

Kokoda Track Diary Notes and Memories. 27th June – 07th July 2001.

A few years ago, I saw the Four Corners program, "*The Men Who Saved Australia*". It was about the campaign fought along the Kokoda Track in 1942 by Australian Militia and AIF battalions against the Japanese advance over the Owen Stanley Range towards Port Moresby. I was deeply touched by this story and the idea that I would like to walk the Track and see the battle sites formed in my mind at that time.

One Friday afternoon last October, I heard a fellow, Murray Jones being interviewed by Sharmaine Scott on the local ABC Radio station. Murray was planning to walk the Kokoda Track in 2001 and was asking for interested persons to join him. I phoned his number that night and the adventure began.

Twenty-something people turned up to an initial meeting in November 2000 at the Kangaroo Point steps. After seven months of personal training and organized group walks, 16 people flew out from Brisbane and Cairns to walk the Kokoda Track.

The group consisted of 10 men and 6 women with ages ranging from 29 to 61. Murray called the group, TEAM KOKODA 2001. Here are the team members: -

Murray, who is the team leader. He is 42 and a locksmith by trade. He used to be a Sig in the Army. I was not surprised to learn that he could have been an SAS candidate – he chases dogs up mountains with a 20 kg pack on his back. Murray has previously walked the Kokoda Track.

Geoff R is an Army trained mechanic now working for them as a public servant. I reckon he is in his very early-thirties. He does kick-boxing and is very fit and strong. Geoff served in Bougainville with the Peace Observer Force.

Nancy is Geoff's partner. She is a scientific officer at the Queensland University vet farm and an Army Reservist. She is extremely fit with seemingly unending reserves of stamina as I observed on the training walks. I think Nancy is in her mid-thirties.

Gill is 55 and a retired metallurgist. He leads a very busy life as a volunteer at Brisbane Forest Park and is never home when you phone. He does a lot of bush walking and has travelled extensively overseas.

Reuben is 51. He works part-time as a cleaner. He migrated from South Africa about 25 years ago. Reuben has had an interest in the Kokoda Track story since before he came to Australia. He lives on the Redcliffe Peninsula.

Annie is a secondary school teacher. She has travelled extensively overseas, is outgoing, high-spirited and never short of a word which will be good for team morale. She sets up a very mean hutchie. Annie is 31.

Liz is Annie's sister and they both definitely have the same Mum and Dad. She is a Registered Nurse by profession and has travelled extensively overseas including 12 months in Africa from North to South. Liz is 37.

Alistair is Liz's partner and is also 37. He is a sales rep for a major beverage company. He and Liz live in Roma. Alistair is a thorough gentleman – well he did speak with Liz's mum about his intentions before the engagement was announced. He has trekked through the Himalayas.

Tanya used to be a school physical education teacher and a member of the Army

Reserves. Now she is a Captain in the Regs and has her sights set on trading her three pips for a crown. Tanya is based at Lavarack barracks in Townsville and is one fit lady. She is 31 or 32.

Ronnie is also in the Regular Army in Townsville. She is a Company Sergeant-Major and knows how to track down supplies and get them delivered. Ronnie is another very fit lady. I think she is also in her very early-thirties.

Peter is a Warrant Officer in the RAAF at Richmond. He is an aircraft tech by trade but now looks after the careers of other techs. I think he is in his early-forties.

Geoff C is the group's elder statesman at 61. He drives a taxi now for a living and lives on the Gold Coast. He used to work in PNG managing a car and truck spare parts business.

Andrew is a metallurgist at the Century Zinc mine. He is an ex-Army reservist and is tall, fit and strong. He lives in Townsville and is the youngest in the group at 29.

Zoltan is a physiotherapist who works for the RAAF in Darwin. He is 36, an athlete, a scuba diver, a hang glider pilot and a world traveller. You guessed it – he is not married.

Angela is a psychologist. She works in Sydney and is doing a PhD. She has travelled extensively overseas. I think Angela is in her mid-thirties.

Last of all is me, **Michael**. I am 43 and work for the Australian Customs Service.

Wednesday 27.06.2001:

My wife, Jennifer drove me to the airport with my two sons, Gabriel and Maxim. At check-in I met Peter, Liz and Alistair for the first time. I have copies of a Kokoda Trail, Revised Route Going and Track Plan produced by the PNG Defence Force in 1984. Murray marked the location of some of the villages we would be staying at onto one so that Jen and the boys could follow our progress.

I did the duty-free thing and then said goodbye to my family.

Reuben had a bit of drama at check-in. He mentioned to the airline officer that there was an empty fuel bottle in his luggage. He was requested to produce it and also the burner cup from his stove. Even though these items were empty of fuel, the airline officer could smell traces of methylated spirit in both and they were confiscated. Reuben's cooking kit was based on a modified hexamine-stove and as extra hexamine tablets had been organized, he could use some of these for fuel with it.

I went through Customs and got my passport stamped. In the departure lounge I met Angela for the first time. She had just flown up from Sydney to connect with our flight.

Our aircraft was the Air Niugini, Airbus A310-300, serial P2-ANA. I was seated in 22H which is a window seat on the starboard side just behind the wing. There was no one seated beside me and the plane was only about 1/3 full.

Runway 19 was being used for departures and after take-off, the aircraft turned right to track back North. Excitement started to replace the non-specific anxiety I had been feeling. We climbed over the suburbs of Brisbane and were probably a little West of Gordon Park where Jen and the boys were visiting friends and watching out for flight PX004 to fly over, but I waved in their direction anyway.

As soon as the "Fasten Seatbelts" sign was extinguished, the cabin crew handed out drinks (I had an orange juice). Not long after that came the PNG Immigration and Customs forms which I attended to straight away.

The in-flight movie had Mel Gibson and Helen Hunt in it. I didn't watch it. The cabin attendants asked those sitting next to windows to pull the slides down to darken the cabin for the movie viewers. At 1420 hours, I had a look out the window and we were somewhere over the Great Barrier Reef. It was a beautiful sight. I spent most of the trip copying notes about the Kokoda campaign into my notebook. (I had brought some loose sheets of notes and Peter Dornan's book, "*The Silent Men*", for reference).

The aircraft captain made an announcement over the intercom that the air traffic controllers in the tower at Jackson's (Port Moresby) had gone on strike. He said he would make his way in and we would be landing about 1615 hours without any disturbance.

About 150 kilometres out of Moresby, the aircraft started its descent. We crossed the coastline to the East of the city. Just offshore, in the shallows, the sea is a beautiful, clear, blue colour and there are coral reefs nearby. On the land-side, there are lots of mountains, ridges and hills, some of which are rocky. The ground looks brown and dry but the trees are green. It is a bit like flying into Mt. Isa – I love it already.

As we neared Moresby, native garden plots began to dot the landscape. They were most irregular in size and shape and the further on we went, the more of them there were. Closer in, near the coastal part of town, there were suddenly a lot of coconut palms which were much greener.

As we came in to land, I could see four Nomads and a D.C.-3 from the PNG Defence Force parked on the apron over on the military side of the airfield. The aircraft captain found his way in for a smooth landing. Port Moresby international airport now has a couple of aerobridges that weren't there in 1993 when I last visited.

Alistair, Liz and Annie had started work on team morale during the flight and were in high spirits. They have got a little M&M doll called "Mate". He has been nominated as the team mascot.

In the Customs arrivals hall, I introduced myself to the senior officer on duty. I tried to do a bit of badge swapping but was unsuccessful – she did not have any spares. I gave a couple of Australian Customs patches to the Senior and a baggage officer anyway.

We all had food rations in our kit, but Quarantine wasn't interested once they found out the nature of it. We passed through without delay.

I had got 40 Kina in small notes from Travelex in Brisbane during the week before departure, but others had yet to exchange their money. There were very few small denomination Kina notes available at Moresby airport, so most missed out.

We had arrived in Port Moresby just one day after the Police shot dead three university students during protests against the PNG Government's privatization policy. A curfew from 1930 hours had been imposed on the city. Murray had decided (and we agreed) that we should proceed straight to our motel without further diversion or excursion and remain there. We would be staying at the Ambers Inn which is in the suburb of Boroko.

We all piled into a minibus for a very cramped and cozy ride to our lodgings. There wasn't enough room in the bus for all luggage and so some bags were left behind for a second trip. It was about 1700 hours when we headed off and as we drove through the streets, I was amazed at the number of people out walking. (I suppose that is how many people get around here, though there was certainly no shortage of vehicles on the road). Many looked at us as we drove past. Some smiled and waved.

Another source of amazement was the large number of street stalls set up on the footpath or behind the front fence of houses and other premises. People were selling betel nut, bananas and other produce.

Ambers Inn is a two level establishment set amongst tropical trees and behind a high fence topped with razor wire. (Most of the premises we had passed were similarly fenced). I was booked in to room #30 with Zoltan. He had arrived earlier in the day on a flight from Cairns along with Tanya, Ronnie, and Andrew.

I started on the job of sorting out my backpack. The things I wouldn't be taking on the track went into my suitcase. This would be left behind locked in a storage room.

Ambers Inn has a small swimming pool and we gathered around it for some group photographs. No one went for dip, but most said they were looking forward to doing so in nine days time.

The cook at Ambers Inn was a short, small, old gentleman. He fired up the BBQ and put on steaks and sausages which were cooked for a VERY VERY long time. (In fact, I'd be prepared to say it was a job worthy of a visit by the verification people from the Guinness Book of World Records). Surprisingly though, they were not overdone and the snags especially were juicy and tasty.

We had a team meeting after dinner at which Ronnie handed out items including dehydrated one-meal Army ration packs, luminous sticks, extra hutchie cord and spare batteries for the 2-way radios. (One radio would be carried by a designated point person and the other by tail-end-Charlie). Murray advised that there would be a luggage limit of 20 kg per person on our flight to Kokoda. This meant we would have to take empty water bottles and fill up at Kokoda if our pack exceeded that weight with water.

I returned to the room and continued to work on lightening my pack. Clothing, including my second long-sleeve shirt and some extra socks and jocks were left out. I reduced the number of muesli bars in each day's ration from 4 to 3, halved the amount of Deb instant potato and ditched a 100gm packet of grated Parmesan cheese. Then I got rid of some extra bandages, bandaids and Panadol from my first-aid kit and some food from my emergency ration pack. I estimated my pack to be about 20 kg and couldn't see what else I could possibly leave behind. I would have

to get my water at Kokoda.

Murray came by the room with an update on our drinking water situation. The new plan was to fill our water bottles here and see if we could check our packs in with the extra weight. At worst, we would only have to tip the water out.

Our departure time from Ambers Inn was changed from 0530 hours to 0730 hours because of the curfew restrictions. This meant two extra hours of sleep – great!

Eventually I hit the sack about 2300 hours but didn't go to sleep straight away as Zoltan was on for chat. We talked about our interests and experiences. At 0100 hours I said goodnight and went to sleep. He is an interesting fellow.

During the night, the local dogs made quite a racket. There was an electric motor somewhere in the building that would cut in and out every now and then. As it changed tone, the dogs would start barking. I'm sure they disturbed the sleep of other team members as well.

Thursday 28.06.2001:

When I woke up about 0600 hours, I felt rested. After showering and dressing, I started tinkering with my backpack again to try and reduce the weight some more. I rearranged things and ditched the ammo pouch my first aid kit had been packed in. About 0715 hours there was a call that the bus had arrived and was ready to leave for the airport. I had completely forgotten about breakfast and didn't grab anything on my way past the dining room. (I took my Doxycycline, Vitamin-C and anti-inflammatory tablets and ate a muesli bar).

The streets were again full of people out walking. It was a lovely, mostly clear day and quite warm in the sun. In no time at all, sweat had started soaking through my shirt. As our minibus pulled up at the Milne Bay Air terminal, there was a Twin Otter aircraft parked on the apron adjacent. A large crowd of locals was standing around outside the building and there were more than a few inside too. It struck me that many were quite dressed up. There were seven or eight women wearing long black skirts and white tops printed with colourful floral designs. There was one young lad I noticed wearing long grey trousers, a long-sleeved white shirt and a black bow tie.

Cars were coming and going, dropping off more people and a security company utility pulled up with a big German shepherd dog in a cage on the back. I don't know who looked the meanest – the dog or its handler.

The check-in process was a little different. Not only did our packs get weighed but we had to stand on the scales too. This was to make sure the aircraft wasn't overloaded. My pack weighed 25kg. The check-in officer asked for our tickets to Kokoda. As Tanya pulled hers out she asked, "Where's my return ticket from Kokoda?" I pointed to her pack lying on the ground at her feet and said, "It's there in front of you". All those who heard this had a laugh. (Actually, I think she was just foxing).

Angela had left her airline tickets at Ambers Inn and had to go back on the bus to get them. In the end, she didn't need to hurry.

