (sic) line through the Jungle (sic)! They also walk you on occasions (sic) at night, what a dangerous thing to be doing! (sic) Not sure how you can take in the ambience and scenery of the Kokoda Track when you cannot see two feet in front. They also charge you a huge price for the privilege (sic)!

Wetherall used a similar approach to establish his credentials in his 're-discovery' of the original Sandakan Death March Route three years later in 2011 (see Sandakan Death March Route Controversy' below). He denigrates the view of military historians who had been trekking across the Kokoda Trail for at least two decades prior to his 'discovery' and disregards the fact that their articles reflect a learned understanding of military strategy, tactics, and the significance of 'ground'.

A review of Wetherall's writings suggests a subjective vibe rather than historical fact. To him, the jungle includes 'brooding mountains' which have a 'surreal feel' where he could 'feel the energy coming out of the ground' akin to 'entering a lost world'.

By the end of 2008, Wetherall's marketing strategies paid dividends as Kokoda Spirit emerged as the leading tour company on the Kokoda Trail. He was then able to quietly remove his unverified claims as an international athlete and dispense with the advertisement for his book, which never materialised, as the myth surrounding his self-proclaimed 'adventurer, explorer, historian' status had been established.

Bogus Claim re Kokoda 'Village Garden Project'

Wetherall also announced a 'Village Garden Project' along with his 'Village Reader Program on 8 May 2010:

'It has been an exciting start to the new trekking year for myself and the Kokoda Spirit Staff.

'Our long awaited Village Garden Project has produced its first yield of vegetables on the track!

'Our Village Garden project started with a vision by Kokoda Spirit Managing Director Wayne Wetherall in early 2009 to improve the quality and variety of vegetables available to the villagers along the track. The village gardens can be a long way from the village and sometimes perched on steep ground that is difficult to access and even harder to cultivate.

'Our simple project was to build smaller raised vegetable gardens next to their village homes or guesthouse. With the help of the villages we were able to improve the quality of the soil and mulch the gardens to improve the yield. We certainly had some learning to do about what grows in PNG, the villagers certainly have green thumbs.

'The Menari School has also taken on the project to teach the kids and parents about small veggie gardens and to assess what grows best in the area. With their experience we are hopeful that the knowledge gained by the school will allow greater awareness of the benefits of smaller scale gardening. The village of Iorabaiwa (Sic) has also adopted (sic) the Village Garden project and is developing some great gardens. We will also be developing and rolling out the project along the track over our next treks.

His former trek leader has revealed that he was given a packet of tomato seeds to take up and put in a planter box. He was uncomfortable with trying to get them through PNG customs, so he left them behind and brought a packet in Port Moresby to go through with the charade and report accordingly to Wetherall. He advised that the villagers politely accepted the packet of seeds, but there was no project as such.

His claim could also be tested against the fact that the villagers of the Kokoda Trail have lived a subsistence lifestyle for generations. They are devout Seventh Day Adventist

followers and are vegetarians. They are therefore well versed in establishing crops and rotating gardens to meet their needs.

In 2009, the Australian-funded Kokoda Initiative introduced a \$1.3 million ‘Village Livelihoods Project’ which was conceived in Canberra without consultation with the PNG Department of Community Development, the Kokoda Track Authority or Kokoda tour operators who generate the income for Kokoda tourism. As a result, the program failed, and as soon as the funds were exhausted, villagers reverted to their traditional gardening methods.

Wetherall’s former trek leader did arrange for his trekkers to bring some books and school supplies to present to the school, as most other tour companies do.

No further posts were published on the program. Having created an impression of another noble philanthropic village project, he moved on!

Bogus Claims re ‘Village Reader’ Project

On the Trail, he also announced a ‘Village Reader Project’:

- [Village reader & Village Garden programs](#)

He claimed his Village Reader program would ‘*teach mothers how to read and how to teach their children to read*’ as well as ‘*creating an information and reading library for the schools in Menari*’.

According to the headmasters at Menari no such program has ever been introduced and Wetherall never published any follow up articles to prove the program existed.

As a result, Wetherall’s ‘Village Reader Program’ was never implemented, and no further mentions were made of it after the initial announcement, as he had moved on.

Bogus Claim re Partnership with the Kokoda Track Foundation Charity

Wetherall then claimed to be a ‘**Gold Trek Operating Partner**’ to the Kokoda Track Foundation. There is no record of any type of partnership - gold, silver, bronze or co-delivery listed on the [Kokoda Track Foundation website](#).

Bogus Claim re ‘Discovery’ of ‘Kokoda’s Forgotten Battlefields’

Over the next two years, Wetherall went on to make spurious claims to have rediscovered [Kokoda’s Forgotten Battlefields](#) (which have never been forgotten or ‘lost’) to enhance his status as a *historian*, and to have ‘*discovered*’ **original sections of the trail** to enhance his ‘*explorer*’ status.

A blog article regarding his claim to have rediscovered a *forgotten* battlefield claimed:

[‘Had the 39th Battalion and Templeton’s men in B Company failed in the initial fighting at Awala, Wairopi, Gorari \(sic\) and Oivi, then the course of the Kokoda Trail Campaign and Australia’s history could be very different. They took on the might of the Japanese Army and inflicted physical, logistical and psychological wounds on them that would eventually become terminal to the Japanese.’](#)

This is an outrageous misinterpretation of historical fact!

The 39th Battalion were gallant in their actions between Awala, Kokoda and Isurava from 23rd July to the 26th of August 1942, and later at Buna and Gona during the battles for the beachheads.

However, their initial contacts with the Japanese advance party forward of Kokoda at Awala did nothing to stop or delay their advance towards the Trail. To suggest that they *'took on the might of the Japanese Army and inflicted physical, logistical and psychological wounds on them that would eventually become terminal to the Japanese'* is pure, embellished fiction.

Bogus claim re discovery of Captain Sam Templeton's body

In 2010, Wetherall made an extraordinary claim to have solved *'the 68-year-old mystery of the disappearance of Captain Sam Templeton'*. The claim caused significant distress to the Templeton family and resulted in the hospitalisation of his then elderly son, Reg, after it was the subject of a national television story.

A blog article, **'Destiny - Move Out!'** was vintage Wetherall hyperbole:

'The booming voice of Captain Sam Templeton reverberates through the early morning mist.

'With these two words the lives, destiny and course of history of Captain Sam Templeton the 39th Battalion and those that would follow them across the rugged Owen Stanley Ranges would be changed forever.

'Until then only New Guinea locals, patrol officers and other old New Guinea hands were able to make it across this living breathing, pulsating and evolving Track, surrounded by seemingly impenetrable jungle, raging rivers and stunning waterfalls. The Track crossed deep into the brooding mist covered mountains then swept down into beautiful, lush green mystical valleys. This was truly Gods own land, his private garden of Eden. But never again would this sweet smelling track ever be the same, forever the Kokoda Track will be soaked in blood of young Australians. They didn't know it yet but the 39th Battalion was heading for big trouble...

'The young soldiers of B Company were full of excitement and vigor that morning, itching to start this great adventure. They showed little concern for what lay ahead, their ignorance was bliss.

'They had every reason to be confident; they were being led by Captain Sam Templeton a man of unquestionable, moral courage and a man of great physical and mental strength.'

He goes on to advise that he:

'sometimes get asked why Captain Sam Templeton and the 39th Battalion are so important to our Australian History and why his disappearance is important. Captain Sam Templeton holds a special place in Australian history. He commanded the first Australian Company to cross the Kokoda Track, he was the first Australian Officer to lead his men into battle and he was the first Australian Officer to die in battle on the track.

'Sam instilled in his men great confidence and resolves to repel the voracious Japanese tiger heading their way.'

It is worth noting that there are no official references to the 39th Battalion repelling *'the voracious Japanese tiger'* in more sober historical publications. **[An analysis of the validity of the claim is outlined on this link.](#)**

On the basis that the claims could not be substantiated, and were unable to be substantiated by the Army Unrecovered War Graves Unit and the Department of Veterans Affairs, it can easily be concluded that it was an elaborate publicity stunt.

On 11 January 2012, the manager of the Unrecovered War Casualties - Army advised:

‘Over the last couple of years, Unrecovered War Casualties - Army (UWC-A) has received two submissions from Mr Wayne Wetherall in regard to CAPT Sam Templeton of the 39th Australian Infantry Battalion. The first was redirected to UWC-A by the Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG), and the second was sent directly to UWC-A.

‘In his first submission, Mr Wetherall presented his contention that Templeton had been captured and killed by the Japanese and that he had been taken to where the body had been buried near Oivi. When specifically asked if he had identified an exact burial site, he reply was that he had no knowledge of any burial site.

In his second submission, a few months after the first, he alleged that his research had identified an unidentified Australian burial at the Port Moresby (Bomana) War Cemetery as being CAPT Templeton.

‘In order to try and ascertain the truth surrounding the various claims being made in relation to CAPT Templeton, I directed that an investigation be commenced in order to test the veracity of the various hypotheses. This investigation was concluded in late 2011, and I am awaiting the investigator's report.

‘I can tell you that, in essence, the investigation concluded that CAPT Sam Templeton of the 39th Australian Infantry Battalion was probably captured by the Japanese around the time he left his company's position near Oivi and killed some time afterwards. The investigation found no evidence that would allow any conclusion about how, when or where his death might have occurred. Nor did the investigation find evidence to allow any conclusion in regard to the disposition of his body.’

However, Wetherall's claims achieved their purpose in cultivating a myth as an ‘*explorer*’, ‘*adventurer*’, ‘*historian*’ and ‘*philanthropist*’, obsessed with a ‘*passion for our soldiers*’ which resulted in his trekker numbers increasing exponentially. His previous life as a sales manager for an air conditioning company had been airbrushed from his CV and archived.

