

FOCUS.

RSL & SERVICES CLUBS ASSOCIATION FEBRUARY - APRIL 2020 | EDITION #1

WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A LEGEND

CHARLIE LYNN
TO ACHIEVE
MILESTONE OVER
ANZAC DAY

RSLSERVICESCLUBS.COM.AU



RSL & SERVICES CLUBS



WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A LEGEND

WE SPOKE WITH MAJOR CHARLIE LYNN OAM OL AHEAD OF HIS 100TH TREK - BRAD SMITH MARKETING & COMMS MANAGER - RSL & SERVICES CLUBS ASSOCIATION

For those who don't know who Charlie Lynn is, he is a 75 year old former Army Major who previously served in the Australian Army for 21 years and during this time he saw active service in Vietnam. He was also an ultra-marathon runner to which he held the record by running a distance of 213 kilometres in 24 hours. If that isn't enough Charlie was also a Member of the NSW Parliament for 20 years.

During that time, he was a member of the legislative council, parliamentary secretary for veterans' affairs and shadow parliamentary secretary to the opposition leader.

"Whilst I regarded my 20 years as a Member of the NSW Parliament as a privilege and a great honour it was not my natural habitat".

In 2015 Charlie was inducted as an Officer of the Logohu by the PNG government in their New Year's Honours and Awards list 'for service to the bilateral relations between Papua New Guinea and Australia and especially in the development of the Kokoda Trail and its honoured place in the history of both nations over the past 25 years.'

Then In 2018, Charlie added another achievement to his list as a recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia, which was for 'service to the people and parliament of NSW'.

It's hard not to be inspired by Charlie Lynn. He has a fierce passion for Kokoda, the Kokoda Youth Leadership Challenge (KYLC), and sharing its benefits with as many people as he can. He has been leading expeditions across the Kokoda Trail since 1991 and late last year completed his 99th crossing with 42 young KYLC trekkers under his wing.

"Every time I take a group of young Australians across to Kokoda it reinforces my faith in the future leadership of this place," he said.

One of the perfect ways to describe Charlie was written by Mark Watson from Australian Geographic and he said;

"If you threw Chuck Norris and Indiana Jones into a blender and added a few Anzac

badges (not biscuits) for good measure, most likely it would be Charlie who would emerge. He carries a distinct air of confidence, a hard as nails approach but with a hint of larrikin in his eyes'.

Approaching his 100th crossing of the trail over Anzac Day this year I spoke with Charlie to ask him some questions about himself so people can get an insight into Major Charlie Lynn OAM OL.

How will you celebrate your 100th Trek?

"There will be no difference with the trek itself which will be yet another hard slog to share with another group of proud Australians". Glenn Armstrong, a writer and publisher in PNG, will be releasing a hard-cover book about Charlie titled 'Kokoda - 100 Treks' on Anzac Day.

Charlie has trekked with thousands of different people over the past 29 years including celebrities and politicians however. I asked Charlie if there is one person who he would like to trek with again and why and this is what he had to say:

"My favourite is probably Angry Anderson who came back to trek it a second time - he has a dinkum compassion for our veterans and will do whatever he can to help them in any way. People who have trekked with us over the past 29 years either have a genuine interest in our wartime heritage on the trail or have volunteered to develop their personal leadership abilities. The celebrities I have led across the trail are no different to any of the others after a couple of days - I regard them all as important".

Is there one trek that stands out for you out of the 99 you have trekked?

"The Angry Anderson Challenge for A Current Affair which included Angry, Collette Mann, Darryl Braithwaite, Dermott Brereton, Grant Kenney, Shelly Taylor-Smith and Dr Kerryn Phelps. They were a terrific group and the documentary which was screened by Channel 9 was one of their highest rating shows. However, if I had to choose between

leading another group of celebrities across the trail or fighting the Japanese I would choose the Japs - it would be less stressful"!

He is a keen student of the Kokoda campaign and an activist for protecting and honouring our military heritage along the trail. Charlie has spent much of his life to maintaining the legacy of the Kokoda Trail as a historic war site.

"My commitment to Kokoda has never wavered from my desire to protect and honour our Kokoda story through the development of a Master Heritage Interpretation Plan for the trail. Such a plan should provide for the development of sustainable economic opportunities for the local custodians of the land that is sacred to our shared wartime heritage.

My greatest disappointment is the failure of successive Australian Governments over the past decade to commit to this".