The aircraft on the apron was not for us. A long box draped in white material was

taken out and loaded onto the aircraft. I was told that this was a coffin with the body of one of the students who had been shot during the riots. He or she was being returned to their village for burial. The women dressed in the black skirts and floral tops boarded the aircraft with some other people. Mourners were pressed against the wire fence waving goodbye as the aircraft departed. Not long after this, most of the crowd left and we had the terminal area just about to ourselves.

There was another Caucasian fellow at the terminal who had been trying to get on a flight to Kokoda for several days. All flights had been booked out. He was going over to meet up with some local guides who would take him out for a few weeks of bush living. He was eventually accepted as a passenger on our flight.

There is a story to our supply of cooking fuel and it starts back in Australia. Being classed as Dangerous Goods for the purpose of transport on aircraft, it was going to cost more than \$1000.00 to get the hexi-tabs and metho to PNG on a regular airline flight. CSM Ronnie came to the rescue. She was able to organize the fuel and get it onto a RAAF flight to Port Moresby earlier in the week. It was supposed to be waiting for us at the MBA terminal but no one could locate it. This was cause for concern as we had no way of replacing it all at this late stage but eventually someone realized it had already been flown to Kokoda.

The chief guide for our trek is Alex Rama. His 2-i-c is Isaac Matama. Angela has hired a porter to carry her backpack and his name is Colin. (Angela will carry a daypack only with food, water and some essentials). Two more local fellows are joining us at Kokoda as guides.

Time dragged on as we waited for an aircraft to arrive for us. We chatted amongst ourselves, met the guides and just waited around. Eventually, another MBA Twin Otter (serial P2-MCD) chocked on the apron near the terminal. I was sitting just outside the terminal building when a soft voice behind me said, "Passengers for Kokoda...". It was our boarding call and the time was about 1050 hours.

We were airborne about 1120 hours. The flight over the Owen Stanley Range was spectacular. The aircraft was well and truly loaded with passengers and backpacks. As it climbed to altitude to pass through the Kokoda Gap, I'm sure we were all silently willing the two turboprops to keep on humming loudly. The landscape was all UP and DOWN. There was no flat, clear ground I could see for the pilot to head for in the case of an aircraft emergency. (I think the procedure in this situation is to aim for the biggest looking treetop and hope for the best).

As we flew along, the pilot spoke over the intercom pointing out parts of the Kokoda Track below. We passed villages high up on the top of ridges and saw isolated patches of cleared slopes and felled timber. The forest canopy was the thickest I have ever seen. (Looked like it could easily support a fully laden Twin Otter but I hoped we wouldn't need to find out). Some treetops were masses of red flowers and others masses of yellow. All the different shades made the canopy a beautiful patchwork of colours.

After some twenty minutes or so, we landed on the grass airstrip at Kokoda. The airport building / shelter is at the far end of the airstrip (away from the village). The pilot kept the starboard engine running while the aircraft was on the ground. We collected our packs as they were unloaded, took some photographs and then headed off to Kokoda village. Our cooking fuel had been brought to the aircraft in a wheelbarrow as someone thought we needed it there. The poor fellows who got this job had to push it back into the village for us. (About 1.5 kilometres).

The sun had a real bite to it, just as in Moresby. I could feel it burning through my sunscreen as we headed in to Kokoda. Some shade would have been nice but there was none to be had.

We were accompanied back to the village by lots of locals who had been there to meet the plane and to see off those leaving on the return flight. We seemed to be a particular source of amusement to the children. They all had beautiful big smiles.

In Kokoda we had a lunch of sandwiches, apples and oranges that had been provided by Ambers Inn and brought over on the aircraft. Our fuel supplies of hexi-tabs and metho were distributed as required. I took ten packets (40 pieces) of hexi-tabs.

I then went off to see the WWII memorials. There are four at the northern end of the plateau near where the 39th Battalion northern perimeter positions would have been for the first Kokoda battle on 29 July 1942. One memorial has a plaque with a bronze casting of the Owen Stanley Range. The Kokoda Trail is marked on this with the positions of villages shown. Suggested walking times (in hours) for the trek are listed on the plaque as follows: -

Kokoda – 0. Isurava – 7. Alola – 9.5. Eora Creek – 12. Templetons Crossing – 19. Myola – 23. Kagi – 25. Efogi – 28. Brigade Hill – 30. Menari – 33. Nauro – 36.5. Ioribaiwa – 43. Imita Ridge & Golden Staircase – 47.5. Owers Corner – 50.5.

(Our intended route is slightly different. We are going Templetons – Narduli – Efogi).

There is a museum at Kokoda. It was closed but we were able to locate one of the people with a key. Everywhere we went, the children followed. A group of about a dozen waited outside the museum door while we looked at the photographs, rusted weapons and helmets inside. There was a museum visitor's book and most of us signed it.

After the Museum visit, we collected our packs and went to the hospital to fill any empty water bottles from a tap in the grounds. This and any subsequent water taken from streams must be treated to make it safe for drinking. Next we went to the Kokoda store to sign a register of trackwalkers. I was #320. (I didn't take note if this was for the year so far or what).

About 1320 hours, we started the trek back to Ower's Corner. Our destination for the day was the village of Hoi. At Kokoda we were joined by two more guides, Sabi and Kirol.

As we walked along the plateau from Kokoda, we passed locals tending their garden plots. Others were coming back to the village carrying billum bags and sacks full of produce. We passed hibiscus trees with beautiful red flowers. Big blue butterflies fluttered here and there.

Even though this section of the track was mainly flat, the heat of the sun made the going tough. We came to the village of Kovel and stopped for a smoko break. I had a big drink of Moresby water and ate a few chocolate biscuits and a muesli bar. The villagers here keep pigs and Reuben took a photograph of me with a sow and some piglets in the background. The village seemed deserted of people. I couldn't see anyone, not even children. I didn't know if they were all out working in their gardens,

having a siesta or what.

We got underway again and passed a woman working in her garden beside the track. As we went by, she called out. I didn't understand the words she was saying but her tone suggested she wasn't happy. (Kovelo village had previously closed their part of the track to walkers and this situation had only been resolved not long before we left Australia). I think she was giving us a fair gob-full. Alex said not to worry about her.

About 1500 hours, we got to the village of Hoi. A creek skirts the village and as we walked along beside it, people on the other side in the village waved to us. We waved back and called out greetings.

The Hoi guesthouse is removed from the rest of the village. It is in a clearing on the lower slopes of the ridgeline beside the fast running creek. Beyond the clearing, the forest is thick and green and there is a garden plot beside the area. The building has a thatched roof. The external wall cladding and flooring is made of rough-sawn timber planks.

I was one of the last into the guesthouse and learnt a lesson straight away, ie. first in - best dressed. I squeezed my pack into a space between Gill's mozzie tube and another then set mine up. Several others camped outside including Alistair and Liz who are sleeping in style. They have brought along a dome tent – their own Hilton Hotel - and it was up in no time. (That's experience for you).

Angela brought along some of the comforts of home. She had a blow-up mattress and a foot-pump. That shows what can be done if you hire a personal porter.

What is a Mozzie Tube you ask? Well it is an invention of Murray's. It is a one-person, enclosed sleeping tube with a triangular cross-section. The base, one side and both end panels are made of ripstop nylon and the other side-panel is mozzie netting. A full-length zipper along the base and netting side allows access and it has a flysheet.

After setting up, I went down to the creek for a wash. The stream was only knee deep so I lay down to get fully submerged. The water was a little bit cold at first but after a few seconds, it felt pleasant and quite invigorating. I washed out my walking trousers and then had another dip. Nancy went a bit further up the creek for her tub. Some time later, one of her rock shoes came floating down the creek. Geoff went to check that she was O.K. and return the shoe.

The internal walls of the guesthouse were just framing posts so I strung up a communal clothesline. Then I cooked dinner on my hexi-stove. I had a packet of the Continental brand, Indian-spices, *Rices of the World* with extra rice noodles and dehydrated green peas added. It tasted a treat, though I didn't have much of an appetite and struggled to eat it all. After dinner, I washed up my cups-canteen and by this time darkness was falling fast. (A cups-canteen is a metal cup with a folding handle that can also be used for cooking food or boiling water. It is a piece of personal-issue Army kit)

I walked around to the back of the guesthouse and over to the edge of the clearing for a 'number 1'. As I stood there, I looked ahead and there were hundreds of small bright lights moving up, down and around amongst the trees and bushes. It was nearly dark and I couldn't tell if they were 5 feet or 50 feet in front of me. It was a bit startling as I had no idea what was going on. Then it dawned on me that this must

be a magnificent firefly display. One landed on a post nearby and with my torch I was able to see that the light came from the glowing rear end of a beetle. I have no doubt some 'fireflies' were visible from 50 metres away.

A little later, I went up to the Lik Lik house (little house / pit toilet) for a 'Number 2'. When I switched on my torch to follow the path up, the bulb blew immediately. I borrowed Zoltan's torch which was one of those Cyclops types worn on a headband. I was extra careful not to have an accident with his torch.

Most people were in bed by about 1900 hours. I had a chat down by the creek with Zoltan, Tanya and Ronnie and then went for some shuteye myself. During the night it was cool and though I was very tired, my sleep was broken. (Hoi is at about 1300 feet / 400 metres elevation). I wore my second pair of cam trousers, socks and a T-shirt to bed and used my mozzie tube flysheet as a blanket. My sweat condensed as droplets on the underside of the flysheet and as time passed, the droplets cooled. Whenever I rolled over, this was a little uncomfortable on my bare arms.

Friday 29.06.2001:

Everyone was up around first light. I didn't check the time myself but heard someone mention 0530. I packed up my bedding, got dressed in my still damp walking clothes, put my boots on and made breakfast.

I had prepared a mixture of oats, skim milk powder, rice cereal, protein powder and sugar for breakfast each day. I had tried this mixture at home and liked the taste but here now on the Track, I didn't fancy the flavour of the protein powder at all. Maybe my taste buds were on the blink. I took my three tablets.

I filled my empty water bottles from the creek and treated the contents with Iodine – 2 tablets per litre / bottle. This treated water didn't taste the best. I had brought two bottles of iodine neutralizing tablets with me but they had gone AWOL somewhere in my kit and I couldn't find them.

I gave Alex the uneaten packet of breakfast mix and two muesli bars from yesterday's ration and one from today's – that was a few hundred grams less for me to carry.

We set off about 0700 hours. We were to climb up to Isurava at just over 4000 feet / 1200 metres and then continue onto Alola at about 4500 feet / 1370 metres. Isurava would be a special place. That is where the 2/14th Bn AIF arrived company-by-company during 26-28.08.42 to save the 39 Bn Militia from annihilation. The Japanese attack was held up for four days before the Australians commenced a fighting withdrawal on 30.08.42. I have read much about the battle that occurred there.

Just about straight away, the track started to climb. Even at this early time of day, the sun was quite hot and there was not much shade relief in this section. The sweat started pouring out of me at a terrible rate. After an hour or so of this it was a physical and mental struggle just to keep putting one foot in front of the other. I sought inspiration by thinking of the efforts of the Diggers during the Kokoda campaign – two in particular came to mind.

I had read about Captain Sam Templeton of the 39th Bn. He saw service during WWI in Royal Navy submarines and was in his fifties at Kokoda. When his battalion

originally marched over the Owen Stanley Range from Port Moresby, he came back down the steep slope of Imita Ridge to carry the haversacks and rifles of three much younger troops who were struggling on the way up.

Also, there was Corporal Johnny Metson of 2/14th Bn who was wounded in both ankles at Isurava. He was a member of Captain Ben Buckler's party. This group was made up of wounded and able-bodied troops who had been cut off from their battalion at Isurava Rest House. They attempted to rejoin at Alola but the Japanese had taken that position. The group travelled North over the mountains to the Kokoda valley and then headed East for the coast. Metson didn't want to be a burden to his mates as a stretcher case, so he bandaged his hands and knees and crawled on all fours. After some three weeks, the worst of the wounded (including Metson) were left at a native village with Tom Fletcher who volunteered to stay behind to assist with caring for his mates while the others pushed on. The Japanese found those left behind and murdered them all.

I struggled on for another half an hour but things didn't get any better. The last of my Moresby water was gone and now my supply was 100% iodine treated. The taste of this was so terrible I could only manage a few sips each time – not enough. Body-heat was becoming a real hindrance to my progress.

Murray was keeping an eye on how everyone was going. I was travelling near the rear of the group. When us tail-enders caught up with the front-runners at the next rest stop, Murray decided I needed a break from my pack. Isaac volunteered to carry it for me.

I forced down a big drink of water, ate a muesli bar and took off my singlet. I wrung the singlet and drank the sweat that poured out from it. This tasted like fresh water! I thought about throwing the singlet away to save a bit of weight but in the end, I carried it over my shoulder.