- [Wayne Wetherall: Shameless publicity stunt for Kokoda Spirit! - Adventure Kokoda Blog](#)

After Wetherall's claim was refuted by the official Army ‘Unrecovered War Graves Unit’, which refused to verify the claim, he moved on.

Bogus Claim re ‘Opening Up’ of the Long Tan battlefield in Vietnam

His marketing bravado was boundless as he then claimed to have assisted in ‘opening up’ Long Tan in Vietnam (purportedly to enhance his credibility with the veteran community):

‘Wayne has successfully led exploration treks and tours into Vietnam, Thailand, Borneo China, Germany, Italy and France. Wayne has assisted in opening up the Sandakan track for Tourism in Borneo and Long Tan in Vietnam. Wayne has also successfully climbed Mt Wilhelm in PNG and Mt Kinabalu in Borneo twice including the World's highest “Via Ferrata”.

- [About Kokoda Spirit: 1 February 2010](#)

A fact check revealed that access to Long Tan had been negotiated by veterans of the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, who had fought in the battle. Wetherall was not involved in any of the sensitive diplomatic negotiations which led to the erection of a Long Tan Cross at the battlefield on 18 August 1969 and its restoration in 2000.

[6 RAR Battalion History](#)

A fact check revealed that Wetherall was born on 3 May 1965, a year after the battle. He was just 4 years old when the Long Tan Cross was first dedicated in 1969, and a 35-year-old manager at a suburban refrigeration and air-conditioning company when access to the site was granted by the Vietnamese Government in 2000.

When these facts were revealed, he amended his claims and moved on!

Spurious Trek Claims

Wetherall's most recent strategy to enhance his reputation was to market his imminent 100th trek.

However, a review of the [Internet Archive Wayback Machine](#) reveals a web of schizophrenic claims about the number of treks he has completed and the number of clients who have trekked with his company, Kokoda Spirit. A snapshot of these anomalies reveals the following spurious claims:

- On **11 August 2018**, he claimed to have completed 82 treks with Kokoda Spirit, leading 7,700 trekkers since the company began operations in 2004.
- Three months later, on **9 January 2019**, he claimed to have completed **91 treks with Kokoda Spirit**, leading 8,400 trekkers.
- On **12 August 2020**, he claimed to have led 85 treks with Kokoda Spirit, leading 8,900 trekkers, and two months later, on 30 October, he claimed to have completed 80 treks with Kokoda Spirit, leading 8,500 trekkers.
- On **19 September 2021**, when trekking was suspended due to COVID, he claimed to have completed 95 treks with Kokoda Spirit, leading 8,900 trekkers.
- Three months later, on **4 December 2021**, he claimed to have completed '*more than 90 crossings of the Kokoda Track*'.
- On **19 August 2022**, he claimed to have completed 95 treks and '*So far...we have seen over 10,000 trekkers come on some extraordinary adventures with us!*'.
- On **27 February 2024**, he claims to have completed '*more than 99 crossings of the Kokoda Track*'.
- On **18 May 2024**, he claimed to have '*trekked Kokoda in excess of 95 times*'.
- A month later, on 2 June 2024, he claimed '*trekked Kokoda in excess of 90 times*'.
- On **1 September 2024**, he claims to have completed '*more than 99 crossings of the Kokoda Track*'. On the same date, in different sections of his website, he claims to have completed '*95 crossings of the Kokoda Track*' and to '*have seen over 8,900 trekkers successfully cross the track!*'
- **1 May 2026**, he claims to have completed **95 crossings of the Kokoda Track**, including the first Kokoda Coast to Coast crossing from Buna on the North Coast to Port Moresby, a triple Kokoda crossing, a fast two-day Kokoda crossing, the race distance, 2 nights, 3 days Kokoda Ultra Marathon on three occasions.
- **1 May 2026**: He claims to have '**completed more than 100 crossings of Kokoda.**'

Wetherall fails to explain how he could have led 11 treks across the Kokoda Trail when it was closed during COVID, and there were no flights between Australia and PNG!

A table titled 'Trolling for the Truth' on page 37 below details the claims he has made regarding the number of trekkers his company has led and the number of times he has claimed to have trekked it.

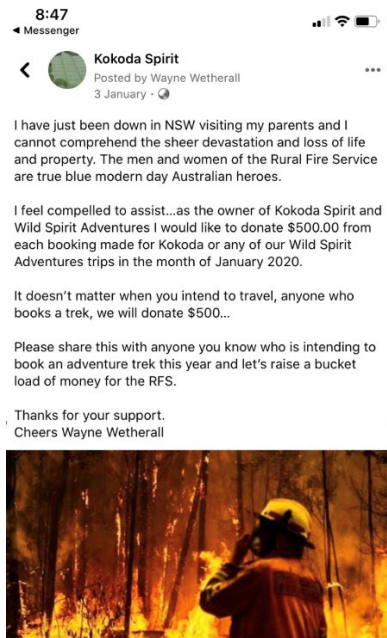
Bogus Claim to be 'the Anzac Spirit'

By the end of 2010, Kokoda Spirit had emerged as the leading Kokoda tour company as a result of Wetherall's aggressive marketing, albeit on false premises.

On 11 November 2010, he brazenly claimed ‘I am the Anzac Spirit’ despite having never served in the armed forces or having any association with the veteran community prior to discovering the business opportunities associated with the Kokoda Trail in 2005. The essay supporting his assertion was a compilation of historical drivel.

- [I am the Anzac Spirit by Wayne Wetherall](#)

Bogus Bushfire Appeal



According to his office staff, the funds received were not passed on to the appeal. Wetherall should be asked to provide receipts, as this is quite a serious issue.

Wild Spirit Adventures

[On 7 April 2010, Wetherall announced the establishment of a new company, Wild Spirit Adventures:](#)

‘Wayne and Michelle Wetherall run our Australian office and operation.

‘Wayne is passionate about people and the culture of the people in the areas we visit. He has developed a successful trekking operation in many countries after initiating a rafting and trekking business in the remote areas of Papua New Guinea. Wayne has been exploring PNG since 2002 and has been instrumental in some of the great discoveries along the famous Kokoda Track. He has also written a number of stories on the history and his experiences in Papua New Guinea.

‘He has established strong bonds with local villagers, **setting up trusts to supply much needed supplies of Schoolbooks (sic) and equipment.** He has initiated this same sense of responsibility in our other Wild Spirit venues. ‘Wayne’s expertise in Business, IT and Tourism provides the professional support and infrastructure to our teams in the countries we operate. **Wayne has always been exploring and has an intimate knowledge and passion for the Australian war history** His enthusiasm and knowledge will give you an insight into the culture and customs of our Wild Spirit destinations.

‘Wayne has successfully led exploration treks and tours into Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, Thailand, Borneo China, Germany, Italy and France. **Wayne has assisted in opening up the Sandakan track for Tourism in Borneo and Long Tan in Vietnam.** Wayne has also successfully climbed Mt Wilhelm in PNG and Mt Kinabalu in Borneo twice including the World’s highest “ Via Ferrata“.

There is no evidence of any 'trusts' ever having been established for the provision of school supplies.

He fails to mention that his 'expertise in Business and IT' was related to his job as a sales manager for an air-conditioning company before he 'discovered' Kokoda and both 'Sandakan' and 'Long Tan' had been 'opened up' more than a decade before he became aware of their existence!

True Spirit Adventures

Around the same time, he also established a separate business, True Spirit Adventures, with Monique Slade, one of his female trekkers from Melbourne. Together, they claimed to have:

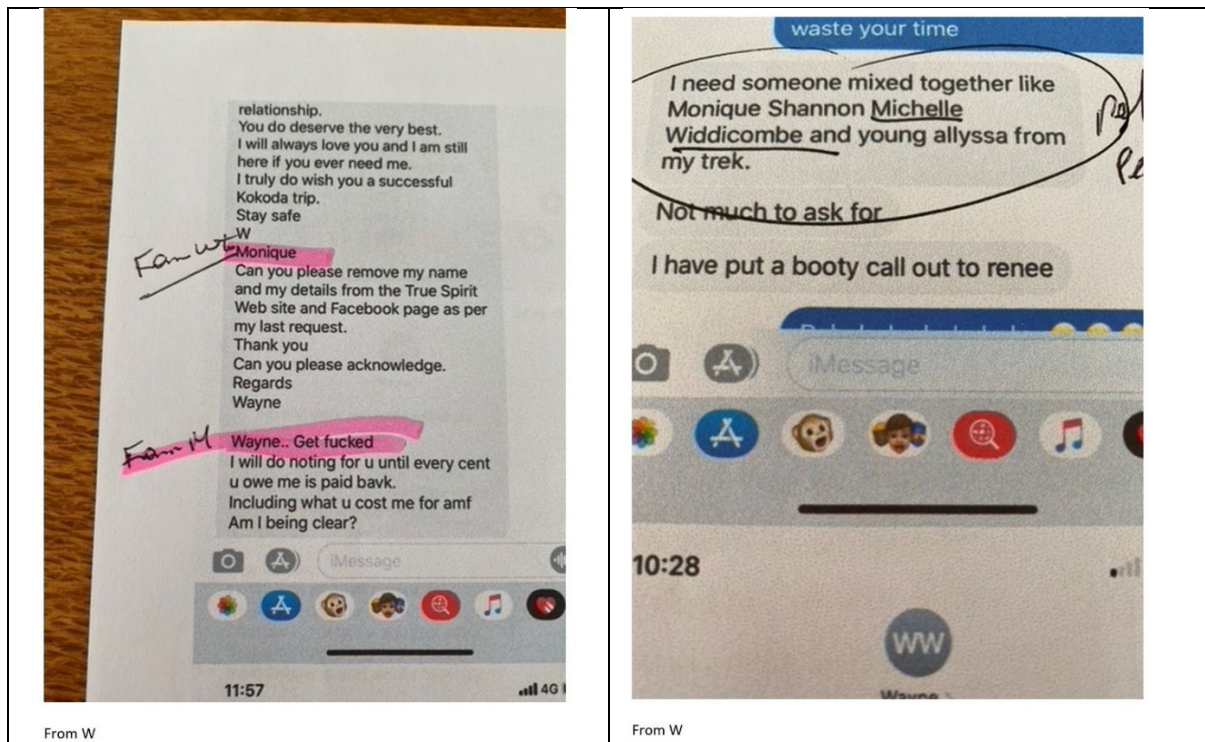
'identified an opportunity in the market to provide Elite (sic), life-changing and empowering adventures for Charity (sic), Corporate (sic), Teams (sic), Defence Forces (sic) and Schools (sic).'

