

# Kokoda Trek Report - 22 Sep 13 - Andrew Flanagan

02/10/2013

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*A soldier remembers: Jack Manol*

*"Oh my God, that walking! The first hour I thought 'No, I'll never do this.' I was exhausted! But I didn't like to show it, to anyone, particularly to the country blokes, because they were going along all right. At one stage I remember looking at my few mates in the section and they're yellow skinned and a dirty, scruffy lot and I thought: 'Christ, there's no-one between us and Moresby, and if the Japs get through us and get to Moresby there, Australia's gone!"*



Once again it was my privilege to lead a group of intrepid trekkers from Popondetta to Ower's Corner, and as usual the Track did not disappoint, throwing up numerous challenges and special memories to last a lifetime. On this trip I was joined by 8 trekkers: Gaylene Turri, John and James Saunders (father/son), Robert West, Leighton Morvell, Liam Flanagan (grandfather/son/grandson) and Ken and Donna Rayner (father/daughter). All had trained with great dedication and determination in the months prior to the trek.

The trip certainly started in an eventful fashion, with one un-named trekker (Robert) going horizontal on flat ground 200m out of Kokoda. Robert casually explained that it was his way of instantly bonding with his personal porter! Brilliant strategy! Liam followed up with a face-plant river crossing technique not long after, getting everyone's attention with an almighty SPLASH.

I shared Jack Manol's quote as we lay breathless in Deniki, satisfied with a job well done at the end of Day 1. James and Liam joined the Deniki kids in sliding down a very steep hill on a piece of bark, getting airborne with a flip over a large rock.....great fun!

Our service at Isurava was typical highlight, with trekkers paying their respects with the Ode, Last Post, Minutes Silence and Reveille. After visiting the museum it was 'packs on' and away we went, bound for Alola. After a wonderful meal of pizza we were sitting around reflecting on an amazing day when we heard the lovely sound of children singing in the village. With great enthusiasm we rolled down into the village for an impromptu 'sing-sing' as the mist rolled in and night fell. A perfect end to a perfect day.

Day 3 was to prove extremely challenging, with most trekkers staggering into Templeton's weary, breathless and with legs like jelly. A number came into contact with the ground, "both cheeks down", with many saves by our brilliant personal porter team. Day 4 included the jaw-dropping Myola experience, matched by the surprise at eating freshly baked iced-donuts at lunch. Meeting our special friend, the Kagi Fuzzy Wuzzy, and the traditional village welcome in Kagi concluded an excellent day.

The sound of bagpipes echoed over Brigade Hill as I played 'Amazing Grace' as part of our service, with the trekkers once again reflecting on the qualities of courage, endurance, mateship and sacrifice.

A near tragedy in Nauro highlighted the fragility of the human experience, with a trekker from another company (local guide) collapsing from heat exhaustion and dehydration. Some 4 hours later the trekker recovered consciousness, responding to medical care and re-hydration one drip at a time. Our excellent trekkers assisted as required, including carrying her by stretcher into a hut as darkness fell. A great team effort averted what could have been a much different outcome. The Track takes no prisoners! It was music to our ears to hear the sound of a helicopter arriving the next morning.

Arriving at Ower's Corner, just beneath the arches, was a perfect location to reflect on our individual and collective journey across the Owen Stanley Range. A perfect time to pause and reflect on the deeds of the men who fought and died along the Track in 1942, ordinary men who did extraordinary things. We had indeed walked in the Footsteps of the Brave. I am reminded of the words of Lt Col Phil Roden, Commanding Officer, 2/14th:

*"We think of them in sorrow and with pride but there should be a third feeling stronger than grief, greater than pride. A sense of fullness and of achievement. To us, their lives may seem to have been severely shortened, yet in truth they were full lives. It is not how many years a man lives that matters but what he does with the years- many or few- that are granted to him. And those who sleep here did much with theirs."*

Andrew Flanagan  
Expedition Guide  
No Roads Expeditions  
[andrewf@noroads.com.au](mailto:andrewf@noroads.com.au)

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## Comments

**GaylEne Turri**

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Thank you Andrew for giving us a fantastic trip and instilling in our minds the thoughts and struggle that the Aussies found at Kokoda and the rest of PNG. I still come to tears when I recount the images from the War Cemetery in Port Moresby. A place of great gratitude & sadness, a place of great peace & loss. May those that lost their lives in PNG and the other wars, both named and unknown know that we (that walked with Andrew) feel more thanks than we could ever say.

The great 'Porters' we had are like great parents - giving you the space to find your way and climb to greatness, but the care and understanding to know when to hold on and guide us through the tough times so we don't fall, giving us guidance and support as they only know how.' To all those involved in our trek I can not praise you enough, Many thanks GaylEne :-)

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