I was a bit emotionally distressed at this point. I had come to Papua New Guinea with the intention of carrying my own backpack all the way. It was now only day 2 and I had failed in this endeavor.

During this rest break, the guides cut walking poles for those who wanted one. I put my hand up. I don't know how long we stopped for but I cooled down and we got going again. Murray said Isaac would carry my pack (as well as his own) for half an hour.

After only a few minutes, the track stopped climbing and began to descend. Some 25 minutes later, we reached the bottom of the slope. I was rested and eagerly retrieved my pack from Isaac. Then, as the track climbed higher, the temperature cooled and there was more shade cover. I felt much better, though not 100% flash.

We walked through clearings where a large, green-leafed vine covered the underlying vegetation. Murray said that it was Choko vine. Supposedly, the Japanese had planted chokos as they advanced to use as an eventual food source. (Believe it or not).

There were a number of false crests on the track up to Isurava. 'False crest' equaled 'false hope'. When going up a long slope, you could look ahead to its apparent crest anticipating the end and some easier going once you reached that point. It was almost soul destroying to go over the lip of this crest only to be faced with another steep ascent starting right there in front of you.

My walking pole certainly helped. I plodded along at a steady pace and was one of the last in to Isurava. Isurava was a welcome sight. The time was somewhere between midday and 1300 hours and the last part of the track had little cover overhead – it wasn't pleasant in the sun. The difference between standing in the sun and standing in the shade immediately adjacent was like comparing a sauna to an air-conditioned room. It really was that extreme.

I took my pack off and sat in the shade of a small tree. As I sat there, I was filled with admiration for what our Diggers had been through. It had taken all my effort just to carry my pack up the slope and I didn't have to think about an enemy out there who might try to kill me at any moment. The slope continued steeply to the top of the ridge above the village. Behind us, on the other side of Eora Creek, was the ridgeline where the 2/16th and 53rd Battalions met the Japanese on the right flank. I was totally amazed that 1100 Diggers had faced 6000 Japanese soldiers in this terrain. The Japanese way of fighting had been to make front-on, almost suicidal charges along the track and to move across the high ground to outflank the Australians. They must have been mountain goats.

All the village houses are up on posts and most of the ground is just bare. This looks a bit strange when you are used to house blocks with lawns. Alex said that this is to help keep the village clean of rubbish.

The villagers provided us with bananas, mandarins, sweet potato and yam for lunch. We chipped in a couple of Kina each for this food. The yam was salty and tasted great.

The current site of Isurava is not the same as in WWII. Alex indicated the direction to the old village and battle site and said it was about a 40 minutes walk away. We would not be going there. This was very disappointing. Murray had been told that the site was 'bad ground' due to the Japanese killing the remaining villagers after the Australians withdrew.

(I have been told subsequently that this massacre did not occur and that the site is not closed. My source says you can even camp there – he did last year).

After lunch, we had a group photograph taken around the memorial plaque that commemorates the Isurava battle. I went and filled my empty water bottles at a village watering point.

We left Isurava and headed for Alola, still a few hours away. Alola had been the site of Brigade HQ for the Isurava battle. The air temperature was much cooler under the dense canopy at altitude and this made the going easier. After some time, the track went around a large boulder. Murray had been told, on his previous visit, that this was where Bruce Kingsbury had been shot after the action in which he won the Victoria Cross. The lay of the land didn't gel with the accounts I had read of this action, but who knows?

Late in the afternoon, we came around a bend in the track and there in the distance was Alola. The village nestles on the slope, just above a big banana garden. Further along the valley, there was low cloud and maybe rain. It was a beautiful sight and I took a photograph.

The track descended along the side of the ridge and we crossed a small stream where two water / washing points were set up. Then it went up a short rise where an

archway had been decorated with flowers to welcome us. I was glad to see the guesthouse after a hard 10-hour day. I set up my mozzie tube, got my second set of clothes and then went back down for a wash.

Two long plant fronds (or maybe they were plastic pipes – I can't remember now for sure) were set out from the slope almost perpendicular to the flow of water. This arrangement resulted in two shower streams (for want of a better name). I stripped down to my jocks and squatted under one. The water was much colder than at Hoi. (Remember 4500 feet / 1370 metres elevation here compared to maybe 1300 feet / 400 metres). It took my breath away but I stayed there – it was very refreshing. I washed my walking clothes, got dressed and went up to cook dinner.

My meal was almost ready when one side of the hexi-stove collapsed and the cups-canteen toppled over spilling the contents onto the ground. I tried to scrape the rice and peas back into the cup but the result was unattractive. I couldn't be bothered starting again - I was too tired to care about food. I ate a muesli bar and a couple of bananas then I cleaned up and went to bed.

There was a cold wind blowing through the night. I wore my nylon jacket hoping it would keep me warm but woke up several times shivering. The village roosters announced dawn a bit early by my assessment of the prevailing light conditions. It wasn't a comfortable night.

Saturday 30.06.2001:

Didn't have much of an appetite for breakfast this morning. I ate a little bit of the porridge ration and threw the rest away. My stomach didn't feel sick but there was this low-grade, unsettled feeling. I visited the little-house O.K. I was finding it hard to drink the iodine treated water. I thought that a big drink of fresh water, straight from the creek, would make me feel better but that might have been too risky to do. (The simplest thing would have been to find those neutralizing tablets but I just didn't have the drive to do so).

I must make mention of why I had been taking a daily anti-inflammatory tablet. A few weeks before we left Australia, I went on a training-walk with Gill and Reuben. During this walk my left hip started hurting so much I could barely hobble along at times. The pain took a few days to pass and I decided to take a daily anti-inflammatory tablet as a precaution against joint aches and pains on the track. This medication must be taken with food and one side-effect can be an upset stomach. I decided, here at Alola, to stop taking this tablet in case it was contributing to my unsettled stomach. I ditched the pills and saved a few grams weight. (They do say that every little bit helps sometimes!)

I took a photograph of the memorial plaque at Alola.

I decided to wear a T-shirt instead of my heavy cotton, long-sleeved work-shirt. Hopefully, this would lessen the heat-load I had to contend with. Murray said he felt the heat yesterday and I noticed that he was wearing shorts instead of his cammo trousers. I was not going to fill all my water bottles here as there were supposed to be plenty of creeks along the track to re-supply from. (Four liters instead of six saved carrying an extra 2 kilograms weight).

We got underway about 0700 hours bound for Templeton's Crossing. Templeton's is

at just over 5000 feet / 1500 metres elevation – another cool night was ahead of us maybe. As we walked out of Alola, we looked down on low cloud back in the valley towards Kokoda. It was a magnificent sight but I couldn't be bothered stopping, taking my pack off, getting my camera out, taking the photograph, putting the camera away and putting the pack on again - so I didn't. I would have to get a copy of the photo from someone else.

The track descended steeply from Alola along the side of the ridge towards Eora Creek. It was a bit slippery in places and quite narrow. Sometimes it was only ten or so inches wide. The vegetation on the low side of the track was so thick it made a wall that gave a false sense of security. If you stopped and looked through this wall, you noticed that the slope dropped away very steeply - it would probably be a bit scary going along here otherwise. I slipped on the way down but stayed on the track and didn't injure myself.

Eventually, we reached the bottom of the slope and then it was up again. My track plan says, "very steep ascent into moist forest" and it wasn't wrong. After an hour or so of this, I was struggling again with my heat-load and sweating profusely. I was in the front half of the group and when we stopped for a break, I stripped off my T-shirt. I was breathing heavily but more in an exaggerated fashion as one might after a session of strenuous exercise. When Murray arrived, he took one look at me and told me to give my pack to Isaac. I knew I was doing it tough but I thought, or maybe just hoped that I could continue with my pack. I suppose that Murray didn't want to take any unnecessary chances and in the end I didn't argue the point.

As with yesterday, I got a bit emotionally stressed at having to give up my pack. The demons were really playing with my mind. I have no family connection to those who fought along the Kokoda Track in 1942 but through my reading about the campaign and the Four Corners program, I felt a deep appreciation for the efforts of these brave fellows. My trek was like a pilgrimage to visit the places where they fought and many had died. I wanted to carry my pack as a tribute to their efforts. I now felt ashamed and a bit of a failure.

I checked my pack again, desperate to cut down the weight of my load. I threw away my webbing belt and pad (about 600 grams or so). I was going to lose one of my cups canteens but Murray suggested it was useful kit I should keep. He said that if necessary, a porter could be arranged when we got to the next village in another day and a half. (Medi-vac out from Kagi would also be an option if I really crashed).

Murray got a spare banana from Peter and gave half to me and half to Reuben who was also struggling a bit. Liz gave me a packet of Isosport electrolyte mixture. I put some into a water bottle and had a big drink. Normally I find those sports electrolyte mixes too salty and can't drink them. (I had brought Salvital as my replenishment drink for this trek but that wasn't enough). The Isosport wasn't too bad and it definitely improved the iodine taste. Liz also gave me half a high-energy food bar.

Body-heat was a big problem for me. (I think now that my problems were all part of a dehydration cycle). I decided to convert my long, army-issue, cammo trousers into shorts. Liz used her knife and did the honours. I had originally decided to walk in long trousers and long-sleeved shirt (with sleeves rolled up to the elbow) as a means of minimizing cuts and scratches that could get infected in the tropical jungle environment. Almost half the group wore shorts right from the start. Some people wore 'longs' out of concern for leeches but this was never a consideration of mine.

The trousers conversion, the banana, the Isosport and a little rest started working

quickly in my favour. In fact, I started feeling so good I offered to carry Peter's pack so he could have a rest. (He was beginning to feel the effects of the heat too and thought about my offer but decided to press on himself). Isaac carried my pack for about an hour and once again, it was mostly downhill.

At the bottom of this descent was Eora Creek (again). This had been the site of much fierce fighting, especially later in the campaign when the Diggers pursued the Japanese troops withdrawing back over the Owen Stanley Range to the coast.

We sat down there and had a bit of rest and a smoko break. By this time, I was feeling good and looking forward to carrying my pack again. I thanked Isaac for his help and got my pack back. We crossed the log bridge with the assistance of our guides. The water was maybe mid-thigh deep and flowing fast but Murray just waded through by himself.

Once you climb up the last embankment from the creek, the track turns sharply left through the trees and climbs steeply up the ridge. For those going the other way, the turn down to the creek could be hard to see and looking at it, one could easily think that straight-ahead was the way to go. There was a deep pit on each side of the track at this turning point. These would be hazards for the unwary. I'm sure they are mantraps dug by the Japanese during their ultimate withdrawal. (There would have been sharpened bamboo stakes in the bottom to impale unfortunate Diggers).

We started passing Australian defensive positions. Tanya and Ronnie pointed out section pits and the like. I'd read that the last action seen by the 39th Bn on the Track had been at Eora Creek on 01 Sept 1942. Back then, under enemy fire, they covered the withdrawal of the 2/16th Bn across the creek. Maybe this is where that occurred.

We stopped for lunch further on up the knife-edge ridge. (The slope fell away steeply on each side of the track). Lunch had become one of the most eagerly anticipated parts of my day. In preparing my rations for the track, I had fluked upon cans of Trident brand, *Tom Yum – Spicy Thai* tuna. These contained a spicy, coconut-milk curry which was absolutely delicious. (I ate one can of this with four wholemeal crispbreads and always made the point of waiting till our proper lunch stop, not just morning smoko, to savour these delights).

Reuben took a photograph of me eating my tuna here above Eora Creek. I will send it to Trident with a little story if the photo turns out O.K. (It turned out not to be so).

Our destination this day was Templeton's Crossing. Captain Bert Kienzle named this crossing after Captain Sam Templeton of the 39th Bn. Kienzle was the ANGAU (Australia New Guinea Administrative Unit) Officer responsible for organizing the native carriers, the Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels, who carried supplies and stretcher cases along the track. Kienzle also found the Myola Lakes supply drop-zone. He blazed a new track from Myola back to the main track running between Kagi and Eora Creek. At this junction by Eora Creek he established a new campsite - Templeton's Crossing.

Today I worked out a way to mentally overcome those long, steep slopes ('false hope' and all). During my pre-trek training, I used to go to the steps at Kangaroo Point. I could carry a 23-25kg pack up and down 20 sets of the steps in about one hour and ten minutes. I always had a five-minute rest and drink of water after 10 sets. There were 106 steps from bottom to top, so every time I put my left foot down I'd count one, two, three.... up to 53 – this would be 1 set. I just counted off the sets

and would have a drink around the 10-set mark. After 20 sets, I'd have a short break and another drink then start again. It worked for me.