In the meantime, he was also managing Kokoda Spirit with his wife, Michelle, from the Queensland Sunshine Coast. He wrote:

'Wayne and Michelle had a dream to share the story of the courageous and heroic diggers on the Kokoda Track with fellow Australians. Immerse yourself in the cultures of traditional village life, marvel at the size and magnitude of the rainforests and mountains, enjoy the adventure of crossing swift-flowing rivers to discover waterfalls, and people living in harmony with their land. Come with us on a journey to experience the Spirit of Kokoda and Papua New Guinea.'

Some thought it was a crazy-brave initiative to run separate companies across the same Trail – one with your wife in Queensland and the other with a female business partner from Victoria.

The relationship culminated in the break-up of his marriage in 2013, and a later acrimonious business and relationship bust-up with Monique Slade from True Spirit Adventures in Victoria.



Phone messages between Wetherall and his True Spirit Adventures partner, Monique Slade, after an acrimonious breakup – and Wetherall describing his next sexual requirement

According to his staff on the Sunshine Coast, Wetherall quickly recovered from the break-ups and moved on with others enamoured with his status as a reimagined adventurer, explorer, historian and philanthropist.

A comprehensive review of Wetherall’s bogus claims and a review of his modus operandi on Sandakan can be accessed on this link:

- [Wild Spirit Adventures Sandakan Review – Let the buyer beware](#)

Rod Hillman’s appointment as CEO of the Kokoda Track Authority

The Australian Government assumed responsibility for the Kokoda Trail under a Joint Understanding signed with PNG in Madang on 23 April 2008.

Mr Rod Hillman was appointed as CEO to replace Bartlett. It was Hillman’s first trip to PNG, and the defaulting on payment of trek fees by Australian trek operators was the first issue he had to address. The former CEO, Warren Bartlett, provided Hillman with a comprehensive list of all trek fee defaulters.

The records showed that Kokoda Spirit was the major trek fee defaulter in 2008. It was clear that Wayne Wetherall took advantage of an overworked management staff and neglected to pay trek permit fees for 378 trekkers. He was caught out after the KTA CEO, Warren Bartlett, suspected there were more trekkers than trek permits and established an ‘audit checkpoint’ with one of his rangers, Mr Landy Noel, in Efogi village, halfway across the Trail.

KOKODA TRACK AUTHORITY **** Confidential for 2008 Listed Tour/Trek Operators, PNGTPA, DEC Kokoda Task Force, Aust HighCom ****

Kokoda Track Permit Holder Trekking Statistics at 31 December, 2008

For Trekkers Trek Permits Applications, Paid and Unpaid with KTA identified 2008 Defaulters

Tour Operator	Year		Year		Year		Year		Year		Year 2008		Adjusted Total				
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005		2006		2007		Applications Paid/Unpaid		Defaults				
	Tkrs	Tkrs	Tkrs	Tkrs	Tkrs	Treks	Tkrs	Treks	Tkrs	Treks	Tkrs	Treks	Tkrs	Treks			
Adventure Kokoda				28	332	25	507	22	731	30	753	36	0	753	36		
Adventure 35 / Tropic Tours									5	1	22	2	0	22	2		
Back Track Adventures / Niugini Holidays											0	0	38	3	38	3	
Dick Baker									25	1	34	3	0	34	3		
DCXP					43	5	32	4	147	12	0	0	146	11	146	11	
Desoho Treks & Tours											2	1	0	0	2	1	
EcoTourism Melanesia				30	35	7	79	15	78	11	28	4	0	0	28	4	
Executive Excellence / Tropic Tours			13	35	287	245	15	378	16	359	19	416	27	0	0	416	27
Fuzzy Wuzzy Expeditions				5	17	1	47	2	39	3	27	3	18	2	45	5	
Fuzzy Wuzzy Spiritours							8	1					0	0	0	0	
Getaway Trekking							15	3	56	5	155	13	0	0	155	13	
GMS Tours (Niugini Adventure Tours)							33	2	25	1	68	5	32	2	100	7	
Isurava Memorial Tours											2	1	0	0	2	1	
Kokoda Bros (Legend Guided Tours)							3	1	6	1	52	6	0	0	52	6	
Kokoda Historical											11	2	18	2	29	4	
Kokoda Holidays				15	15	1	51	6	35	3	19	2	5	1	24	3	
Kokoda Icon (formerly Koiari Treks & Tours)			32	97	34	51	10	60	7	45	6	38	7	6	44	8	
Kokoda Memorial Black Angels											36	4	0	0	36	4	
Kokoda Oro Tours									25	5	42	3	0	0	42	3	
Kokoda Spirit					4	1	187	19	646	49	477	40	378	32	855	72	
Kokoda Track Experience (Mervyn Hains)									18	2	92	5	27	2	119	7	
Kokoda Trail Bushwalking											21	2	30	2	51	4	
Kokoda Trekking Ltd			36	426	636	69	822	100	722	83	370	42	207	24	577	66	
Kokoda Treks & Tours Pty Ltd		27	117	142	172	12	189	13	176	11	168	11	15	1	183	12	
Mentone Grammar					?	3	7	3	18	3	0	0	25	2	25	2	
Niugini Holidays / Pacific Travel	76	290	574	403	587	49	699	63	659	52	116	10	196	16	302	26	
No Roads Expeditions					23	2	74	6	368	30	479	35	114	9	593	44	
Northern Distractions			92	29	0	0	68	6	154	9	45	4	0	0	45	4	
Our Spirit			8		54	6	162	9	195	10	0	0	110	4	110	4	
Paradise Tours											0	0	15	1	15	1	
PNG Trekking Adventures			12		33	6	37	4	69	9	237	21	12	1	249	22	
Private		3	103	187	120	17	214	38	363	48	136	32	81	9	217	41	
South Seas Horizons / Brigade Hill Mission Tours											0	0	104	10	104	10	
Team Kokoda Australia							49	4	69	5	83	5	10	1	93	6	
Toogee Treks					7	1	33	3	45	5	52	6	10	1	62	7	
Trek 96 Kokoda Historical									68	6	23	3	0	0	23	3	
Trukai Industries											0	0	13	1	13	1	
World Expeditions / Tropic Tours											17	1	0	0	17	1	

According to the KTA list of defaulters, Kokoda Spirit led 855 trekkers but only paid trek permits for 477. However, in a blog on 18 November 2008, Wayne Wetherall boasted that they led 'over a thousand trekkers' across:

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2008

Kokoda Story

It's a tale of courage, endurance, mateship and sacrifice which Wayne and Michelle Wetherall want to share with everyone.

Six years ago, the Sippy Downs couple formed Kokoda Spirit - a company which takes treks across the Kokoda Trail in Papua NewGuinea.

Since then, Kokoda Spirit has educated thousands of trekkers about the bitter fight between Australian and Japanese soldiers which took place on the track 66 years ago - which Australia eventually won.

"It's a business that Michelle and I are very passionate about becauseit's such a fantastic story of what took place," Wayne said.

"This year alone we've taken over a thousand trekkers ... We do anything from corporate to school groups to individuals or teams." While the trail is 96 kilometres long, with 7,500 meters in climbs andanother 7,500 meters in descents, Wayne said the key to completing the track is having a good stamina.

"You don't need to be an Olympian," he said.

Rather than advising operators who had defaulted on their outstanding trek fee payments to settle, the KTA (under Rod Hillman's leadership) entered into a series of confidential agreements that resulted in undisclosed discounts and payments to the rogue companies, including Kokoda Spirit.

Wetherall's persuasive sales skills obviously came to the fore during his negotiations with Rod Hillman, and they became close friends. So close that Hillman wrote a letter advising that Kokoda Spirit '*had no outstanding trek fees in 2008, 2009, or 2010*'. He neglected to mention whether these amounts related to the full amount of unpaid fees identified by the Kokoda Track Authority audit, or any discounts negotiated as part of a confidential settlement with the KTA.

It was noted that Hillman did not write a similar letter to any other trekking company, including Adventure Kokoda, which was the only company that had paid their trek fees in full and in advance.

On 2 February 2011, I wrote to Rod Hillman to '*express my concern over a number of claims contained on the Kokoda Spirit website. I believe they are false and misleading and should be investigated by the KTA as the authority responsible for the integrity of Kokoda trek operators and the Code of Conduct.*' The concerns in the letter related to Wayne Wetherall's false claims regarding:

- Announcement of a 'Spirit Foundation'
- Discovery of Captain Sam Templeton's body
- Opening up the Sandakan track for Tourism in Borneo
- Opening up 'Long Tan' Vietnam

- Discovering original ‘wartime Kokoda Tracks’

Hillman responded on 25 February 2011, advising that he did not have the resources to monitor website content and that he had *‘spent considerable time working with tour operators to resolve the outstanding fees from that time and believe we have now resolved these issues’*.