Along the length of the trail Charlie recites stories of young Australian soldiers who fought and died on the same ground we stood on. You can hear a pin drop as trekkers sit in silence looking up at a man wearing a well-worn Akubra, khaki clothing covered in mud and sporting a silver moustache he has been growing for over 40 years, as he recounts their experiences during fierce battles on the trail.

There is one specific poem called 'A Soldier's Farewell' that captures the essence of emotional survival that Charlie can relate to and he explains why.

'A Soldier's Farewell' by Sapper Bert Beros because it related to the emotions I felt when I left my young wife and baby daughter to go to Vietnam. The thought of the possibility of not seeing your family again is a strong emotion every serviceman and woman feels when they leave their homes for active service.

It's impressive that he has memorised dozens of stories, letters and poems from soldiers to famous authors and delivers them so passionately, that you're left with a tear in your

WHAT FIVE THINGS DO YOU ALWAYS PACK FOR A TREK AND WHY?

1. A thermarest blow up mattress – I love my sleep.
2. A titanium coffee plunger – I couldn't operate without a freshly brewed pot of steaming hot PNG roasted coffee each morning
3. A leatherman skeleton – essential for a myriad of small repairs
4. A lightweight portable stool – guarantees a degree of comfort at each stop along the trail
5. A small flask of Bundaberg Rum – a couple of nips offer a hard day warms the cockles of the soul.



"I say to all you people were today. To you who are responsible for governing this country, to all you who hold positions of leadership in the community, to all Australians. It is from the men we honour today that you inherited this land.

"These were the men who helped build this nation. They were the ones associated with the building of our harbours and our bridges. They sealed the roads across the black soil plains, and they built the railways across Australia. Then they fought off the Japanese invasion so that you could inherit this country.

"You now have the fruits of our labours. The cities and the harbours and the plains are yours. We few survivors are aged and can only look on with pride and wish you success in the future.

"But we do charge you, to accept the responsibility of your inheritance and nourish and guard them with care.

"And remember always, the men of the Eighth Australian Division and the two ships who stood between the Japanese invasion and Australia. They paid the price of your future. Only they know the real cost.

"And remember - remember - we solemnly promised God that we would never forget!"

Kokoda occupies most of Charles time because of his continuous fight to properly protect the wartime heritage of the trail. Otherwise he enjoys reading, writing, riding his Harley Road King or getting away in his motorhome with his wife Jill.

The Kokoda Trail has become a pilgrimage for many Australians and taking on the Kokoda Trail could be one of the most memorable trekking experiences.

If you are looking for a personal challenge; want to follow the footsteps of our Australian soldiers; and experience the unique jungle environment and welcoming nature of the Papua New Guinea people, all while learning leadership skills and understanding the sacrifices our Diggers made so we can be young and free, then the Kokoda Trail should be on your bucket list!



"I feel it is important for young Australians to understand and respect their inheritance from previous generations. I don't think the legacy of freedom is fully appreciated these days – it is much like air and water which is taken for granted until you are deprived of it. Kokoda offers a realistic example of the ability of the human spirit to conquer adversity and instill a belief in their ability to influence others to achieve their potential. I have never forgotten the words of the late Sergeant Stan Bryan in his address to a small group of aged veterans at the Cenotaph in Martin Place in 1995 – he concluded:

"The objective of the Kokoda Youth Leadership Challenge is to identify young people within the community who are potential leaders, and who have an ability to both inspire and educate other young people in their communities.

"I believe the best investment an RSL Club or Sub-Branch can make is in the personal development of young leaders from their local communities. The Kokoda Youth Leadership Challenge has no peer in this field. We now have more than 550 young custodians of the spirit of Kokoda' to ensure the values our veterans fought and died for are never forgotten".

"With more than 550 young men and women now having made the trek since the Kokoda Youth Leadership Challenge commenced in 2005 by the RSL & Services Clubs Association and Charlie Lynn of Adventure Kokoda, that represents an investment of more than \$3 million by clubs in our country's youth.

"My favourite campsite is Bomber's which is nestled in the Moss Forest in the upper reaches of the Owen Stanley Ranges. It is one of the most beautiful sites one could imagine with the only hot shower along the trail. Offerings of hot scones and fresh bread is always a welcome treat. I couldn't select a favourite village as I have an affinity with them all and am often humbled by their compassion for us".

Do you have a favourite village or campsite on the trail?

Along the trail you visit many beautiful villages and campsites to which the locals all hear him coming as he yells out words you rarely hear these days like 'digger', 'strut' and 'cooe cobber' to his fellow trekkers before reaching their destination. They all greet him with a handshake or a hug because he is a living legend of Kokoda.

eye and a feeling that you can tackle anything that Kokoda can throw at you.