I also borrowed from Nancy's uphill walking technique. She takes deliberately short strides and it almost looks like she is stepping up a staircase. This seems a more efficient way to go – a greater number of easier steps compared to fewer, more difficult ones. It improved my endurance.

After another long day we got to Templeton's. As we walked in, there were a few drops of rain and the sky looked a little threatening. The Diggers often had to contend with afternoon torrential rain. I wasn't looking forward to such an experience myself. Templeton's is just a campsite without any facilities apart from Eora Creek for water and washing. We will be under the stars or rain clouds tonight.

I set up camp then went back down to the creek for a wash and water re-supply. There was a commemorative plaque with info about the battles fought there. When the Diggers ultimately pursued the Japanese back to the coast at Gona, it took three days fighting to retake this position and then another two weeks to retake the Eora Creek crossing. (We had simply walked this section in a few hours).

After my tub, I felt clean and refreshed but the walk back up the short, steep slope to the campsite was surprisingly very hard. It was almost like my body had got to Templeton's in the first instance and then said, "That's enough" and promptly shut down my desire for further physical effort.

I had a chat with Liz about how I was getting on in general and my drinking water in particular. She told me I only needed to use one iodine tablet per litre of water instead of the two mentioned on the dosage instructions. (That was good news). She also said that the neutralizing tablets would get rid of the iodine taint. I already knew this but when she said it, the queasy feeling in my stomach that always went with drinking the treated water, or even talking about it, disappeared instantly. It was like someone had waved a magic wand over me. I felt much better. I made the effort to unpack my kit, found the neutralizing tablets and attended to my water bottles straight away. After a half-hour wait, I had a big drink of neutralized water. It had a slightly citrus taint but still tasted pretty good.

I took a photograph of Alex, Isaac, Sabi, Colin and Kirol sitting around their campfire. They are great fellows

Alex, as the chief guide, walks at the back end of the line. He is very patient with us. He seems more serious than the other fellows but I suppose the ultimate responsibility for getting us through safely is his. (I seem to remember Alex saying that he has walked the Kokoda track eighty-something times).

Isaac usually hangs out at the front. He is much more vocal and has more laughs than Alex. He is heavy-set with wild, wiry hair that he usually wears with a top-knot. He has an old faded T-shirt with the name of an under-14 footy team printed on it. The shirt is his size and he has copped a bit of a ribbing about having been the biggest 13 year-old kid in the team. (Actually, he just has the shirt and was never in the team at all). Isaac's footwear is interesting – he wears Dunlop KT-26 joggers. I reckon there is advertising potential there – maybe he needs an agent.

Sabi is lean and wiry. He carries a machete and is forever making cuts on tree trunks or chopping twigs off branches as he goes along, often at the front of the group. He has a habit of calling out or singing loudly. These calls are usually

answered in kind by Isaac.

Colin is Mr. Patience. Angela is doing it tough on the down slopes especially and Colin is always right there at her side to help. He has a big, friendly smile. I am amazed to see that he walks barefoot up and down all slopes, no matter how steep or wet and hasn't slipped once to my knowledge.

Kirol has a very strong hand-grip that is particularly evident when he helps us over the log bridges.

Next, I replaced the blown bulb in my torch and then had dinner. I went to bed straight after eating but due to an accident earlier in the day, I was unable to wear my nylon jacket. I had brought along a bottle of liquid Nugget polish to keep my boots in good condition. At the afternoon smoko-stop, I wiped the mud off my boots then reached into my pack for the Nugget. My fingers found the bottle and the cap was off. I grabbed hold of the top and pulled. Out came the roller-ball plug and the bottle toppled over emptying most of the contents into my pack. The mess was contained in the top section with my nylon jacket sitting right in the puddle of liquid Nugget. I unpacked the top and as it was already soiled, I used the jacket to soak up the rest of the mess. At Templeton's, I rinsed it out but wasn't wearing it to bed wet and smelly.

I was cold during the night and I put on my poncho and a second pair of socks which helped. I think that a lightweight sleeping bag would have been a useful piece of kit to have. Geoff C found a cheap one at K-mart which is working for him.

Sunday 01.07.2001:

I woke up feeling like a new person compared to the previous two mornings – my tummy was fine and I looked forward to eating breakfast. There had been plenty of dew during the night and my walking clothes were still damp but that was not a problem.

After breakfast, I visited the latrine area just away from our bivouac site and picked a spot at the base of a tall, strong-looking tree. The size of my contribution to its future nutrition surprised me somewhat – I hadn't eaten that much the day before. I must have been on the road to recovery!

The latrine area was well marked with evidence of previous callers from our party. There were lengths of soiled toilet paper on the ground and dangling from the branches of bushes. This didn't strike me as being particularly appropriate. CSM Ronnie wasn't amused either. Tanya told me later that Ronnie had wanted to give us all a talking to about personal hygiene.

Today we head off to Narduli, the village that Alex comes from. It is also the home of one of the surviving Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels or Strongman (to use the local term). Meeting him will be a special event.

From Templeton's, we started along the main track to Kagi. Since crossing Eora Creek yesterday, there has been a sudden appearance of litter on the track. It is mainly empty noodle packets which I believe have been dropped by PNG people. I didn't expect to see this here on the track but I suppose there is no reason why some locals wouldn't litter like that.

The track passes through the Kokoda Gap at an elevation just under 7000 feet / 2100 metres. We had a smoko break here and I took a photograph of some big Pandanus

Palms. They were not as spectacular as some we have already passed along the track but I wasn't keen enough at those times to get my camera out. I'm certain some of these had been 100 feet / 30metres high with roots coming out from the trunk 30 feet / 10 metres above the ground. They were huge compared to ones I have seen in Australia.

The Kokoda Gap is about 11 kilometres wide and is formed because the ridges here peak lower than those on either side. I have read that Military High Command thought the Gap was just a narrow pass that could be defended by a relatively small number of troops, thus denying passage to a Japanese advance. Obviously, there was plenty of room for the Japanese to out-flank any Australian positions.

We got underway again and eventually turned off the main Kagi track and followed a long rolling ridgeline to Narduli. At one point we could see the open, grassy area of Myola Lakes in the distance. I have seen wartime documentary clips of C-47 "Biscuit Bombers" making low passes to drop supplies for the troops and today it wasn't hard to image that scene being played out. I would like to go there one day.

As we continued along the Narduli track, I got the feeling we had turned off the highway, so to speak and were traveling along a back-road. The trees and other vegetation seemed to close in on the track even more so and the path was less worn with a greater covering of moss and plants on the smaller scale. There were micro-forests of a plant about 8-inches high with leaves like pine needles poking out from a central stem. The track abounds with photo opportunities on both the grand and small scale for someone with the right equipment - though most can slip by without notice. Let me explain.

If you didn't look where you were walking almost all the time, there was a good chance you could come to grief by tripping, slipping or walking over the edge of a steep slope. Several times I forgot to stop walking before I started looking around at the scenery, or something that had been pointed out by another trekker and almost ended up hurting myself. Also, when the going was hard, you didn't want to look at the scenery anyway. I could well imagine someone walking the whole track and seeing very little of its natural beauty unless they made the effort to look. One good thing about being in a large group was that people saw different things as they went along and pointed them out to others.

Narduli gets its water supply by pipe from a stream some distance away. We followed the mostly-buried pipe and every so often passed a small pit from which gurgling sounds could be heard. This was the valve system for letting air out of the line.

Narduli seemed a long time coming. The ridgeline rolled on and on. Even though we were descending overall, there were still some long rises to go over. The going wasn't too hard and the view across the valley to the next ridgeline was magnificent. We passed fenced gardens where villagers were tending their crops and I saw my first coffee trees laden with beans. (The fences are made of wooden poles and sticks and are to keep the wild pigs out). Eventually we came to the Narduli airstrip and I got my camera out to take a photograph of Reuben, Tanya, Ronnie and Geoff R. Some children came along the track behind us dragging long wooden poles. They dropped their loads and ran over to join in the photo.

Andrew Idiki is the villager in charge of the guesthouse area. He welcomed us to his village and made the point that there was no trouble there. A welcome table had been set with fruit and flowers. At one end were a couple of framed photographs of

Strongman and a display of war relics including a rusted Bren gun, bayonets, Japanese helmets and rounds of machine gun and rifle ammunition.

Andrew said that Strongman was out working in his garden. He would visit us tonight or maybe in the morning.

There was no guesthouse building as such. A large tarpaulin was set up which we were able to sleep under but I camped outside next to the welcome table. Then I went for my daily tub (another eagerly anticipated part of the day). I found out where the washing area was and headed off down a path through the village. Two young fellows were walking up this track and I said, "Hello". I told them where I was going and they offered to show me the way. By the time I reached my destination, the escort had grown to a dozen or so fellows ranging in age from maybe 4 to 14 (it was hard to tell).

There are separate male and female washing places. The men's place is under a large tree. It is a rocky-bottomed depression and water streams out from an overhead pipe. My escorts were now all standing around the edge to watch. I imagined they were waiting to see my reaction to the cold water. No matter how cold it turned out to be, I was determined to just grin and bear it. Wearing only my jocks, I walked under the flow and stood there with the stream cascading off my head. It was cold all right but not as cold as at Alola. I took my time and enjoyed the freshness. After dressing, I went around and shook hands with all the onlookers then went back up to the campsite.

We had a football and pump for the children of each village we stayed in. The boys in Narduli play more soccer than Rugby but they handle the pointed ball with obvious skill.

A cloud of fog rolled in from across the valley, up the side of the ridge and through the village. It passed quickly and the scene was a little eerie while it lasted.

Andrew came around with a bowl of food for us to sample. It was a dish of chopped, baked nuts with salt and ginger. I don't know what sort the nuts were but it was very tasty.

Strongman came and visited our group. His name is Ovoru Idiki and he is 86 years old. Andrew is his son. I can only imagine that Strongman must be a true survivor to have lived such a long, hard, village life. He is small in stature, quite wiry looking and has a bent over posture, though he can stand straight. He walks with the aid of a stick. He was wearing an Australian Army peaked cap and on his T-shirt were his British Empire medal and two RSL badges. Strongman has a proud face with a big warm smile and we all greeted him with handshakes and "hellos". He doesn't speak English so Andrew translated our conversations.

Strongman posed for a group photograph with us. The villagers are very proud of him and want his story to be known by others outside. He has been asked to travel to Australia for a visit but will not go. He says he has already been in one aeroplane crash and will now only travel on the ground.

Geoff R and I had some gifts for Strongman. Geoff gave him a current Australian Army cap badge. I gave him a WWII Rising Sun badge and some WWII Army uniform buttons. I had brought along an inkpad and some cards. Through Andrew, I asked if Strongman would put his thumbprint of these cards for me. He did.

A dinner table was set for us with bananas, mandarins, boiled rice, sweet potato, yam and boiled ckoko leaves. There was even sauce and salt provided. After dinner, we sat around sharing our thoughts about the trek so far. Annie recorded this discussion to include in a history project she is working on for her job (secondary school teacher). A couple of themes were prominent in our comments. There was admiration for the sheer physical achievements of those who fought the battles in this most difficult terrain. Also, the spirit of the local people, who extended to us the same welcome and help that their forefathers gave to the Diggers in WWII, was very much appreciated.

Later on, a choir of adults and children singing songs with a religious friendship theme entertained us. Some of our ladies reciprocated by getting the Hokey Pokey going. As part of their final song, the children came around and gave each of us a small posy of flowers and a handshake. It was a wonderful end to a great day.

Back in Australia tonight, the mighty Queensland Maroons take on the New South Wales Blues in the deciding game of the Rugby League, State of Origin series. I went to bed wondering how Queensland would fare. I wished I had a radio to listen to.

Monday 02.07.2001:

It was another cold night. I woke up and put on my poncho. (My nylon jacket still stinks of boot polish). We had a sleep-in as the destination of the day, Efogi was not that far away.

After I went to bed last night, I heard some cheering and loud calling-out coming from somewhere in the village. Morning brought the reason for this excitement – the villagers had listened to a broadcast of State of Origin III on a radio. The news was great – Queensland had whopped The Blues and won the series trophy.

Strongman came and visited our group again this morning. I got a photograph of him and me together.

More fresh fruit was provided for breakfast and also a tasty dish which simply turned out to be baked, grated banana and ginger. I put some leftovers in my pack for smoko later on.

It was sad to leave Narduli. The people had been so welcoming. Also, we were saying goodbye to a bit of living history. I wondered how many years Strongman has left. I hope he has as many as he wants. Andrew, his wife Beatrice and lots of other villagers came to say goodbye to us.

We walked through the village down the track past the church. In the distance, on the next ridge, was the village of Kagi. Isaac comes from there. He zipped over last night in just 45 minutes to see his family. I wonder how many hours it would have taken our group? This view was one photo opportunity I took advantage of.