He also advised that he believed it was *‘inappropriate for previous management to circulate outstanding payments due to KTA’*, and that *Kokoda Spirit has paid all their outstanding and current trek fees in full.’*

I responded on 1 March 2011, advising that:

‘I believe the managing authority has a responsibility to ensure trek operators do not post false and misleading information on their websites. Nor should they be permitted to copy information from other trek operator websites without their permission. If this is brought to the KTA's attention, the offending trek operator should be asked to correct the record. If they fail to do so, they should either be named and shamed or sanctioned in some other way.’

I also advised that his confirmation that *‘Kokoda Spirit has paid all their outstanding and current trek fees in full’* did not answer my question in regard to the total number of trekkers Kokoda Spirit led across the Trail in 2008 and how much they had paid.

I also requested that, *‘in the interests of transparency, details of any financial arrangements made between the KTA and Kokoda Spirit be made available to all other trek operators. Any other financial arrangements made with other delinquent trek operators between 2008 and 2010 should be included’* and that:

‘Whilst these questions remain unanswered, there will be a suspicion that the KTA and Kokoda Spirit have colluded to provide a financial advantage to Wayne Wetherall. This would not be an issue if only a small number of trekkers had not paid their trek fees, but 378 is not a small number. The scale of the deception indicates that Kokoda Spirit deliberately avoided paying trek fees. It is unfair and unethical for them to be rewarded with a financial advantage over other trek operators who abided by the requirements of the special purpose authority established by the PNG National Government to manage trekking operations across the Kokoda Trail.’

‘I disagree with your assertion that the publication of outstanding payments due to the KTA by the former Chief Executive, Mr Warren Bartlett, was a violation of *‘generally accepted principles of privacy and business practice’*.

‘What the publication of those figures did was expose a large scale smuggling operation by an unscrupulous trek operator. If the operator, Wayne Wetherall, had not been exposed he would have successfully cheated the management authority of approximately K100,000 in unpaid trek fees.

‘I am disappointed that you did not address the other issues I raised, particularly in regard to the hoax surrounding the search for Captain Sam Templeton’s body and the fraudulent claim about a Kokoda Spirit Foundation. I will therefore pursue these issues in a different forum.

‘The concept of a management authority for the Kokoda Trail arose from a desire to honour and protect the military heritage of the area. The aim was to develop a sustainable model for wartime tourism by ensuring villagers received shared benefits from trekkers.

‘The greatest contribution the Australian Government can make towards the development of the Kokoda Trail as a sustainable wartime historical destination is to ensure proper governance is observed at all levels, in all negotiations and with all parties in both Australia and PNG. The potential for wartime historical tourism is enormous if a proper management model can be developed.

'Trek operators are the primary income generators in this emerging industry. It is not a good principle to penalise those who comply with the Code of Conduct and reward those who corrupt it.'

Copies of the exchange in correspondence can be provided if required.

As Wetherall's company, Kokoda Spirit, emerged as the leading operator on the Kokoda Trail, he was lauded with references from the Australian High Commission, the Kokoda Track Authority and DFAT as a result of his bogus claims and his persuasive sales and marketing skills.

On 3 September 2010, Wetherall's relationship with Rod Hillman was evident in the following announcement on his blog:

'Kokoda Spirit to manage Kokoda Track Authority Chairman's Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel Day Trek . . the VIP participants on this trek have been personally invited by the Chairman and CEO of the Kokoda Track Authority.

Such a trek should have been put out to tender among licensed Kokoda tour operators at the time; however, there is no evidence that this protocol was followed.

At the end of Hillman's term as CEO, he joined Wetherall's company, Kokoda Spirit, on a trek across the Kokoda Trail, and wrote a glowing reference as a parting gift on Thursday, 28 June 2012:

KOKODA SPIRIT BLOG

THURSDAY, JUNE 28, 2012

Wayne and Michelle,

Please accept my apologies, belated thanks and appreciation for assisting me to join your trek last year. The trek was brilliant and allowed me to spend time with my two sons focused on them instead of organizing/ leading my own trek.

Kokoda Spirit's organization and implementation was a credit to you both. The trek flowed well with competent (obviously well trained) staff who enjoyed their work. From our first meeting on Brigade Hill with the porters performing a welcome dance to flying back to Port Moresby and dinner at the Yacht Club we were treated extremely well. The relationship one of my sons developed with your porter Billy was a highlight.

Cameron is excellent. He has a genuine passion for the subject and I thoroughly enjoyed his commentary and leadership of the group.

This was my first experience as a 'trekker' on the Kokoda Track as all the other times it was work and a very different experience. It was a great insight to the experience trekkers get when they join a tour operator and if everyone supplies the experience Kokoda Spirit does then the Industry is in safe hands.

Once again, my congratulations and my thanks.

Cheers
Rod Hillman

Freedom of Information Request re Rod Hillman

In 2012, I was made aware that Rod Hillman had distributed Annual Reports for the Kokoda Track Authority to Australian and PNG government authorities, but not to Kokoda trek operators who generated the industry's income.

I was also suspicious of the influence Wayne Wetherall seemed to wield over the Kokoda Track through his relationship with Rod Hillman.

My suspicions were confirmed after I submitted a Freedom of Information request to Canberra to obtain a copy of Rod Hillman's 2008 Annual Report. All 7-pages of the report were redacted apart from the following sentence:

'Recouped the majority of 2008 outstanding debts from unpaid trek fees.'

See Attachment A below

Official Character References for Wayne Wetherall

In 2016, the Australian High Commission went a step further and wrote a personal letter congratulating Wetherall for the 'great work he was doing on the Track':

Dear Wayne,

By way of introduction I am responsible at the High Commission for the Australian government work in the Kokoda region.

I'd like to pass on our congratulations in general to your company for the great work you do on the Track. I see your teams out there, they're clearly well prepared, your potters are being treated well, and your companies interaction with campsite owners and the local communities is positive. Terrific stuff. It's great for those individuals involved, both from PNG and Australia, it's good for the economy, and it helps strengthen the bilateral relationship. Recognise you must be working hard to bring up the number of trekkers - that's not easy in this economic climate.

I'd welcome the opportunity to meet with you if you have time next time you're around Moresby Always keen to hear and learn more about the Track, and discuss the Australian government approach, including to some of the challenges.

Respectfully yours,
Tim Bryson
Counsellor, Australian High Commission - Port Moresby
Ph +675 3259333 Ext. 379 I Mobile + 675 7200 7872 I Fax +675 325 5535
Australian High Commission - Pott Moresby Locked Bag 129, Waigani NCO, Papua New Guinea www.dfat.gov.au

[Link to letter from Tim Bryson, Australian High Commission, posted on Kokoda Spirit Website on 3 December 2016](#)

The Australian High Commission failed to write to other trekking companies, such as Adventure Kokoda, that had established two legitimate charitable foundations, built community learning centres, introduced scholarship programs, initiated agricultural projects, and provided generous support to local schools and health centres.

- [Adventure Kokoda Charity](#)

They obviously lacked the personal charm that Wetherall oozed when he needed to.

The Australian High Commission was obviously unaware that Kokoda Spirit was not (according to the PNG Investment Promotion Authority (IPA), operating in accordance with PNG legislation: [Due Diligence Guide for Kokoda Spirit](#)

Wetherall's extraordinary marketing and persuasion skills are also evident in his LinkedIn endorsements for 'management', 'strategic planning' and 'program

management' by the Australian 'Strategic Management Advisor' for the DFAT Kokoda Initiative, [Mark Nizette MBE](#):

Skills & endorsements
Management Endorsed by Mark Nizette, MBE (mutual connection)
Strategic Planning Endorsed by Mark Nizette, MBE and 2 other mutual connections
Program Management Endorsed by Mark Nizette, MBE (mutual connection)

- [Mark Nizetter – Kokoda Trail Ringmaster](#)

It's instructive that DFAT agencies responsible for ensuring good governance in the management of the Kokoda Trail i.e., the Australian High Commission, the DFAT Kokoda Initiative, and the PNG Kokoda Track Authority, have provided written and published endorsements to an Australian company that, according to documentary evidence available, has failed to pay substantial trek fees by cheating villages of their entitlement to shared benefits, making continued unjustified and unsubstantiated claims on their website, failing to operate in accordance with PNG legislation, and who have avoided their taxation obligations.

According to a signed statement by Hillman on 8 November 2018, Wetherall advised him that the '*thousand trekkers*' he claimed to have led across the Trail in 2008 was just a '*marketing statement and not actual figures*'.

Rod Hillman's credentials can be viewed on this link:

- [The Rod Hillman Era of Mismanagement: 2009-2012](#)

Vietnam Veterans' Assessment of Wetherall's Character

The Last Word . . .

The last word regarding Wetherall's character flaws came from one of his trek leaders – a former army lieutenant decorated during the Vietnam War 10 years earlier in 2011:

'I led two dry season Track crossings for Wayne in 2009. The first, comprising a group of some six clients, went reasonably well. An overall assessment suggested to me that, prima facie, Wayne had his shit in order.

'The second crossing for Wayne later that year, was however, an unmitigated disaster, and suggested to me that Wayne was flying by the seat of his pants, and that his organisation was a major accident waiting for a time and a place to happen. I forwarded a comprehensive assessment of the trek and his organisation to him and received in return only a brief acknowledgement of that report. Since that time, I've had essentially no contact with him.

'It was very clear to me before, during, and after that second trek, that every facet of his organisation essentially failed to meet even the most rudimentary of common, garden variety trekking standards. It didn't matter whether the issue was pre or post trek administration; support staff selection, management, development, competence and accountability arrangements; trek safety; or logistics: all seemed to perch precariously and consistently on a narrow knife edge, where the potential for significant problems to emerge were so obviously and consistently in evidence.

'I concluded that report to Wayne with the following advice: "If it is your wish that KS continues to operate, and to prosper, professionally, on the Track, it is my opinion that a significant review of your Company's philosophy, your standards and modus operandi is urgently required.'

