

Kokoda Trek Report - July 13 - Barry Jenks

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Hi it's Baz back from another Kokoda Trek. Another great trek and we were fortunate to have the best weather and track conditions I've ever experienced. Even the swamp was almost dry. I was fortunate to have a great group of trekkers who seemed to really enjoy the experience.



The group consisted of 16 trekkers, 10 personal porters, 19 general porters and yours truly. I remember looking around the camp at Deniki and thinking there was so many of us that we deserved our own postcode. Our trekkers were from all walks of life and covered three generations. The oldest, and I know he won't mind the mention, was Ron Allen who is 70. Ron is an absolute inspiration. He is an ex-cop and as tough as they come. He carried his own pack the whole way and the pace seemed way too slow for him. Ron's siblings Peter and Judy were also on the trek. Ron and Pete shared a tent which was a logistical blunder on my part. It seems sibling rivalry doesn't dissipate over the years. But it was amusing listening to the brotherly arguments and disagreements coming from their tent. Boy's, it's spelt ALOLA, always has been. Judy was on her second Kokoda Trek, both with No Roads. I think I grew on her because she eventually conceded I am the equal best Australian Guide she has walked with.

Judy and trekker Lesley had never met before arriving in PNG but really hit it off. I'm sure they will be friends forever. We managed to give Lesley a little surprise birthday celebration at New Nauro and I hope that will always be a lovely memory for her. Lesley didn't make any secret of how old she turned but the gentleman in me forbids me from repeating it. I'll give you a bit of a clue, she is now older than 64 but younger than 66.



As was the case with Lesley, Max signed on by himself and didn't know any the other trekkers and Ranjit was in the same boat. Max was as determined as anyone I've ever met. I think he drew a fair bit of resolve from acquaintances who said he wouldn't make it. Well he proved them very wrong. Well done Max, I'm so pleased for you. Ranjit is now fondly known as "Raj". Personally, I didn't find his real name all that difficult to grasp but others clearly did. Ranjit (Raj) was a fantastic part of the team. He is just so personable and has a terrific sense of humour. I don't think he'd mind me mentioning that he found the last couple of days pretty tough, but he really dug deep and got over the line. Ranjit does have a few body clock issues. Either that he is just the most eager trekker ever. I can't recall another trekker going to bed at 6.30 pm and then up and ready to go again at 10.30 pm. Dressed and packed and ready to go. I think Ron and Peter got the blame because they were still awake and bickering and Ranjit mistook that for a wakeup call. Ranjit's also famously discovered on the track that 8 days of trekking, means 8 days of trekking. His body clock thought 8 days meant 4 days. It was a real pleasure trekking with you Ranjit.

We had the pleasure of trekking with two characters from Alice Springs, Andy (Andreas) and Stephen AKA "Millie" AKA "The Walrus". The later nickname was the result of Millie being sick on day two as we headed into Alola. One of his symptoms was a horrible guttural noise which can only be likened to the mating call of the Great Southern Ocean Short Hair Snub Nose Walrus. And like the walrus, Millie often didn't appear from the depths of the sea or in this case the jungle when you wanted him too. He was always way back doing his thing and taking it all in. I guess he isn't used to plants, hills and streams where he comes from. As for Andy, well, just when I thought I was the master of dry humour and really bad jokes, along came Andy. It's no contest, he has me covered and is a lot of fun to hang around with. I really enjoyed his stories of life in the outback. It's a miracle he survived some of the things he's been through in the NT. The only disappointment is that Andy didn't manage to catch a fish at Templeton's 1. He'd been talking up his fishing prowess. Andy and Millie really thrived on the track and got stronger as it went on.

James and Steve tagged along too. And it did feel a bit like that. These guys are quiet achievers who just knuckle down and get the job done. I'm sure all you other guides know the type I'm talking about. Great blokes who get along with everyone, never complain, never seem to have a bad day and the whole thing is like a walk in the park for them. In a lot of ways they were the voice of wisdom and I'm glad they were there to keep me in line. I wish I had some dirt on them but they were way too at home on the track to put a foot out of line. Although post trek, it was more the case that I had to keep them in line. Ken who came along with daughter Claire was pretty much in the same mould. Ken is human because I did see him looking a little exhausted one day at Menari I think it was. But Ken is totally unflappable. Even the drowning of his camera and Ua-ule Creek didn't seem to upset him. Sorry to remind you of that Ken, but I had to mention it. Glad to hear the camera has made a bit of a recovery. Claire was an extremely popular trekker. Everyone seemed to have her best interests at heart. She is a veteran of Everest Base Camp who is quite capable of fending for herself. But try telling the other trekkers and even some of the porters that. The minute there was a hint of sunshine you could hear the chorus of "Claire, put your sunscreen on", "Claire, put your hat on", "Claire, get in the shade". I'm sure she was sick of hearing it but is too nice to say anything. Personal Porter Greg always led the chorus. I must mention that on day two Claire provided me with a life changing experience. She called me an "old man". Honestly, I hadn't realised until then so thanks!!!! Claire.

Last but not least were dad Pete, son's Clint and Cameron and friend Ron. Ron was that quiet I sometimes thought we only had 15 trekkers. It wasn't lost on me that Ron had a rather large and heavy looking backpack so maybe that kept him quiet. But he really didn't miss a beat. Ron's gentle and quiet nature was well and truly compensated for by the big personalities of "the boys" Clint and Cam. Big Cam will never be left wondering. He's never shy about asking a question or two hundred. You can't help but admire the carefree and positive natures of these two blokes. They are a lot of fun and there is never a dull moment when they are around but it's their big hearts I will remember most. Their interaction with the porters was incredible and something they should be proud of. The porter's loved them and it's the first time I've even known the porters to invite trekkers to share their meal and sleep in their hut, but that's what happened. Pete was the catalyst behind these four blokes coming to Kokoda. He was very fit and on day one I had trouble getting him back behind Neino. Wouldn't you know it, Pete got very crook for a couple of days. It was hard to work out what the issue was because his standard response to everything is "don't worry about me, I'm all right". I'm just glad he came good and got to enjoy most of the trek.

Our porters, capably led by Clement were sensational. Our lead man Neino is just the coolest dude ever and Henry is an outstanding cook. I love the way Henry goes about all of his work with a beaming smile. Thanks too to all the trekkers for your eagerness to help with dinner preparation. It was great that everyone wanted to be involved. Of course there was the small matter of Henry banning Judy from the kitchen. But I agree with him, the kitchen is no place for someone who can't tell the difference between an onion and her right pointer finger.

Thanks everyone for a great trek, all the laughs and the many highlights. I'm really looking forward to seeing the photos.

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