The track passed around the ridge spur to the left and then descended quite steeply to a creek crossing. The footing on the way down was quite wet and it required care to avoid slipping. The vegetation here was really lush.

A long, steep climb brought us into Efogi North. We had smoko and bought bananas

from the villagers. There was a small monument made of rocks and mortar next to where we stopped. This is supposed to be a Japanese memorial but there is nothing to indicate this fact on the monument.

The next major battle after Isurava was fought along Mission Ridge which is the next ridgeline on from Efogi North. The 2/27th Battalion occupied positions on the Northern slopes of Mission Ridge with the 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions further South on higher ground. Brigade HQ was sited on the high feature which came to be known as Brigade Hill / Butchers Hill. On the night of 6th September 1942, the Japanese troops moved down the slopes opposite the Australian positions in a lantern parade. The Australians had no long-range weapons and could do nothing but watch this strange event occur. Brigadier Potts signaled Moresby requesting a bombing and strafing operation and on the morning of the 7th, the air force attacked Efogi. The Japanese spent the rest of the 7th probing for the Australian positions and on the 8th a most intense and bitter battle was fought on the ridge.

We headed down the ridge to Elome creek. It was steep and slippery. I was at the back with Geoff R, Gill and Angela. Not far from the bottom, Gill slipped and fell. As he went over, he rolled and his left knee struck the ground hard. We could do nothing to prevent the fall once it started. The injury didn't look good. The knee became swollen and painful almost straight away.

There was a log bridge across the creek and then a short, steep walk up into Efogi South. It was great to arrive so early in the afternoon. I could set up camp, have a wash, and get organized at my leisure.

The guesthouse was the biggest and most solid we had stayed in so far. It had a laid timber floor and one room had a sink, taps and cupboards. This was obviously the kitchen, though no water was connected. The kitchen wallpaper pattern was a montage of old newspaper sports clippings. Reuben and I claimed this space for our packs.

I explored all the kitchen cupboards and they contained nothing more than a few old kerosene lamps. Written on the inside of one door was the name and address of a fellow, Roger Garland from Huntington Beach in California, USA. I wondered how he ended up walking the Kokoda Track (I will have to write and ask about his experience).

Just inside the front (and only) door was a room with a fireplace on the floor! This was where our guides would cook and sleep. The smoke from their fire should keep any mosquitoes at bay, though so far on the trek, I hadn't seen or heard any mozzies at all.

I went down to the creek for a tub. Just upstream from the log bridge there was a small log weir and the resulting pool was just over waist-deep. The water was warmer than at Narduli. I washed myself and my walking clothes and had a bit of a bob around for 20 minutes or so.

I strung my clothesline up outside the guesthouse and dried my flysheet and wet clothes. Up in the kitchen, I tied one end of my mozzie tube to the louver frame and the other end to my pack which I leaned against the opposite wall.

We had started our trek from Kokoda carrying a five-day supply of food rations. Another four-day lot had been packed separately and flown in to Efogi for us. I collected my re-supply and set about cutting down my pack weight. We only had

another three and a half days on the track and I still had some original food left as well as my emergency ration pack. I gave away a couple of rice dishes, a dozen chocolate biscuits, 6 muesli bars and a couple of packets of porridge mix. I also ditched most of the roll of 'wet-ones' I was carrying to clean my hands with.

Andrew gave me a couple of sachets of electrolyte drink mix. I prepared some straight away and had a big drink. Andrew is doing this trek without much difficulty I think. He is very fit and told me that in the Army Reserves he used to carry a 40 kg pack at times. (He was a Sig and carried the radio in his pack as well). His long legs take him over most obstacles with ease and he is the quickest in the group at getting his boots off for crossing creeks.

I went for a walk around the village with Reuben and Geoff C. There is a small museum building that was locked. I looked through a window and saw there were only a few rusted weapons and helmets on display. Further on, we saw a covered table with coffee beans spread out on it to dry. I took photographs of the Museum and the coffee bean table. Many houses had raised chicken coops close by. Efogi has an airstrip and we went down to have a look at it. From the village-end, the airstrip slopes away with a bit of a grade for maybe a hundred metres. Then the grade increases dramatically and it runs DOWN for another two or three hundred metres to the edge of the ridge. It must be a magnificent experience approaching across the valley and then landing uphill. The down-hill take-off must be exciting too.

Zoltan (the physiotherapist) took a professional look at Gill's knee. The swelling and pain is increasing. They will decide tomorrow if Gill can continue on the trek or if he should be flown out.

The gift of football and pump was well received by the village children. Peter also gave balloons to some kids. I had a laugh to myself about this. One kid had a balloon and was blowing it up but his younger sibling had missed out. The little one was getting quite worked up about this situation and in the end an adult made the bigger kid hand the balloon over to the younger one. So much for village peace and harmony – this reminded me of the Bushmen children fighting over the Coke bottle in *"The Gods Must Be Crazy"*.

Once again we were a source of interest to the villagers. A group formed and just sat there watching us as we went about cooking tea or whatever. The people seemed very polite. They were happy to talk if we approach them first and the children certainly didn't ask us for anything. (Murray said that the village children are brought up not to ask for things). All the smiling faces and the idyllic village setting could give a visitor the impression that this would be an attractive lifestyle. I'm sure that village life is hard though. If this were our lot, we certainly wouldn't be traveling overseas to go on Kokoda treks and experience other cultures. We do live in a lucky country.

Not far from the guesthouse lived a young mum with a relatively newborn baby. The baby was sick and cried a lot. It sounded like a chest condition to me. Liz talked to the lady who is a teacher but there was nothing she could do to help. I saw lots of kids with dirty, runny noses in this village. There are no bulk-billing doctors here.

I was carrying more hexi-tabs than I needed, so I spent some time boiling up drinking water. This caused some concern late in the afternoon as the flame was reflecting off the kitchen walls and louvers. From outside, in the fading light, the place looked like it could have been on fire. Murray came in to check it out but all was sweet.

I was feeling quite good within myself. My only craving was for some high fat, salty

food. When I had made up my ration packs, I chose rice dishes instead of pasta ones because at that time, I found the pasta too salty. I should have included some after all and I shouldn't have left that Parmesan cheese back in Port Moresby. Gill swapped one of his cheesy pasta meals for one my Indian Rices of the World. I cooked this up for dinner and savored every mouthful. YUM YUM YUM. I now felt absolutely great. The change to my walking attire had sorted out my heat-load problem. My water supply was fixed and I was drinking like a fish. My tummy was back to normal and my food tasted great. Wouldn't be dead for quids.

The Lik Lik house in Efogi was worthy of special mention. I visited not long after we arrived and it was a good thing I looked before I walked in. Three poos had been deposited on the floor nowhere even near the hole. I avoided these and picked my squatting position carefully. I noticed a dung beetle working hard rolling a ball of poo away to wherever. In this situation, I had to admire its efforts. Later on, Geoff C found a shovel and cleaned up the mess for us.

After dinner, most of us sat around chatting. It was well and truly dark by then but there was a bright half-moon and Mother Nature turned on a bit of a show for us. A huge bank of cloud, quite visible in the moonlight, spilled over the ridge from Efogi North. It was like a giant, luminous blob. Another came up around the end of the ridgeline from the direction of the airstrip. They came together overhead and rolled across the village. It was another eerie scene.

I went to bed about 2100 hours and slept well.

Tuesday 03.07.2001:

We had another sleep in – maybe 0600 hours. The news was not good for Gill. His knee was quite swollen and sore. He had planned a further two weeks holiday in PNG after this trek and if he continued with us then he could end up missing out on the other trip. He flew out about 0700 hours back to Port Moresby to recuperate. I heard the aircraft arrive but didn't get down to watch it take-off. With Gill went the best camera in the group. I think Angela might also have had a 35mm SLR but the rest of us only had those modern compacts or the throwaway type.

I will miss Gill. I did some extra training walks with him and Reuben and up to this point of the trek, it would be fair to say that along with a couple of others, we are finding it a bit tougher than the rest. We have had an interest in each other's progress. I hope he recovers in Moresby.

I met a villager called Davis LUGELA. He was standing around watching us and looked a bit cold in his shorts and thin jumper. I went over and we had a chat. I asked Davis if he would like me to send him a jumper and he said, "Yes please". I reckoned one of my old warm Customs jumpers would be appreciated.

We walked out of Efogi past the airstrip and started the climb up Mission Ridge. I took a photograph looking back over the village.

At one point, we walked past a new garden plot that was being prepared. Some of the trees and most bushes had been felled. Other trees were left standing but all their branches had been chopped off. I took a photograph of this plot.

There was one section on the climb up Mission Ridge that I found worthy of extra caution. The track climbs steeply up an exposed rocky part of the spur line and if you

slipped here you would probably do yourself some real damage. There were also a couple of overhanging rocks to avoid getting your pack caught up on. The view across the valley was magnificent from here but I didn't take a photograph.

Even though there were many really fit people in this group, Tanya and Ronnie stood out. Not only did they carry their packs up the slopes with apparent ease, they sung loudly as they went. They got a song going, something about the Quartermaster's Store and made up a verse for each person in the group. I had heard the real tune before but I didn't recall the name and never thought to ask what it was.

We passed a group of school kids heading home for the holidays to Popendetta. I reckoned they were in their early-mid teens and they were getting along at a quick pace. Someone said they had come from a school in Moresby – talk about being fit.

Eventually we came to a steep side-track leading up to Brigade Hill. It was here that 21st Brigade HQ was nearly cut off and annihilated by the Japanese in a bitter flanking attack supported by mountain guns and heavy weapons. Acting-Corporal Charlie McCallum, who was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his heroic action covering the withdrawal of his platoon at Isurava, lost his life along with many others in the effort that saved Brigade HQ. We dropped our packs beside the track and went up to see the site.

On Brigade Hill there is a commemorative plaque with a very moving verse inscribed. I took a photograph but did not expect my throwaway camera to do it justice. Nearby is a plot where the bodies of 40 Diggers had been buried but I don't believe the bodies are still there. I had a photograph taken of me standing next to this plot.

It was pretty hard to be at such a place and not reflect on what I had read about the battles that occurred there. When the Digger's positions became untenable, they withdrew over the Eastern side of the ridge and picked up a rough track that led down to Menari. I went back to where our packs were and walked off the track some 10 meters in this direction. The vegetation was so thick that all signs of the track disappeared behind me – it could have been anywhere, though I knew it was back up the slope. I took a photograph of the 'view' and found myself trying to imagine this place in September 1942. What struck me most was the realization that an enemy could be just metres away and you wouldn't know they were there until it was too late. This must have been a terrible thought for the Diggers to contend with.

I went back to the group and we continued on to Menari. From time to time, the village was visible on the lower slopes of the next ridge. It was just "over there" but I wasn't falling into the trap of thinking that this meant we'd be there soon. With six days track experience under my belt, I knew we still had a bit of travel down and up to do first.

At the bottom of the descent we reached a magnificent creek set in a deep, densely timbered gorge. A log footbridge, with a dog-leg bend supported by a large boulder, was the way across. Sabi and Kirol helped us over without incident. Menari was said to be some 20 - 30 minutes further on but such a beautiful setting could not be passed-by without a smoko break and swim. The water was cool and fast flowing. It was deep enough to jump in safely from the bridge and many of us did. I had just jumped in when Tanya stood on the bridge and asked where the deepest part was. I pointed it out then moved away in the strong current. She promptly turned around and got set for a back flip. My blood ran cold - I would hate for her to have an accident out here. I asked her not to do this but to no avail. She jumped this way safely, time and time again.

This is such an idyllic setting. I thought of that television commercial for Cussons Soap where the rich fellow and his wife are looking at travel brochures while taking a bath. He says over an intercom, "Tahiti looks nice" and then the scene cuts to an aircraft altering its course. I could just imagine someone saying, "Menari Creek looks nice. Lets fly in for a BBQ".

It was hard to leave that place but we still had a village to get to. We climbed up from the creek and continued on for a short time – maybe only 15 minutes. The track enters Menari along its airstrip and villagers at the top waved to us as we walked up. It really wasn't that far back to Menari Creek but once we got to the guesthouse and I put my pack down, I didn't fancy the walk back at all. I was pleased to have arrived.

Reuben and I both set up our mozzie tubes in the passage between the two main accommodation rooms. I got my change of clothes and toiletries bag and asked Alex where the washing creek was. Kirol is from Menari and he came along to show the way. We walked up through the village, turned right around the last house and then down the pathway through a banana grove. Kirol's father and two daughters were coming the other way along the track. He introduced me to his Dad, Billy.

On the way back from my wash, I passed Billy sitting with a group of adults and children under a shelter. He called out, "Hello Michael" and I went over. I met his wife, eldest daughter, daughter-in-law and several grandchildren. We chatted for a while.