It would be well beyond any possibility that I would trek for or with him again, nor would I in any way recommend any potential trekker to join his expeditions. I would not allow myself to be associated with him or his organisation.

‘My anecdotal-based overview of WW, gained inter alia, from a number of reputable sources whose opinion and judgement I would trust, and over the past seven years, is that he is a bullshit merchant of some standing, whose principal position in life seems to be based on a carefully planned programme of self-aggrandisement and self-promotion. Notwithstanding his clever self-marketing skills, his trekking “exploits” both on and off the Track appear to me to lack any real credibility.

‘He seems somehow to survive on a predetermined network of manipulative exploitation of, at best, half-truths, something akin to a shonky second-hand car salesman!’

Sordid Revelations in Queensland Industrial Relations Hearing

Wayne Wetherall’s transformation from a suburban salesman to a self-proclaimed Kokoda ‘*adventurer, explorer, historian and philanthropist*’ with his company, Kokoda Spirit, is a compelling tale; however, his carefully crafted reputation is at odds with evidence presented to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission in 2022, where the decadent side of his character was revealed regarding his disrespect for his female staff, his exploitation of female trekkers and his sexual deviancy.

During the course of a 4-day hearing brought against him by his female manager, it was revealed that Wetherall had:

- fathered an illegitimate child in PNG;
- traded sexual favours with his female staffer in Port Moresby;
- exploited his PNG guides and porters;
- preyed on vulnerable female trekkers;
- introduced a female trekker into group sex sessions with his mates;
- engaged in group sex with other men; and
- bullied and harassed his female staff in Australia
 - [Kokoda Tour Employee Wins Appeal over claims boss spat on her during outbursts.](#)
 - [Queensland Industrial Relations Hearing WC/2020/175: 27-30 September 2021](#)

Bogus Claim re ‘Opening Up’ of the Sandakan Death March Route

In early 2009, Wetherall advised:

‘I am also this month trekking in the deep jungles of Borneo and will be offering on my return exclusive adrenalin pumping adventures in this beautiful region for our trekkers.’

- [New adventures for 2009](#)

Wetherall’s claims about ‘opening up the Sandakan track for tourism in Borneo were also bogus. In creating a new company, Sandakan Spirit, to lead treks across the Sandakan Death March Route, he shadowed Lynnete Ramsay Silver AM, author of the highly acclaimed book ‘Sandakan – A Conspiracy of Silence. He conveniently neglected to mention that Lynette Silver began leading treks across the Death March route four years earlier, in 2005.

Wetherall adopted the same marketing techniques he used when he discovered the business opportunities associated with Kokoda trekking by claiming to have ‘opened up Sandakan’ and discovering ‘part of the original death march route’. His claimed ‘discovery’ of Sandakan led him to upgrade his self-proclaimed status to ‘*intrepid Explorer*’.

In an article published by the Courier Mail, he advised he ‘could feel the energy coming out of the ground’ – the reporter was obviously unaware that ‘history’ is more than a vibe, and accepted Wetherall’s interpretation – a testimony to his remarkable sales skills:

- [The Courier Mail – Tour operator reveals deadly past](#)

Lynnette Silver, a meticulous historian, author of 10 published books and the official historian for the Australian 8th Division Association, was aghast at Wetherall’s bogus claims in promoting his interpretation of the Sandakan Death March treks; however, she was no match for his shameless marketing techniques – all she could do was to post a blog warning potential trekkers to :

- [Beware of bogus claims re the Sandakan Death March](#)

Sandakan Spirit

In developing Sandakan Spirit to lead treks across the Sandakan Death March Route, Wetherall shadowed [Lynnete Ramsay Silver AM](#), author of the highly acclaimed book [‘Sandakan – A Conspiracy of Silence.’](#)

Wetherall used the same techniques as he used on the Kokoda Trail by claiming to have ‘opened up Sandakan’ and ‘discovered *‘part of the original death march route.’*

Mrs Lynnette Silver, a meticulous historian, author of 10 published books and the official historian for the Australian 8th Division Association, was aghast at Wetherall's bogus claims in promoting his Sandakan Death March treks; however, she was no match for his bogus marketing techniques.

On 11 February 2009, Wetherall advised:

- [‘I am also this month trekking in the deep jungles of Borneo and will be offering on my return exclusive adrenalin pumping adventures in this beautiful region for our trekkers.’](#)

The Brisbane Courier Mail – 7 August 2011

‘A Sippy Downs adventurer and historian says he has found missing links to Australia’s greatest single World War II tragedy, the Sandakan Death March.

“Wayne Wetherall, of tour group Sandakan Spirit, says research, interviews, maps and journals have led him to discover 20km of track lost for more than 65 years . . .

‘Now, Mr Wetherall is adamant he has discovered the “correct” track, with 20km previously unknown across the Maitland ranges between the post-war relocated villages of Mangkadai and Miruru (Milulu).

“You can feel the energy coming out of the ground. This is a significant part of our history,” he said.

“It is imperative that the recording of the history of this track is correct. We hope this can be shared with other historians and other people to get a truer picture of what happened out here.

“On our last few trips there we’ve come to realise that tracks run in different directions.”

‘Mr Wetheral said he expected his claims to cause controversy in the history community.

“Some of the information in the past has been quite sketchy,” he said. “There will be some controversy involved, no question, but we believe this is a new section of track.

“We’re not saying that anyone else is wrong, just that we want to get this track right.

“It’s an evolving track and we’re finding out more and more about it.”

'He said he used documents including Japanese records and death certificates of POWs to put the jigsaw together.' He also interviewed carriers on the original track, now aged in their 90s.

"This has all helped us put together the missing pieces," he said.

"They spoke about the way the track ran and what they witnessed. They have very descriptive stories.

"Carriers were under threat of death if they assisted POWs in those days."

'Mr Wetherall and his team will return this Friday to investigate another new section of the track at Lalosing, a dense forest that was once a Japanese camp and POW site during the second world war.' He will be led by an original carrier from the Death March, named Ambugang, and his son, the chief of Miruru village.

"We will be the first to go into Lalosing since the war," Mr Wetherall said. "It's part of the state forest now, we had to seek permission from the Malaysian Government to do it."

'He said Sabah Tourism, the Malaysian Government's tourism office, supported his claims of the new track.

"The history and correct route that these courageous POW walked need to be documented correctly so future generations of Australians can walk in the footsteps of these heroes," he said.

"We also have a small window of opportunity to interview the surviving locals who witnessed the atrocities before they take this knowledge to the grave."

'He said these locals collaborated with him twice.

'Next week is also an important day in the history of the Death March.

'The Sandakan Day Memorial, on August 15, commemorates those who died and suffered on the Death March.'

Sandakan's Deadly Past

Wetherall's self-proclaimed 'historian' status was betrayed by his statement that he '*could feel the energy coming out of the ground*' – he was obviously unaware that 'history' is more than a vibe!

Lynette Ramsay Silver AM MBE

He also failed to acknowledge the extensive research conducted by Mrs Lynnette Silver AM on Sandakan over the previous decade.

Her painstaking research and interviews with survivors, as well as a study of Japanese records, pieced together a detailed and highly readable account of the lives and ultimate fate of Sandakan's POWs. The integration of first-hand accounts and historical records yields a merciless portrayal of the crisp trepidation and unwarranted deception behind what has become WWII's darkest and deadliest secret. uncovered the fate of 2428 Australian and British prisoners of war who died at the Sandakan POW Camp in Borneo on one of the death marches, and investigated the cover-up of a failed rescue mission, [Operation Kingfisher \(World War II\)](#). 2004's *The Bridge at Parit Sulong* is an investigation into the [massacre of allied prisoners](#) by Japanese soldiers in Malaya in 1942. Further books, mainly related to military history, followed.

Silver was awarded an honorary [Medal of the Order of Australia](#) (OAM) in 2004 for "service to veterans and their families, particularly as an organiser of battlefield tours and commemorative services".^[1] She was advanced to [Member of the Order of Australia](#) (AM) in the [2019 Australia Day Honours](#) for "significant service to the community through historical battlefield tours and commemorative services",^[2] and appointed a [Member of](#)

[the Order of the British Empire](#) (MBE) in the [2024 New Year Honours](#) for services to British families of Second World War personnel.[3]

Mrs Silver contested Wetherall's claims in the following blog:

'The death march track opened up by Tham Yau Kong and Lynette Silver in 2005 follows as closely as is practically possible the route taken by the POWs, retraced and recorded by an Australian Army War Graves team in 1945.

'The original hand-drawn map plotting this path was given to Lynette in 1995 by Corporal G Robertson, the soldier who drew it.

'A copy, based on the original, is preserved in Australian Archives and is on public display at the Australian Government Commemorative Pavilion at the Sandakan Memorial Park.

'A copy of Lynette's original map is displayed at the Kundasang War Memorial. 'In August 2011, Wayne Wetherall, an Australian tour operator, claimed in media reports that the route being followed by trekking parties was incorrect, and that the POW route had deviated into the Liwagu Valley, to pass through the village of Miruru.

'He also claimed he had 'discovered' a 'lost' section of the track, deep in primary jungle. 'Following this announcement, a letter by a Sabahan 'History Buff', concerned by the veracity of these claims, was published in Sabah's Daily Express, initiating a public debate. Lynette's statement, compiled at the request of the newspaper editor, can be accessed at <http://www.dailyexpress.com.my/read.cfm?NewsID=750>.

Further transcript and additional commentary is at <http://blog.kokodatreks.com>

'Reports and body-recovery documentation, the copy of Robertson's map and wartime maps prepared from intelligence gathered during hostilities by secret agents are held in Australian Archives. This material, coupled with first-hand knowledge provided by several local people, who had walked the track many times while ferrying supplies for the Japanese, show that the POW route did not, at any stage, enter the Liwagu Valley or pass anywhere near Miruru village.