Back at the guesthouse, the villagers had provided fruit, sweet potato, yams and a big bowl of salted cucumber for us. The cucumber was a particular treat and I had my fair share.

The Menari children enjoyed the football we gave them. Some of our group got a game of touch footy going but I didn't join in. Since day 2 of the trek, my left heel has been sore. Walking barefoot is painful and my reef shoes only provide a little padding. With my boots on, walking uphill doesn't hurt at all; downhill hurts a little but walking on flat ground is quite painful. I have been giving myself foot massages but things aren't improving. Thankfully, there is little very flat ground along the Kokoda Track.

Someone told me that the other fork of the track down to the washing creek led to a small waterfall. I went back down for a look and another dip. There was a large frog sitting on a dry rock within the creek. The frog was a pale brown colour like that of drinking chocolate and this gave good camouflage against the rock.

After I got back to the guesthouse, I went for a walk around the village with Geoff C. Like Efogi and Narduli before, the biggest and most significant building is the Church. The main Christian faith here is Seventh Day Adventist. I was told that its followers don't eat pork. It seems a shame to me that wild pigs can't be utilized as a source of protein for the villagers. I'm sure it would help their diet.

Late in the afternoon, I went back to see Billy and his mob. I took the photograph of Jennifer, Gabriel and Maxim that was in my wallet and showed it to them. They smiled as they repeated the names and seemed especially pleased with "Gabriel", being I suppose, the name of an Archangel.

The shelter they were sitting under was their cooking area. (Next-door is the sleeping house). A fire was burning and food was being prepared. I took a photograph of them all and one of the grandchildren held my family photograph up to

the camera.

For dinner that night I had a Thai Pasta, *Cup-of-Soup* meal that I had swapped for a Satay, *Rices of the World* with Nancy. I added some instant mashed potato, rice noodles, peas, salt and juice from one of the veggie pots provided by the villagers. My meal wasn't very tasty but I did manage to eat the lot, albeit slowly. I also drank a litre of water and had four squares of chocolate for dessert.

There was a radio transmitter in the guesthouse. Alex used it to make comms with base at Ower's Corner I think, or maybe it was Moresby?

Wednesday 04.07.2001:

It was cold during the night but I slept well. There was one nature call to deal with that liter of water I drank at dinnertime, as I couldn't hold on. Finding your way to the Lik Lik house in the dark could have been a problem, even with a torch, as most were some distance (though not too far) from where we slept. Ronnie had organized a supply of luminous sticks and each night she thoughtfully set one up on the Lik Lik house. This clearly showed where you had to head for.

One of the village roosters started crowing at a time that was obviously well before dawn. (Maybe he was on daylight saving time). It woke me up and I wasn't able to get back to sleep.

After daylight, I got up and looked out the window at the new day. I watched one rooster, a big colourful cockerel, strut all the way up to the far end of the village and back again. His bearing suggested he was the No.1 rooster in the village. (I don't know if he was the one that couldn't tell the time though).

After breakfast and repacking, I went back to say goodbye to Billy. I asked him if he would like me to send a present once I got home. He said, "Yes please" and I wrote his postal address down. (I thought jumpers would be useful). As I turned to leave, Billy said, "Please wait here Michael". He went into his sleeping house and came back carrying a small shoulder bag which he gave to me. His wife had made the bag in a traditional style. It was a wonderful gift to receive.

I was most of the way back to the guesthouse when I heard the call, "Michael, Michael" behind me. It was Billy heading my way. I went back and he said, "You want to send me a present. When I read my Bible, I cannot see the words very well. Can you please send me some glasses and some for my woman?" I promised to do that for him.

I had a bit of excitement when finally leaving the guesthouse. As I walked from the porch onto the top step of the stairway, a support post broke and it collapsed to the ground with me following. The distance was only about four feet but with my backpack on, I had a heavy landing though I kept my footing and didn't hurt myself. We all got a good laugh from this incident. The post was inspected, repositioned and re-nailed by a village elder. (I think he might have been the village headman).

There is a sign on the guesthouse at Menari. It reads: -

MENARI
KOKODA 53.7 kms →
EFOGI 4 ½ Hours

← OWERS CORNER 36.3 kms
NAORO 3 ½ Hours
TOP OF RIDGE 1 ¼ Hours

Looking up at the top of the ridgeline above the village, there is a narrow clearing like one you might expect to see for an electric power-line. It is actually a clearing where villagers signal from to the next ridge (where a similar clearing would be) or back down to the village.

Murray reckoned that the going for the day would be five hours. We would go up for about 1½ hours then down and across the swamp and a few creeks and into Naoro.

We walked out through the village up past Billy's place. I was at the back with Geoff R. Annie was just ahead and she said farewell to the locals with the Pidgin phrase, "Lookim you behind". She had to bend over to adjust her bootlaces or whatever and I said, "Yes Annie, Lookim you behind".

It was another long slog up and I just plodded on. The sun was hot as usual and even though I was sweating heaps, I felt good.

Once over the top of the ridge, we started a long, steep descent. Sometimes on the down-slopes, momentum builds up and all you can do is go with the flow when your footing slips. On this slope however, there were a number of deadly stakes beside the track about mid-thigh in height (remnants of small trees). A fall onto one of these could have serious consequences. A number of our female colleagues made the standard comment about males doing themselves particular damage on such an obstacle. I had to agree with this observation and commented that we all have femoral arteries to look out for. I was relieved to reach the bottom of this one without incident.

My walking stick was a little shorter from all the wear and tear. It was a big help and I had got used to the feel of it in my hand. After one rest break early in the morning, Reuben accidentally took my walking stick. I picked up his, which had been next to mine and immediately felt that it was not right. I got that one sorted out quickly as I didn't want to lose MY stick.

The going became flatter and a bit easier, though as we moved along beside the river and through the swamp area, it was warmer and more humid. (The vegetation cover was a bit more open and we were at a lower altitude – about 1600 feet / 500 metres).

We walked into Naoro past houses where people sat in the shade watching us. I really had the feeling that we were invading their privacy. There was something about the way they looked at us. This place had a less friendly feel about it. Maybe it was just my imagination.

At one point, we had to cross a swampy patch by means of a narrow, log footbridge that sat just above water level. It was the dry season and the water was a bit stagnant with an unpleasant smell. The footbridge was wobbly and as more of us crossed over, it became wetter and slipperier. Ronnie was the only one to end up in the slush. It was a bit messy and her bright red soccer shirt wasn't pretty – but that would wash out.

There was a very small hut in the Naoro camping area. It had a sign on it offering accommodation for 5 Kina a night. I suppose that fee applied to the grounds too and

would have been taken care of in our trek costs. Alex and the guides set up camp in the hut while we all opted for a night under the stars. The sky looked a bit ominous to me but 'Barometer' Geoff C said it wouldn't rain. (Later I asked a local fellow who agreed with Geoff's prediction).

I set up camp just beside the creek along with Peter, Nancy and Murray. To one side of my site was what looked like an overgrown rubbish tip. There were black, greasy smears on the ground nearby that were attracting the blowflies. I thought about relocating to another area but I rectified the situation by collecting armfuls of dried grass and putting it on the greasy patches. The blowies shot through after this so I stayed put.

The creek we were camped next to would be a tributary of the Brown River. It was a bit disappointing as a swimming hole as the water was almost warm and not even knee deep.

I ate a big lunch. Annie had given me a can of chilli tuna she didn't want. I was going to keep it as an extra treat for the last day, Friday but decided to fill-up for our next days effort. We would have a climb up to 4450 feet / 1357 metres and Murray suggested it would be 4 hours up then 3 down. There would be no water available on the way up so I'd be carrying a full water load from the start.

I noted the sign on the guesthouse: -

NAORO
← KOKODA 66.9 kms
RIVER CROSSING 1 Hour
MENARI 3 ¾ Hours

(I must have forgotten to note the sign details for the direction to Owers Corner – or maybe there weren't any?).

After lunch, I visited the Lik Lik House. When I finished my business, I stood there just inside the door and turned my mind to how the facility was constructed. It seemed to me that first a deep rectangular pit is dug. A number of strong bearer logs are laid across the pit and then a floor of smaller logs is laid across these. A hole is left somewhere near the center and mud is put over the top to make an earth floor. Suddenly I fell to the ground with my left leg disappearing up to mid-thigh level down a new hole. One of the top logs had crumbled between two bearers. I was lucky I didn't cut myself on the exposed jagged ends of this log. I didn't land in anything unpleasant as the pit was quite deep and the business would have been more towards the center of the floor.

I went and announced to Murray that I had something for inclusion in his trek diary. I told him there was now a second hole in the floor of the Lik Lik house, just inside the doorway. Those who had already visited would need to look out for it to avoid surprise and possible injury on their next visit. Everyone got a good laugh from the story. After the earlier mishap in Menari and then this, I was getting a reputation for breaking things. Murray reckoned I was lucky there were no more villages to do damage in before we finished.

Not long afterwards, Peter went to the Lik Lik house and there was a large snake inside. He made a quick exit and sounded the alert. He said it was a Copperhead.

I went for a bit of a walk around the village. It is quite spread out. At the front of one house was a VERY pregnant woman sitting preparing food. I wondered if Liz would have to attend during the night. Geoff and Reuben came back from another section of the village with news that they had come by a woman mourning over a fresh grave.

Naoro has an airstrip that is now overgrown and out of service.

I gave the football I was carrying in my pack to children in this village. Someone else handed over a pump. We had a bit of trouble getting the pump to work until it was discovered that an inside component of the valve stem was reversed. Once this was turned around the pump worked and we demonstrated its use to the kids.

We collected wood for a fire and after dinner sat around the flames for quite some time. It had been a good day. I slept well. Due to the lower altitude, the night was not as cold as previous ones and there was a bit less dew about in the morning.

Thursday 05.07.2001:

Today we would be going over the Maguli Range. There are supposed to be 9 false crests on the way to the top. (*"I can feel some false hope coming on"* – Sorry Mr. Fourex).

We got underway and went back over the log bridge where Ronnie had come to grief the day before. Today was a different story – no slips at all. We went past some houses then started the climb up. One thing about the nine false crests was that no one was sure when to start counting - was the very first rise out of the village part of the count or not? Time would tell and as I have already mentioned, Murray reckoned there was a four-hour ascent to look forward to.

We came across a group of three or four huts on top of a knife-edge ridge. There was a lovely fenced garden with flowers, bananas, sweet potato and other crops. The view from here was magnificent. The men here were building a new hut and had a string-line set to cut the main stump posts level.

There were some good steep climbs on the way up and the short respites of flat were appreciated (even though they made my left heel hurt more). We made good progress and after only 2 ½ hours it was announced that we had reached the top. I took a photograph of a soldier's weapons pit on top of the range. It was a bit overgrown but I didn't know what lay further along the track to take a photo of.

We started our descent of the Maguli and I felt pretty relaxed with the thought of 3 hours in the down direction. I didn't remain relaxed for long - It wasn't all down. There seemed to be plenty of long ups as well. Remembering what Murray had said previously, I hoped we were going the right way.

As we went along, I noticed it was common to find weapons pits / defensive positions dug in at the top of sections of slope. A couple of these pits were in quite good condition with little sign of weathering. I was amazed that they had survived so long in the tropical jungle environment escaping the ravages of the weather and human interference. I stood behind one pit and looked back down the slope along the track. I imagined the Japanese soldiers coming into the line of fire and the Digger defending this position until withdrawing further along the track at an appropriate time.

Geoff R and I were traveling at the rear of the group. The track climbed up towards a knoll, and then just short of the top it veered to the right around the knoll and descended. Looking at this high ground, the placement of previous defensive positions suggested to me there would be something up there too. I mentioned this to Geoff and we told Alex we were going up for a look. We went up to a flat area about 20 metres by 10 metres and were not disappointed. A shallow trench ran around the Eastern half of the perimeter maybe one metre from the edge. There was a series of pits dug perpendicular to the trench out to the edge of the slope. We had seen nothing like this so far on the track. A couple of years ago Geoff went to Gallipoli and has a photograph of him standing in one of the trenches there. I took a photograph of him standing in this one.

We then commenced a very long and steep descent. As I made my way down, I thought to myself that it would be a hard slog going the other way. Part of the way down, there was a flat, open area with very long grass. (Maybe Kunai grass?).

(From the track plan I have, I reckon the knoll with the trench is at the top of the slope above the abandoned village of Ioribaiwa. This track runs down to Ua Ule creek).

At the bottom of the descent we had lunch and I went for a swim in the creek. This was very refreshing under the cool jungle canopy. After lunch, we went up and down a bit of a ridge spur then followed Ua Ule creek, crossing back and forth many times. I began to wonder just how far away the campsite was - all this walking over the river rocks was starting to make my foot really hurt.

It was getting late, about 1700 hours and the light was fading fast. We still weren't at the intended campsite when Sabi pulled up at the front and waited for Alex and the rear echelon to catch up. After a bit of talk, the guys started hacking away at the bush beside the track with their machete knives. In no time at all, a clearing was made – instant campsite. We set up there right beside the track. Andrew and Zoltan had their accommodation over the track itself and I hoped there would be no traffic along through the night. I found a space between two trees, cleared the ground and set up my mozzie tube and fly. What little you could see of the sky looked ominous. Alex wasn't sure if it would rain or not.

There was a scurry of activity from Sabi as he chased down a bandicoot type animal that had been quietly minding its own business in the undergrowth. I thought it was going to become the night's main course and I looked forward to the prospect of having a taste. But no, Sabi just showed the animal to us then let it go.

I went down to the creek for a tub. Ronnie and Tanya came down for theirs and went a bit further on to be shielded from view by a large rock and log. Later on, Ronnie apologized to me for apparently walking into view in an unclothed state. I had to say that in all honesty I hadn't seen a thing – not that I would have been offended if I had. Her strength and stamina are obvious to all. The term, 'Amazon' comes to mind, though I believe these warrior women were supposed to have had one breast removed for ease of shooting their bows and arrows. Ronnie most certainly hasn't had any such modification to herself. She practices what looks like a martial arts stick-fighting technique with her walking pole. I asked her where she gets all her physical prowess from and she said her Dad. He had been in the SAS. I'm sure if Ronnie had been born a boy, she could have been there too.

Zoltan and Angela shared a feast for tea. Zoltan had a big bag of pasta shells and Angela provided a packet of creamy soup mix to add. The result smelled wonderful.

I enjoyed my last sachet of satay rice and had a bit of dry salted meat that Gill gave me at Efogi - I wasn't complaining about my lot at all.

Murray got a bonfire going but I was too tired to go over. I went to bed and slept.

Friday 06.07.2001:

We got underway at 0700 hours without breakfast and continued along Ua Ule creek, crossing from side to side many more times. The group started to string out and I was in line following Peter. He was maybe 30 metres ahead and because of the loose and slippery river rocks, I was carefully watching where I tread. At one point, I looked forward and just caught a glimpse of him through the bushes as he disappeared around a bend. By coincidence, a track actually left the creek bed just before this bend. I could have easily gone up this track (the wrong way) if I hadn't caught the fleeting glimpse of his head.

Eventually, we left the creek and started heading up Imita Ridge. I was getting hungry and munched on a few peppermint lollies. They hit the right spot.

At 0800 hours, most of us were ready for a feed. The lead group had stopped near a small waterfall and decided it was mealtime. When Murray caught up, he had a word or two to say about unsatisfactory track discipline (spreading out too much and risking losing people – how true). We had a break and a feed then continued the trek upwards.

The Northern side of Imita Ridge was the steepest slope of the trek according to my track plan, though it was not the longest. The ground was a bit damp and slippery in places but the going wasn't too bad if you trod carefully. Thank goodness we hadn't had to walk in the rain – some of those slopes would have been very difficult to negotiate. Murray certainly picked the right time of year for our trek.

On the way up, we passed a "Track Closed" sign that had been put up by local landowners in December 2000. (I had seen this sign on the television coverage of the trek by members of the Sydney Swans, Aussie Rules team earlier in the year).

Back in 1942, Imita Ridge was the limit of the Australian troop's withdrawal. New Guinea Force HQ in Port Moresby (only 35 miles away) would allow no further withdrawal – the Diggers were ordered to die there if necessary. As it was, the Japanese General Horii was ordered to withdraw his force from Ioribaiwa back to Gona / Buna and consolidate these positions on the coast. (Reinforcements and supplies were needed at Guadalcanal which was under attack by United States Marines).

Where the track goes over the top of Imita Ridge is not a big area. All the Diggers who marched forward over the Owen Stanley Range to meet the Japanese had passed this very place where I was sitting. Many did not return and it was sobering to think of them.

Reuben took a photograph of Isaac, Sabi, Colin and me with my camera. Unfortunately, Alex and Kirol were missing when it was taken and I didn't have enough shots left for another when they resurfaced. (I wanted to keep the last few for the Bomana War Cemetery).

There was a murmur of excitement among some of the group that the slope up Imita

Ridge had been our last climb, though I believed there was still one more decent hike ahead of us up from the Goldie River to Ower's Corner.

The Southern side of Imita Ridge was very steep, wet and greasy. Care had to be taken here. In 1942, the 'Golden Stairs' were constructed on this slope for the Diggers to climb. They were made of logs held in place by wooden pegs. They were of uneven height and in the rain became a quagmire of mud. In such conditions, they were more of a hindrance than a help. The stairs have long since perished.

Zoltan almost came to grief on the way down. I didn't see his fall start because I was at the front and he was in line behind but I heard the cries from those close-by as he went over the side. I turned around to see him sliding down the steep, greasy slope. I reckon he went 15 metres before he was stopped by, or got a hold on, a tree trunk. He wasn't injured and was able to regain his feet and make his way back up to the track.

There was a barrier fence built across the track on this Southern side. (Part of the December 2000 closure). We posed for photographs at it.

The track continued down then up and around a spur and eventually we came to the Goldie River. This would be a considerable obstacle in 'The Wet'. (I noticed there were flying fox points set up at this crossing). On this occasion, it was only mid-thigh deep at the most and we just waded across through the strong current. I had been for a swim in all the streams of any significance thus far and wasn't going to miss out on this last one. I took my pack off and placed it on the bank then lay down in the water to enjoy the cool, cleansing feeling. I didn't even take my boots off.

All that was left now was the last climb up to Ower's Corner and the bus that would collect us for the ride back to Port Moresby. This took a bit longer than some expected. I think I counted my way through about 8 mental sets of the Kangaroo Point steps, though in the midday sun it was hard to concentrate on an accurate count. Reuben, Geoff R, Angela and I brought up the rear with Alex and Colin. After about half an hour we heard cheering up ahead as other members finished.

At the top of the crest, a magnificent memorial archway came into view marking the end of the track. As I came up the last part of the slope and walked under it, I was filled with a sense of pride, elation and some relief. I looked back through the archway and was struck by a magnificent vista of sheer-sided ridges running along the other side of the Goldie River Valley. The view was 100% Mother Nature and I'm sure it hasn't changed in the 59 years since the Diggers passed this way. I wondered what they had thought looking at this same view as they headed off into the great unknown of the Kokoda Track to confront the Japanese?

Our mate Gill was there to meet us with a carton of cold stubbies and his good camera. Team Kokoda 2001 was complete again and we all stood in front of the memorial for a photograph.

The memorial has six vertical steel columns representing the six States and Territories of the Australian Commonwealth. The steel struts linking these columns represent the support given to the Australians by the Papuan Soldiers and the Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels. The profile of the memorial represents the contours of the Owen Stanley Range.

The central strut has "KOKODA TRAIL" in big brass letters across it and a large Australian Commonwealth Military Forces, Rising Sun badge sits on top. The outer

struts are emblazoned with “ PAPUAN CARRIERS” and “KOIARI PEOPLE”.

On the columns, there are plaques listing the units from each Australian State and Territory that served in the Kokoda campaign. Another plaque explains that the term “Kokoda TRAIL” was adopted in the official Army history of the campaign but “Kokoda Track” is just as correct.

When Murray first planned this trek, we were going to do it from Ower’s Corner to Kokoda. I am so happy that we ended up walking the other way. The memorial archway and the spectacular view across the Goldie Valley enhance, or focus, the emotions one feels at the finish, especially after the hard walk up from the river. I think a finish at Kokoda would have had a different feel to it. There is certainly important history at Kokoda but the physical appearance of the village and the landscape doesn’t have the same impact. You’ll have to go and see for yourself to understand, or disagree. Having said all that though, I think we walked in the easier direction. Maybe, if I walk the track the other way one day, I’ll have a different perspective when I get to Kokoda.

Ambers Inn had provided us with a cut lunch of sandwiches and fruit which was delivered on the bus. After lunch (which was washed down with some of Gill’s beers by the drinkers) we put our packs onto a ute and climbed aboard the mini-bus for the ride back to Port Moresby. We were a happy bunch as our convoy headed off.

A short-way along, as we came to a village settlement, our bus driver was ordered to stop by a fellow on the road. A crowd gathered quickly around the bus and some of these locals looked unhappy. Their leader, a bare-chested young fellow with a large sheathed knife on his belt, ordered Alex to get off the bus. Isaac got out too. There was some sort of trouble brewing. I couldn’t understand what was being said but I did hear “250 Kina” mentioned more than once. I wondered if it was going to be a matter of robbery or ransom. The fellow ordered our bus driver to move on and we went another hundred meters or so before stopping. Our packs were back there on the ute which had also stopped at the scene of the confrontation. We were concerned for the safety of our friends and our gear. The only things I didn’t want to lose were my cameras and Strongman’s thumbprints – everything else could be replaced.

Through the rear window of the bus, I saw the young fellow stomping around, shouting at Alex and waving a big stick at him. This situation was both frightening and interesting to watch. Last year, a group of Australian tourists were held up and robbed by Rascals somewhere between Ower’s Corner and Moresby and firearms had been produced. How nasty was this going to get? Alex just stood there copping the verbal barrage. Through it all, he was very passive in his stance. I think he was being very wise.

Some of the locals came back up to the bus and told Sabi and Colin to get out. Colin in particular looked concerned. Reuben told the locals that Sabi and Colin were needed to carry his gear but that made no difference. Out they got.

By this time, the young, hothead leader was back at our bus with Alex and Isaac. He was still ranting and raving but another local fellow, wearing a 2000 Olympics Kokoda Track Torch Relay jersey, spoke up and said that they should let us go. He said, “The tourists are important and any problems can be sorted out with Alex later”.

Someone else got onto the bus and explained the situation like this. Earlier in the year, Alex had led a group of trekkers North from Ower’s Corner to Kokoda. When

that group got to Kovelov village (where Colin was from), the Kovelov people stopped them until a 250 Kina payment was made. The people at the Ower's Corner end thought it was wrong of the Kovelov people to do this but they now wanted the same payment. (Colin had been recognized as a Kovelov man when we arrived at Ower's Corner and the word had been passed on).

In the end, assurances were given that our friends and gear would be safe. We left in the hope that this would be the case.

As we travelled on, the only way I knew we were in a bus and not on a roller coaster was the absence of the safety bar across my chest. It was the roughest road I have ever been on and I wasn't confident that our bus would even survive the trip. Our driver had the pedal to the metal and he didn't slow down for any pothole, rut or corner. There were several places where the bus just fitted or scraped through the cut embankments. We did get slowed up by one particularly wet patch and almost got bogged. I had visions of us all out pushing but in the end, after what seemed like a hundred transitions between first gear and reverse, the bus got free. We passed McDonald's Corner at Ilolo and then got onto a narrow bitumen road. The dirt stretch had been 17 kilometers according to the signpost - another 40 to go to Port Moresby.

There were some magnificent views to come. We passed the outlet pipe for the Rouna Falls hydroelectric power station. The outlet just appeared in a sheer cliff face and a large shower of water gushed forth to the stream below. This would have looked very odd if I hadn't known what it was. I was sitting at the back of the bus on the right-hand side. Looking ahead, I could see the road snake its way down the steep side of the valley. Looking straight out my window, there was nothing but airspace. I hoped there wasn't some nut and bolt in the steering mechanism that had been worked loose by all the bouncing along on that dirt track. It was an exciting ride down the mountain.

On the way back, we planned to visit Bomana War cemetery. We arrived there about 1620 hours to find the gates closed and locked - we were 20 minutes late. There were security guards inside the gate and after our situation was explained, they let us in.

This is the first war cemetery I have been to and I must say that it is very different to any civilian one I have visited. There are nearly 3,300 people buried here and each grave is simply marked with a white headstone. The headstones stand, as if at attention, on a sea of manicured, green grass and are set out with geometric precision in blocks of rows. The visual effect of this is quite dramatic and solemn compared to the chaos of civilian cemeteries with monuments of different size, shape, colour and condition.

The headstones of unidentified servicemen are engraved with a Cross, the relevant Service emblem and the simple inscription, "Soldier / Airman / Sailor of the 1939-1945 War" as appropriate. The headstones of identified members have different inscriptions. With Australian War Graves, the families of those killed are allowed to select a personal inscription for their loved-one's headstone. This is different to the case in other Commonwealth countries. Jewish members have the Star of David instead of The Cross. I also saw the headstone of a Kiwi flight-sergeant which had the New Zealand silver fern engraved.

What also stands out is the young age of most of those killed – this loss of so many young lives is truly one of the tragedies of war.