'This research, carried out by Lynette in the 1990s, and re-checked in 2005, was confirmed in early 2012 by Army historians and mapping experts who, following the 2011 claims, were given the task of making an independent assessment based on all the archival and other evidence. In April 2012, the Australian Government formally released an official map showing that the death march track followed the route plotted by Robertson. No evidence was found to support the 2011 claim that the track had deviated into the Liwagu Valley or passed through through the village of Miruru. 'Furthermore, the 'lost' section had never been lost.

'It is highly protected Class 1 Forest Reserve, entry to which is prohibited without special permission. It is also in a high risk 'flash flood' zone.

'In the interests of safety, and for environmental and conservation reasons, trekking groups have always used a nearby alternate path, which is safer and far less environmentally-intrusive route. 'For an investigation of the death march route, go to the following links:

- [Beware of bogus claims](#)
- [The Route of the Sandakan Death March'](#)

Mrs Silver's confirmation that the 'lost' section of the Sandakan Death March Route has never been lost could be applied to Wetherall's previous claims of lost and forgotten battlefields along the Kokoda Trail, which have also never been 'forgotten' or 'lost'.

Mrs Lynette Silver's extensive research on the route of the Sandakan death march route can be read on this link: [The Sandakan-Ramai Death March Track](#)

In the article, Mrs Silver advises:

'The official documents used to compile this article are all held in Australian National Archives or the Australian War Memorial Collection. The transcripts of interviews, along with the videoed and audio recordings with local people, are preserved in the Silver Papers. A fully referenced version of this paper is held in the Archives of the Sabah State Museum.

However, this did not deter Wetherall from belittling Mrs. Silver's research by advising:

'After 79 years, you can walk the Sandakan Death March track in the footsteps of those heroes. 'With Sandakan Spirit as your trekking company, you'll be participating in both a personal discovery experience and an historic Borneo adventure.' That's because our treks across the Sandakan Death March follow the original route as closely as possible. We avoid using "short cut", "eco" or alternative tracks that are logistically easier, ensuring that you see the real Borneo, and the original Sandakan Death March Route.

'We avoid using short cut or alternative treks that are logistically easier to ensure you see the real Borneo, the real Sandakan Death March Route. We use a variety of accommodation on our treks including camping next to Rainforest Rivers and staying in traditional Dusun Villages along the way, this gives you a great chance to embrace the traditional culture and mix with the locals and hear firsthand the stories of their forefathers. 'If you are comparing Sandakan trekking companies, make sure you are on the correct route.'

- [Sandakan – Borneo](#)

Route to Great Cruelty

Wetherall closed his blog with the expected advertisement for his business:

In an article titled '[The route to great cruelty](#)', the New Straits Times in Sabah reported:

' He (Wetherall) said the lost route was discovered based on information from various sources such as the Australian War Graves, grave recovery maps, National Archives and Australian War Memorial.

"Some of the most compelling intelligence that we have gathered came from local people along the route, including the village chiefs of Taviu, Mankadai and Miruru in Ranau," Wetherall said.

'Unlike Mrs. Silver, Wayne Wetherall does not reference any of the 'compelling intelligence' he gathered from village chiefs and does not provide any GPS readings to support his 'research' as would be normally expected of a 'passionate historian' as he claims to be.'

'Profit Motive' in new Death March

The following letter, 'Profit motive' in new Death March, published in the Daily Express (East Malaysia) by 'History Buff' on 25 September 2011, indicates that Wetherall adopted the same ambush marketing strategy on the Sandakan Death March route as he used to develop his business along the Kokoda Trail:

'A so-called 'expert' has lately surfaced making claims about newly-discovered 'lost tracks' of the infamous Death March route of World War Two.

'He has made claims he has spoken to villagers and the original route used by the POW's and the Japanese near the village of Miruru when this is not the case.

'A number of villagers interviewed in the Miruru area deny ever speaking to him and the Sabah Society research of 2005-2006 concluded the route did cut through the Miruru area before the prisoners had to wade across a major river to get to Tampias.

The issue, however, was if they carried on through the marshland to get to the river before crossing over or went up the top of the ridge and back down to cross over. This has never really been proven even till today.

'The Sabah Society's findings differ from author Lynette Silver and her research but this has not caused problems thus far as most experts agree it is hard to determine the actual route given

there were several marches between Sandakan and Ranau and because prisoners were executed and marched along different parts of the section in question during that period of time.

‘So it is impossible to prove anything beyond reasonable doubt.

‘Much of what this Australian ‘expert’ claimed appears to be old news as the Sabah Society and Tham Yau Kong had done much of the work in 2005 establishing the actual route and the use of Miruru during the actual march before this Australian even got to Sabah and walked the route with Tham several years later . . .

‘We now have a situation where an Australian is now claiming to have made dramatic discoveries when it clearly isn’t the case and is using this to gain media mileage at the expense of Sabahans.’

Wayne Wetherall’s Writings

A review of Wetherall’s writings regarding his ‘*discovery*’ of Sandakan is similar to the approach he used to differentiate himself from other tour operators in the development of his Kokoda Spirit business six years earlier [via his website blogs\[i\]](#)

Unlike Lynette Silver, he does not reference any conversations he has supposedly had with individuals along his version of the Sandakan Death March Route, nor does he provide any GPS readings to support his assertions.

‘it was like entering a lost world, the jungle was thick, dark, steamy and brooding.

‘The track was steep, slippery, brutal and unforgiving, it was difficult staying upright. No white man had trekked this toughest section of the track since the POW’s marched it 66 years ago . . .

‘This is an important find and is now part of our standard itineraries for our treks. . . We avoid using “short cut”, “eco” or alternative tracks that are logistically easier to ensure you see the real Borneo, the real Sandakan Death March Route.’

In a condescending slight to Sandakan historian, Mrs Lynette Siver, he wrote:

‘It was great to read the article in the Sydney Morning Herald of the continued involvement of Military (sic) Historian and Veteran (sic) Trekker (sic) Lynette Ramsay Silvers (sic) association of walking and leading treks across the Sandakan Death March this year with Tham Yau Kong. ‘It is also interesting that it is possible to pay extra for Lynette Silver to accompany you on a TYK trek.’

A review of Wetherall’s Kokoda Spirit website reveals that he adopts the same method on his treks across the Kokoda Trail, as locally led treks are cheaper than those he leads!

On 3 August 2011, he issued a Media Release titled: ‘Every Aussie has a right to know!:

‘CORRECTING AUSTRALIAN WAR TIME HISTORY!

‘Parts of the Lost Death March Track in Sabah Borneo uncovered.

‘Trekking now on the right Track

‘The Sandakan “death march” is the greatest single World War 2 tragedy in Australia’s History.

‘Yet this story remains virtually unknown to so many.

‘Wayne Wetherall an expert trekker and passionate historian has uncovered the lost sections of the “Death March Track” of Sandakan, he has become a voice for the thousands of brave Aussie Men who never came home.’

Links:

- [Every Aussie has a right to know!](#)
- [Parts of the Lost Death March Track in Sabah Borneo uncovered](#)

Wetherall's claim was contradicted by 'History Buff' in the Daily Express (East Malaysia) on 25 September 2011 (see above), who advised:

'We now have a situation where an Australian (Wayne Wetherall) is now claiming to have made dramatic discoveries when it clearly isn't the case and is using this to gain media mileage at the expense of Sabahans.'

On 21 November 2011, Wetherall posted a blog titled '[Borneo Track Claim](#)'

In the blog, he attempted to justify his claim of having discovered two new sections of the Sandakan Death March Route after intensive research and interviews with those who witnessed the attacks on Australian soldiers. According to Wetherall:

'The real answers for us have been actually walking through the jungle and talking to the local people aged in their 90s now who were the carriers.'

'His research also included piecing together information from the Australian Office of War Graves recovery maps, Japanese death certificates and the Australian War Memorial archives'

He went on to explain:

'We were the first people to actually go into this section of the forest called Lolosing and it was primary Borneo jungle deep, dark, with vines coming down everywhere,' he said. 'We had with us an 80-year-old who was a carrier for the Japanese, and he was showing us where the commander's building used to be and where he saw an Australian soldier killed.'

'It was chilling stuff to be there with him. It's going to be an ongoing project because there is still much more left to discover.'

'Over the past two journeys he and Jerome and his team of local Dusun's, who are direct descendents of the carriers and villagers along the track have meticulously, using the latest in GPS mapping technology and old fashion hard work we were able to faithfully piece together as close as what they believe to be the original route.'

He then fell back on the familiar mantra he used soon after he 'discovered' the Kokoda Trail six years earlier, that '*We see things as an explorer, historian and adventurer.*'

'When you trek the Sandakan Death March with Sandakan Spirit, you're participating in a personal discovery experience; you are truly living and participating in an historic and monumental Borneo adventure.'

'After sixty six years, you too can now walk the Sandakan Death March track in the footsteps of the Sandakan Death March heroes.'

Lynette Silver's Rebuttal

The last word goes to Mrs Lynette Silver:

'The Sabah Society walk, led by Tham Yau Kong in 2005, went the wrong way because author Kevin Smith, whom Wayne Wetherall relies upon, had produced a 'map' of the death march showing the track going through Miruru and Mangkadai villages.'

'He had latched onto the words Miruru and Mangkadai because I had given these places as places of death for POWS, as shown on Japanese wartime documents which Smith had never seen.'

'Well, when you appropriate someone else's research, you need to know what you are stealing.'

'Miruru was the name given by the Japanese to the climb up Taviu Hill, and Mangkadai to a stretch to the east.'

'The reason for the naming was because the entire area was unexplored and uninhabited.'

'They had to bring in labour from villages in another valley, along the Labuk River. 'These villages, Miruru and Mangkadai, were far away, with Miruru on the far side of the Labuk. '

‘However, when a road was built linking Ranau to Sandakan in the 1970s, the villages moved to be closer to the new road, as they were no longer dependent on river travel.

‘Smith latched onto the words Miruru and Mangkadai and assumed they went through the modern-day villages. He then published his shonky map in his book and it was taken at face value.’

‘It was not until I asked why the Sabah Society had gone into the wrong valley that Tham Yau Kong found that Smith’s map was completely wrong.

‘When I produced the original 1945 map, drawn by the recovery teams, we were able to follow the rivers marked, crossing the numerous marked tributaries, to identify where the track went. The route was confirmed by at least five locals who had worked for the Japanese as coolies and had walked the track many times. They physically showed us where it went.

‘Wayne Wetherall got hold of Smith’s bogus map and announced that he had found the correct path. His groups and those associated with him go completely the wrong way.

‘When challenged, Wetherall claimed that there was an ‘alternate’ route, despite the fact that villagers refute his story entirely. Business is business is the credo, and, unfortunately, local business interests, tainted by Wetherall’s claims, have no interest in historical facts.

‘When you ascertain where old Miruru and old Mangkadai were, the absurdity of this claim becomes even more obvious.

‘Can you believe that a local guide took 100 serving members of the Australian Defence Force on a so-called death march trek very recently, following the bogus route?’

In September, Wetherall also took a group of students along the same route, now promoted as the Sandakan Memorial Track.

‘Very embarrassing, given that the Australian defence experts produced the official map, with the Australian Coat of Arms on it, which was launched in 2016 to put an end to all this nonsense.

AND, someone connected to Smith (now deceased) has ALTERED the official map on display at Ranau to show the ‘alternate’ route. It is behind glass, so I can’t rectify it.

‘To the uninformed, it looks as if the government and defence agree that there is a second route, no matter how stupid that idea is.’

2025 Update from Lynette Silver in Borneo

‘Far from endorsing the Wetherall route, Sabah Tourism Board has now produced, en masse and for free, a map of the route from Sandakan to Ranau, based on the official map produced by the Army History Unit and Army Mapping team. This map is universally accepted as correct, as it is based on the wartime map drawn by the war graves recovery teams.

‘One side shows the route, the other has 15 key places that can be accessed if travelling by car. Black-and-yellow signs with six POW figures have been erected to direct motorists.

‘The new map incorporates a viewing platform that overlooks the original torturous climb along the Lolosing ridge. This passes through a highly protected class 1 forest and is too dangerous for trekkers to use without express permission, which is rarely granted.

‘To date, permission has only been granted to a British military group and an Australian army group, to tackle it in August 2025, provided conditions are favourable.

‘Wetherall’s claim that he would be the first to venture into Lolosing is sheer nonsense. Tham Yau Kong and his jungle guides were the first, in 2005, when locating the route from the wartime map. Since then, one is allowed into that zone without the express permission of the forestry officials.

‘The new map should put to an end his ridiculous claim that the death march route went into the adjoining Labuk valley and passed through present day Miruru and Mankadai villages, which, in 1945 were a great distance away, on the other side of the Labuk River.

'The Lolosing track has never been lost, as it is clearly marked on the wartime map, and in consequence, the Forestry Department has erected a viewing platform so that people interested in the story can see where the original path went.'

Wayne Wetherall Fact Checks:

Wetherall's claims achieved their purpose in cultivating his own myth as a self-proclaimed '*explorer, adventurer, historian and philanthropist*,' obsessed with a '*passion for our soldiers*' which resulted in his trekker numbers increasing exponentially – his previous life as a sales manager for a suburban air conditioning company has long been airbrushed from his CV and archived.

The following fact checks are more revealing:

- Date of Birth: 3 May 1965
- 1995-1996: NSW Technical Sales Manager, Kirby Refrigeration
- 1996-1999: NSW State Manager, Kirby Refrigeration
- 1999-2002: NSW State Manager, [Actrol Pty Ltd](#) - a wholesaler of parts to the refrigeration, air conditioning and allied industries.
- 2002-2003: National Sales Marketing Manager, [Reliance Group/TubeFit](#) 'TubeFit' does not generate any results in the Reliance Group Search Engine – it is not possible to gauge the extent of Wetherall's 'National' responsibilities in this position.
- 2003-2006: National Sales Marketing Manager, RES (Refrigeration Equipment Supplies)
Note: RES does not have a website – it is therefore not possible to gauge the extent of Wetherall's 'National' responsibilities in this position.
- [2004](#): Kokoda Spirit Pty Limited (ACN:111 575 378) registered with ASIC On 28 October 2004.
- [2005](#): Kokoda Spirit (PNG) Limited (1-47149) registered in PNG on 16 December 2005.

The following is an extract from the first Kokoda Spirit website on [11 February 2005](#): 13 years after pilgrimage tourism across the Kokoda Trail began at the 50th anniversary of the Kokoda campaign in 1992, and the year after he 'discovered' the business opportunities arising from the emerging pilgrimage tourism industry:

'Kokoda Spirit is passionately committed to the legacy and Spirit (sic) that our Australian Soldiers (sic) and their Papuan New Guinea Brothers (sic) have left for us on the Kokoda Track (sic). The Courage (sic), Endurance (sic), Mateship (sic) and Sacrifice (sic) on this sacred track have become legend. We at Kokoda Spirit are dedicated to providing our Trekkers (sic) and Rafters (sic) with the Experience (sic) of a Lifetime (sic), to Experience (sic) Adventure (sic), to Experience (sic) the Spirit (sic) and to Experience (sic) the Culture (sic) and the People (sic) this wonderful, fascinating and awe inspiring Country (sic) provides.

'At Kokoda Spirit we are always at the forefront of new adventures in PNG. We have successfully explored and opened up 3 new rivers in PNG. We can also organise treks to Mt Wilhelm and Mt Victoria. We are also opening up trips to Alotau at Milne bay and Buna and Gona on the North Coast (sic). Kokoda Spirit has offices in both Sydney and Port Moresby. This allows us to provide you with local contacts in Australia, while our strategically based Port Moresby office provides all the advantages of local knowledge and local infrastructure. This support network ensures your trekking or rafting adventure is enjoyable and trouble free.' Our Australian office and operation is run by Wayne Wetherall and Frank Hasiuk. Both these men are passionate about the Kokoda Track (sic), the Australian history, the people and the culture. Both Wayne and Frank have accompanied "Ossie" on the Kokoda Track (sic) and his explorations of the PNG rivers. They have established strong bonds with the local villagers, setting up trusts to supply much

needed supplies of School books and equipment. Wayne and Frank’s expertise in Business (sic), IT and Tourism (sic) provides the professional support and infrastructure to the team in Papua New Guinea. Wayne Wetherall has an intimate knowledge and passion for the Australian war history on the track and is our Chief Australian Guide. He has also written a number of stories on the history and his experiences on the track. His enthusiasm and knowledge will give you an insight into the Kokoda Tracks (sic) history.

‘Kokoda Spirit has also run small group trips to explore the history and sites of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, China and Borneo. (Details on request.)’ Wayne Wetherall achievements in Brief: ‘Kokoda Spirit is the only Trekking/Rafting Company (sic) in PNG. Kokoda Spirit is also the only commercially operated Rafting (sic) company in PNG. Kokoda Spirit can offer you rafting at the completion of your trek – either on the Kumusi River near Kokoda or on the Vanapa and Angabanga Rivers near Port Moresby.’

FACT CHECK:

- Kokoda Spirit ventures into white-water rafting in PNG ended after three Israeli rafters were drowned on one of their expeditions in [May 2005](#).
- There is no record of Wayne Wetherall and Frank Hasiuk ‘setting up trusts to supply much needed supplies of School books and equipment’ for local villagers in 2005.
- There is no record of Wetherall publishing ‘stories on the history and his experiences on the track’ prior to 2005.
- There is no record of Kokoda Spirit organising or leading ‘small group trips to explore the history and sites of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, China and Borneo’ prior to 2005.
- Prior to 2004, Frank Hasiuk worked in Real Estate in South-Western Sydney. According to a PNG guide on his first trek across the Kokoda Trail in 2004 he provided the funding for Wetherall’s initial ventures into PNG – he was mentioned on the Kokoda Spirit website for a short time before being removed.
- According to Wetherall’s [LinkedIn profile](#) he was employed as the National Marketing Manager with Refrigeration Equipment Supplies from 2003 until December 2006.

[2006:](#)

[Celsius Journal](#): Vol 34. No 5. May 2006. Page 14. Industry News – The Official Journal of the Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Contractors Association of Australia:

‘Wayne Weatherall is the National Sales Manager for RES. Wayne has been a great help assisting us with Worldskills.’

FACT CHECK:

It is difficult to understand how Wetherall could have been ‘at the forefront of new adventures in PNG; exploring and opening and opening up new rivers in PNG; and opening up trips to Alotau, Buna and Gona whilst he was employed as the National Sales Manager for Refrigeration Equipment Supplies at the same time in 2005-2006.

There are no known records of his ‘exploring’ and ‘opening up’ of ‘new adventures’ in any of these locations – it can therefore be assumed that he made them up to enhance the myth he was cultivating in the early years of his involvement with the Kokoda Trail.

2009:

According to an interview with the [Sunshine Coast Daily newspaper on 15 April 2009](#) he informed the reporter, Anne Lousie Brown, that he was:

‘a building industry sales executive, but “had a nagging need” to make his Kokoda Spirit dream come alive.’

FACT CHECK:

There are no known records of Wayne Wetherall’s engagement in the building industry as a sales executive. He has not mentioned this fact in his [Linkedin profile](#) or any other forum.

It is possible he might just have been trying to impress the young female reporter.