I had the names of a number of members from the 39th, 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions whose graves I wanted to find. There was no internment plan or register that I could locate, so I just went looking up and down the rows – but it is a big place and after twenty minutes or so, I got the word that we had to return to the bus. My search had been unsuccessful. This was very sad. I had found the graves of 2/27th Battalion fellows who had been killed at Mission Ridge but not the others I wanted.

At the bottom of the grounds there is a small shelter with a Visitor's Book placed inside a cabinet in one wall. I started running down to sign the book but had to pull up some 50 meters short as my left foot just hurt too much. I read the name on the headstone where I stopped and could not believe my eyes – I was standing right next to the grave of Bruce Kingsbury V.C. It was almost like someone had touched me on the shoulder and said, "Stop here". This was one grave and the area I had wanted all along but now I didn't have time to go searching for the others.

I hurried over to sign the visitor's book then went back to Bruce's grave to pay my respects. I said a prayer, touched his headstone, took a photograph of it and made my way back to the bus. There were a lot of reflective people on board as we left. Half an hour had been too short a time here.

By the time we arrived back in Port Moresby, the cultural centers / souvenir shops had closed and I couldn't even buy postcards to send back home to family and friends. We stopped at an establishment in Boroko for some soft drinks, beers and party food. When we arrived at Ambers Inn, we checked-in and once again I was sharing with Zoltan.

The curfew tonight had been changed to 2330 hours instead of 1930 hours as there was a Seventh Day Adventist crusade on in Moresby. (I'm sure the newspaper I saw later mentioned an attendance of well over 10,000 members). We all stayed in.

Alex, Isaac, Colin and Sabi arrived at Ambers Inn with all our packs an hour or so after we did. Our gear had been safe but Sabi looked like he had copped a whack in the face. Neither he nor Alex would say what had occurred or how the problem back near Ower's Corner had been resolved.

Dinner was another well-cooked BBQ. I had some sausages with lots of rice and pasta salad. Alistair had organized some footy jerseys through his work and he presented these to Alex, Isaac and Sabi on behalf of our group after making a thank you speech. (Kiroi was not there to receive his jersey). Angela gave Colin some extra Kina for his efforts. The guys had been a big help to us. I remembered the morning of days 2 and 3 in particular when Isaac helped me with my pack.

I then went and set to work washing my walking clothes and packing for tomorrow's return home. My T-shirt had perished from all the sweat and my walking socks were on the way out too, so I threw them in the bin. I gave Alex the extra long-sleeve shirt and a singlet I'd left behind at Ambers Inn.

Later on, I went back down to the pool / BBQ area with a family size Cadbury *Top Deck* chocolate and some peppermints as my contribution to the after-dinner party. At some stage during the proceedings, Annie (or maybe it was Liz – I can't remember now) got the urge to go around painting guys toenails with nail polish. My two big ones got done.

The evening wasn't all mirth though. We reflected on our efforts over the past nine days and though it had been both physically and mentally demanding, we all agreed

it was a 'walk in the park' compared to the efforts of the Diggers. We always had plenty of food and water at hand and never had to chance upon native gardens to get a feed. We could have a wash each day and take our boots off at night without the skin on our feet peeling off from days and days of having to keep wet and muddy boots on because the battle situation required it so. We always had a track to follow and didn't have to spend days cutting through the jungle to places that were otherwise only hours away. We had not had to walk in any rain and as there were only twenty-one in our party, the track did not become a quagmire of mud. Our activity was just one day at a time and there was always a camp each afternoon or evening where we could rest and put our heads down at night for a peaceful sleep. There was no one out there who was going to start firing mountain guns, mortars and machine guns at us as a wake-up call.

No one went swimming in the pool.

I wanted to take my walking stick home and to get it through Quarantine, I needed to strip all the bark from it. I used my Swiss Army knife for this task and a pile of shavings grew on the floor beside my chair. (Tanya stripped the bark off hers three or four days ago out on the track and then started carving patterns into it. She'll have no trouble getting it into Australia but now that it is such a work of art, the only problem might be if someone at the airport thinks it is covered by PNG's Export of Cultural Heritage laws!)

By 2030 hours, I had finished stripping my stick and I was tired. I cleaned up the mess I'd made and said goodnight to the stayers then headed back to my room. As I walked past the television room, the Rugby League (Australian NRL) was on and I saw that the Broncos were getting a hiding. I didn't stay around to watch this continue.

Zoltan was a bit crook and since dinner his tummy had really started rumbling. I didn't need my antibiotics anymore so I offered them to him. He read the drug-warning leaflet and after checking with Liz, decided they were suitable for him to take.

Saturday 07.07.2001:

Breakfast was at 0630 hours. The cornflakes, toast and spaghetti went down a treat.

The only souvenir I really wanted to buy was a big Billum bag for Jennifer. I spoke to the fellow at reception about this and he told me there was a market near Ambers Inn which would have many but it didn't open until 0730 hours. We had to leave for the airport about that time, so unless there was something available at the airport, Jennifer would miss out.

Members of our group were heading to different destinations. Gill and Angela left first to fly to Goroka and further adventures. Tanya, Ronnie, Andrew and Zoltan would leave for Cairns later in the day. The rest of us were heading back to Brisbane. We said our goodbyes and left for the airport.

Alistair asked the driver if there was time for a diversion to give us a quick look at the city area. The driver said, "Yes" then set off on a somewhat hectic drive straight to the airport! (Maybe something got lost in the translation). The way this fellow entered onto roundabouts without physically merging our bus with vehicles already there was amazing. I was sure, several times, that our trip was going to be via the Casualty ward at Port Moresby General Hospital.

We arrived at the airport to find out that our aircraft departure was delayed one hour. (There would have been time to go to the markets after all). I joined the slow check-in queue and eventually made it to the head of the line. After this, I went back outside and down to the Airport Police Station hoping to swap some Australian Customs badges for local ones. I met an old Policeman sitting outside the station with another fellow. We did some trades. I told him about where I was from, my job and our trek. Something really did get lost in this translation. It became obvious to me that he thought I was a PNG ex-pat living in Brisbane and working for Australian Customs. He proceeded to tell me how the various local football teams were going in their competition!

There were no decent billum bags to buy at the airport shops and no small souvenirs for the boys that weren't rubbish, so everyone at home missed out.

Liz and Alistair were going to Noosa for a week when we got back. Annie was going up for the weekend too. I told them that Stan Bisset lives at Noosa and passed on his address if they wanted to make contact. Stan is an original member of the 2/14th Bn and was the battalion Intel Officer during the Kokoda – Gona Campaign. He was awarded the Military Cross and also mentioned in dispatches. (I had contacted Stan seeking information about battalion dispositions at Isurava before we left Australia and he kindly forwarded a mud-map with some explanation).

In Peter Dornan's book, "*The Silent Men*", the story of Stan and his brother Butch is told. Butch was a 2/14th platoon commander. Late in the afternoon of August 29th 1942, he was mortally wounded at Isurava by a burst of machine gun fire to the abdomen. His platoon withdrew from their position about 2100 hours and members carried Butch back to the RAP (Regimental Aid Post) for medical treatment. The Medical Officer attended Butch beside the track near the RAP and administered Morphine but the prognosis was not good. Later, when Stan was able to, he came and sat with Butch and held his hand until he died about 0400 hours on the 30th. I gave Liz the book and marked the chapters about these two brothers for her to read.

We boarded our aircraft and were wheels-up at 1021 hours. I was sad to be leaving but happy to be going home to Jennifer and the boys. (Although Gabriel had gone off on a flight to Sydney yesterday by himself. I hoped he was having a good time with his cousins).

I sat next to a Kiwi helicopter pilot who had been doing some contract work in PNG. He was keen to hear about our trek. I ignored the in-flight movie, "*Spy Kids*". The food was superb - Apple pie, cheese and jatz, croissant with ham and salad, fish, red wine, coffee, pineapple juice and peanuts – I didn't waste a crumb.

Liz brought the book back to me during the flight. She said, "We're all crying down the back". I knew exactly what she meant.

We landed at 1256 hours. I collected my duty-free goods, got my passport stamped, then promptly lost my declaration form. I found it eventually in the duty-free bag. At Quarantine they inspected my boots and reef shoes and took both pair away for a spray of disinfectant. My walking stick passed inspection. Liz, Al and Annie were in the next inspection bay showing the AQIS officer their dirty, wet and very smelly trekking clothes. (I think the fellow would have been asking for danger money after he opened up that suitcase!) When I went out to the public arrivals area, everyone else had departed.

Jennifer and Maxim were there to meet me. It was good to see them again. I'm sure it has not been easy for them carrying on with school and work etc while I have been away. I am grateful for the chance they gave me to go on this trek.

And In Conclusion:

My Kokoda trek was a wonderful experience – demons and all. I am lucky to have been part of such a well-organized group and for this the major thanks goes to Murray. His organized training-walks and briefings were invaluable to our preparation and for seven months he worked to make it all happen. He has a true passion for the Kokoda Track and the villagers who live along it.

It was also a pleasure to be part of Team Kokoda 2001. We were a group of 16 varied individuals but I felt a true sense of camaraderie within the team. For that, I must say thank you to my fellow trekkers. It was a privilege to share the experience with you all. Five months after our return, I can still find myself immersed in the memory of what we did.

As I said at the very beginning of these notes, my desire to walk the Track came from an interest in the Military history of the Kokoda Campaign. If you share such an interest and can meet the physical challenge that the Track will present, then I recommend you go and walk it too. I would also suggest that you read whatever books you can about the Kokoda Campaign before you go. Two of particular importance would be, *“Those Ragged Bloody Heroes”* by Peter Brune and *“The Silent Men”* by Peter Dornan.

Peter Brune's book gives a detailed look at the campaign fought by 30th Brigade, (39th and 53rd Militia Battalions) and the 21st Brigade, (2/14th, 2/16th and 2/27th AIF Battalions) along the Kokoda Track and brings into focus the politico-military setting of the war. It also details their involvement in the later actions at Gona and Buna when the Japanese were eventually defeated at the coast.

Peter Dornan's book tells the story of the 2/14th Bn in both the Middle-East and the Kokoda – Gona Campaigns. This story is not just a chronicle of the battles fought. It is a very moving account of the experiences of a number of battalion members before and during the war with an epilogue of the surviving members subsequent lives.

Neither of these books gives much detail about the ultimate Japanese withdrawal and Australian advance back over the Owen Stanley Range, as other battalions fought these actions.

Those veterans of the Kokoda Campaign who survive today are aged in their late seventies through to early nineties. If you read their story and are impressed by it, you should seek some of them out to say hello and have a chat. You will find, as I did, that it was a privilege to be able to say thank you to them for their efforts.

There might be a few of you wondering how I got on with the reading glasses I promised to send to Billy Odova in Menari. Obviously, I had no idea of what his, or his wife's optical prescription would be. One day I went to visit Reuben at Redcliffe and drove past a Uniting Church Thrift Shop on the way. I went in and told the ladies there about my mission and they had a big box of old spectacles under the counter. They gave them all to me. I sorted through these at home and after ditching the broken ones; I was left with two-dozen pair. I posted them to Billy along with two big

magnifying glasses just in case none of the spectacles suited.

Last of all, it took 8 weeks for the nail polish to wear off.

Michael Webster.
21.12.2001.

Further Reading.

Since my trek in 2001 I have been steadily reading more books about the Papuan and New Guinea campaigns. Two recently published ones well worth a read are "*Kokoda*" by Peter Fitzsimons and, "*The Spirit of Kokoda, Then and Now*" by Patrick Lindsay.

Peter Fitzsimons's book has a good mix of historical information and personal accounts and recollections written in a very easy to read style. I enjoyed it very much.

When I finished Patrick Lindsay's book, I said to myself, "That's the most engaging book I have ever read in my life". This book has a lot of personal recollections from veterans who fought on the track and from civilians who have trekked recently. Time and time again I found myself knowing exactly what the veterans and trekkers were talking about because I had experienced or thought about those same things during my trek. If you intend walking the Kokoda Track then I thoroughly recommend that you save this book to read after you have returned. You will appreciate what you read more than ever.

Peter Brune's book, "*A Bastard Of A Place*" deals with the Kokoda Track, Milne Bay and Gona / Buna/ Sanananda campaigns in his usual detailed style. His biography of Colonel Ralph Honnor (CO 39th and 2/14th Bns), "*We Band Of Brothers*" and Bill Edgar's biography of Brig Arnold Potts, "*Kokoda Warrior*" are great insights to these men.

Ian Downs wrote unit history of The New Guinea Volunteer Rifles. That is a great story. And Peter Ryan wrote a truly amazing account of his time with ANGAU on patrol North of the Markham River And North of the Finnesteres called "*Fear Drives My Feet*".

These are just a few of the many enjoyable reads to be had.