2011:

THE AWCI 66th Annual Conference:(Association of Wall and Ceiling Industries) – Reef View Hotel, Hamilton Island, QLD: 6-9 November 2011. Motivational Speaker: Wayne Wetherall

‘Wayne Wetherall is currently the owner and Managing Director of Adventure companies, Kokoda Spirit and Wild Spirit Adventures. Wayne had a very successful career in the corporate world as a National Sales and Marketing Manager and General Manager, until in 2004, he walked the Kokoda Track in PNG; a life changing experience that he has turned into a passion and lifestyle.‘In 2007 he took on the fulltime role as Managing Director of his own company Kokoda Spirit, which quickly became Number One operator of adventure treks across Kokoda and PNG, escorting over 4000 trekkers across the track. Wetherall’s adventure company has now expanded into Borneo, Africa and Nepal, with his passion to deliver life changing adventures.’

FACT CHECK:

Wayne Wetherall established his myth on the pillar of his international, national, and state athletic records [which were listed on the Kokoda Spirit website on 11 February 2005](#).

They were quietly removed from the website after the aura of the adventurer, explorer, and historian with a passion for our soldiers had been established.

If Wetherall’s athletic records were true it is fair to assume they would have featured in his profile as a ‘motivational speaker’ of some note at the AWCI 66th International Conference in 2011 – that’s what motivational speakers do!

2013:

‘Wayne’s expertise in Adventure tourism, Business, Management, Leadership, Motivation and Life changing experiences, provides the professional support and infrastructure to the team in Papua New Guinea. Wayne has had a very successful career in the corporate world as a State Manager, National Sales and Marketing Manager and General Manager.’

FACT CHECK: According to Annual Returns submitted for Kokoda Spirit PNG, Wetherall did not have a ‘team in Papua New Guinea’ as the company did not employ any full-time or part-time employees.

2015:

‘Founded in 2004 by adventurer Wayne Wetherall, Kokoda Spirit began with an earnest desire to experience a legendary track that was once all but forgotten to time until a small band of Soldiers trekked into the interior of Papua New Guinea and fought back an invading Japanese force during World War II. This formidable frontier became known as the Kokoda Trail Campaign.’

FACT CHECK: It’s a stretch to relate the term ‘adventurer’ to the various suburban sales manager positions listed on his [Linkedin profile](#) prior to 2004.

According to Wayne Wetherall’s [Linkedin profile](#) he has also ‘thrown himself out of a perfectly good plane skydiving 4 times’, and ‘caged dived with the Great White sharks off Port Lincoln’.

FACT CHECK:

Wetherall didn’t actually ‘throw himself out of a perfectly good plane skydiving 4 times’ as claimed.

According to [Skydive.com.au](#) a parachutist must have completed nine AFF training stages which involve assisted jumping ‘with two instructors holding on to you’ before one is permitted to jump solo.

[This FB post](#) indicates that Wetherall participated in a ‘tandem jump’ firmly attached to the bosom of a qualified parachutist in the same fashion as [this 95-year-old skydiver](#).

According to [Shark Diving in Port Lincoln](#): ‘Our crew strive to ensure all groups get a similar experience in the cage, based on shark interaction . . .

‘Please remember that the day isn’t just about being in the cage, as there is also ample viewing opportunity from on board the vessel while waiting for your turn to dive’.

Trolling for the Truth re Wetherall Trek Claims

At the end of 2008, the Australian Government assumed responsibility for the Kokoda Trail under a Joint Understanding signed with PNG.

Trolling for the truth regarding Wayne Wetherall’s claims on the Internet Archive Wayback Machine is a difficult, time-consuming exercise which leads to the conclusion that he either has mathematical dyslexia, a poor memory, or he just makes things up.

Wetherall fails to explain how he could have led 11 treks across the Kokoda Trail when it was closed during Covid and there were no flights between Australian and PNG! and no treks!

Website Claim References:

YEAR	KOKODA SPIRIT WEBSITE CLAIM	COMMENT
2010	Reference (18 November 2010) : Kokoda Spirit led 3000 trekkers	
2011	Reference (11 January 2012) : Kokoda Spirit led 3800 trekkers	
2012	Reference (13 January 2013) : Wetherall completed 50 treks, Kokoda Spirit led 3600 trekkers	Kokoda Spirit seems to have 'lost' 200 trekkers in 2012!
2013	Reference 1 (25 May 2013) : Wayne Wetherall announces his retirement from trekking after completing 50 treks. Reference 2 (26 January 2014) : Wetherall completed 55 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 4000 trekkers	
2014	Reference (13 December 2014) : Wetherall completed 56 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 4000 trekkers	According to this post, Kokoda Spirit led 400 trekkers across the Trail in 2013 & 2014.
2015	Reference 1 (27 February 2015) : Wetherall completed 56 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 5000 trekkers. Reference 2 (5 November 2015) : Wetherall completed 60 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 6000 trekkers	According to the two references for the same year, Wetherall either did not trek at all, or he did 6 treks, with Kokoda Spirit leading either 1000 or 2000 trekkers.
2016	Reference 1 (5 March 2016) : Wetherall completed 65 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 5000 trekkers Reference 2 (27 December 2016) : Kokoda Spirit led 6000 trekkers Reference 3 (27 December 2016) : Wetherall completed 70 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 7000 trekkers	According to these references, Wetherall either completed 9 treks or 14 treks in 2016 with Kokoda Spirit, leading 1000, 2000, or nil trekkers. According to Kokoda Track Authority records, only 477 trek permits were issued to Kokoda Spirit in 2016.
2017	Reference 1 (29 December 2017) : Wetherall completed 70 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 6600 trekkers Reference 2 (26 February 2018) : Wetherall completed 80 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 7000 trekkers Reference 3 (26 February 2018) : Kokoda Spirit led 7500 trekkers Reference 4 (22 March 2018) : Wetherall completed 80 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 7500 trekkers Reference 5 (31 March 2018) : Kokoda Spirit led 7000 trekkers	According to these references, Wetherall either completed 5 or 15 treks, with Kokoda Spirit leading 1600, 2000, or 2500 trekkers in 2016. According to Kokoda Track Authority records, only 464 trek permits were issued to Kokoda Spirit in 2017.

2018	<p>Reference (11 August 2018): Wetherall completed 82 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 7700 trekkers</p>	<p>According to these references, Wetherall completed either 2, 11, 12, or 21 treks in 2017, and Kokoda Spirit led either 200, 700, 900, 1100, 1400, or 1800 trekkers across the Trail.</p> <p>The Kokoda Spirit staff in 2018 included Wetherall and 2 female administrators.</p> <p>In 2018, according to the Kokoda Spirit and Wild Spirit Adventures websites, they advertised: 74 treks to Mt Kilimanjaro in Africa; 26 expeditions to Everest Base Camp in Nepal; 7 treks to the Sandakan Death March in Borneo; 62 treks across the Kokoda Trail.</p> <p>This totals 169 international expeditions.</p> <p>If Wetherall completed up to 21 treks as claimed, he would have been absent from his home office for up to 10 months, leaving the bulk of the work to his two female staff.</p> <p>Wetherall completed either minus two treks or three treks, while Kokoda Spirit led either 500, or 1200 trekkers</p>
2019-2020	<p>Reference (9 January 2019): Wetherall completed 91 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 8400 trekkers</p> <p>Reference 1 (12 August 2020): Wetherall led 85 trekkers. Kokoda Spirit led 8900 trekkers.</p> <p>Reference 2 (30 October 2020): Wetherall completed 80 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 8500 trekkers</p>	<p>According to these references, Wetherall led minus six treks in 2019-2020 with an additional 500 trekkers!</p> <p>And then, between August and October 2020, he led minus five treks with minus 500 trekkers.</p>
<p>Trekking across the Kokoda Trail ceased in November 2019 due to COVID-19</p>		

2021	<p>Reference (19 January 2021): Wetherall completed 85 treks. Kokoda Spirit led 8500 trekkers</p> <p>Reference (31 March 2021): Wetherall completed 91 treks Kokoda Spirit led 8400 trekkers Reference (19 September 2021): Wetherall completed 95 treks Kokoda Spirit led 8900 trekkers Reference (4 December 2021): Wetherall completed ‘more than 90 treks’</p>	<p>Wetherall led 6 treks in a two-month period in the middle of the annual wet season, but somehow ‘lost’ 100 trekkers.</p>
2022	<p>Reference (19 August 2022): Wetherall completed 95 treks Kokoda Spirit led ‘more than 10,000 trekkers’.</p>	<p>Kokoda Spirit led more than 1,100 trekkers across the Kokoda Trail in 2022. According to PNG KTA records, 1,315 trekkers crossed the Trail. This would have left an average of 7 trekkers per year among the remaining 30 operators!</p>
2024	<p>Reference (27 February 2024): Wetherall led ‘more than 99 treks’ Reference (18 May 2024): Wetherall led ‘in excess of 95 treks’ Reference (2 June 2024): Wetherall led ‘in excess of 90 treks’</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetherall’s ‘Kokoda Spirit’ website currently claims that he has led 102 crossings of the Trail. • Wetherall’s ‘Wild Spirit Adventures’ website currently advises he has completed 95 crossings of the Trail. 		

FOI Request for a copy of the 2008 KTA Report by Rod Hillman

KOKODA TRACK AUTHORITY



[A Special Authority of the Kokoda and Ikoiaril. Local-level Governments]

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Manasupe Zurenuoc
A/Chief Secretary

Kokoda Track Authority Cost Saving Measures.

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Actions already Implemented;

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- Recouped the majority of 2008 outstanding debts from unpaid trek fees.

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Rod Hillman
Chief Executive,

Wednesday, June 30, 2010\

- Chief Executive, Tourism Promotion Authority
- Secretary, Department of Environment & Conservation
- Secretary, Department for National Planning & Monitoring

1. First Assistant Secretary Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (Australia).

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