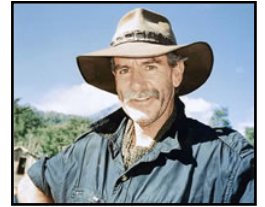


Kokoda: Is this the World's meanest tour guide?

Sydney Morning Herald
Saturday, November 25, 1995



Charlie Lynn's holiday package includes a good measure of fear, exhaustion, injury and shock, which may be why Australia's largest companies think he's great. Marc Llewellyn reports:

THIRTEEN hours up a mountain and Xiaoling Liu is crawling on her hands and knees through the mud with a heavy rucksack on her back. The 42-year-old senior research scientist is almost blind from an insect bite which has left her face and body badly swollen. Both her ankles are twisted and she is close to giving up.

Bending over her is Vietnam veteran and professional motivator, Charlie Lynn. He whispers in her ear the only words that will keep her moving: "Attack! Attack! Attack!"

Ahead, hollow-faced with exhaustion, 28-year-old Karen Dunshea, a human resources consultant, stumbles through the dark. Her miner's lamp, strapped to her pounding head, picks out a few metres of almost vertical track through the rain. She kicks her foot into the mountain, jabs in her bamboo walking stick and wrenches herself a step further upwards. Another kick and - thud. The Kokoda Track thumps her in the face and she slips, flailing into Lynn's legs. If a doctor were here, Dunshea would be admitted to hospital - but all she has is Charlie.

"Come on, you're a psychologist," he soothes, referring to her university degree. "You above all know it's mind over matter." "You bastard," she mutters. The five other members of the corporate CRA team see her fall as a chance to grab a few seconds' rest. But then it is up, and up again, to the top of the jungle ridge.

Today is the hardest day of their lives so far, more difficult even than yesterday's gruelling 14-hour slog. Tomorrow, however, will be even harder.

CHARLIE Lynn, who recently took Ted Pickering's seat in the NSW Upper House, was also once the NSW 24-hour ultra-marathon record holder and director of the Westfield Run. He is convinced the nine-day trek across Papua New Guinea's Owen Stanley Range is the most difficult thing he has ever done.

When he throws in a few "tasks", such as carrying a volunteer on a jungle-made stretcher across dangerous rapids and up a treacherously wet mountain slope, the "toughest trek in the world" mutates into possibly the world's most difficult leadership and team-training scheme.



But it is not the only one. There is a worldwide boom in tough corporate training regimes and Australia is not dragging its heels. Companies such as Outward Bound, Outland Expeditions, Adventure West and the Australian School of Mountaineering are all attempting to put some mettle into corporate types by putting them through extreme situations. The tougher the situations, the more likely that their companies will benefit from these battle-hardened staff.

The CRA team members, who had never met each other before, were experiencing Lynn's inaugural Air Niugini/Adventure Kokoda Leadership Program. Lynn, however, has already completed nine "reconnaissance" trips along the track, during which a few of his companions wished they had stayed at home.

Lynn cheerfully recounts the story of a trekker who went insane before collapsing into unconsciousness. His fellow adventurers, noticing his skin was cold and clammy, desperately raced to cover him in sleeping bags. The man's life was saved only by an emergency survival pamphlet hastily retrieved from the bottom of a rucksack. To the surprise of the worried adventurers, now trying to warm the victim (suffering from heat exhaustion-induced shock) by laying across his body, it warned that he must, at all costs, be kept cool.

And then there was the trekker who lasted less than a day had to be escorted back by New Guineans, and the newspaper photographer who had to be taken out by helicopter. "I told them they had to train before they

came, but they made their choice and took the chance they could make it. They quickly found they couldn't. People can be highly resilient, but the Track is unforgiving," Lynn says.

Lynn may have great faith in the individual's spirit in times of adversity, but he has little time for much of corporate Australia. He believes Australian business lacks good leadership. He says that since an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report in 1992 which compared our managers with those overseas (and concluded Australian middle management ranked 17 out of 22 in effectiveness; senior management ranked 19), little has changed.

"Some so-called leaders might talk about teamwork and bonding and use all the other buzz-words, but it's usually just talk," he says. "Australian employees aren't stupid; they know that the bosses in today's climate are looking after number one and that when the crunch comes they'll be left on their own. In return, they do what they have to do in their jobs and no more."

Lynn has compiled his own "understandings" to effective management", which he believes can be achieved from completing the Kokoda Track. These include an understanding of oneself, others, other cultures, the environmental effects of decisions and the sacrifices and achievements of others in history. Over-all, he says, our leadership and teamwork failings result from a lack of adversity in our lives.

Lynn believes adversity should be introduced to Australian business on a planned scale. "We don't need another war; all you need to do is to take people out of the system and take them back to basics where they can't hid behind their desks - to get rid of all the crap.

COOOO-EEEEEE! Five o'clock in the morning and the Kokoda shuffle begins again. The humidity is draining and the washed-out jungle track is little more than a series of irregular steps between tangled tree roots. Then the uphill clambering starts again, followed by a two-hour slide down an almost sheer muddy cliff. By lunchtime, sweating and exhausted, some members of the team are almost broken. Before them is Eora Creek, a raging torrent studded with vicious crags and slippery boulders.



Even with no pack and a rope to hang on to, crossing is hazardous. But the CRA team has to do it the hard way. Like the diggers and fuzzy-wuzzy angels before them in the Kokoda campaign, they have to carry their injured across on a stretcher. Glad for a rest, Dunshea volunteers and the team persuades the guides to put together a stretcher from vines and saplings. Then, slowly, they wade thigh-deep through the icy water. A slip could see them swept away in the pounding water.

They make it. Their teamwork has paid off and no-one is hurt. But the agony is not over yet. In the drenching rain, they manoeuvre the stretcher and its nervous occupant for hour after hour up another mountain

turned to slime. Then yet more hours of clambering and slipping through the night towards the next camp.

For some, other tasks were more demanding. Delivering supplies and equipment to villages carrying the whole group's tents, food and cooking equipment, may have been bearable, but the four mornings of climbing before breakfast, hacking through the jungle to find waterfalls and WW11 aircraft high in the hills, took their toll on badly aching bodies - which still had to survive the track itself.

Gone are the days when the only way to get to adventure camp-grounds was in a beat-up Kombi. These days, Outward Bound even has a 100-feet, three-masted schooner to sail 1,000 corporate clients a year from abseiling to navigating place. But are such courses really effective?

Outward Bound's business development manager, Ms Kim Niemeier, says "experiential exploration" leadership courses can change people's attitudes permanently. "You take them to an environment which is totally alien and away from their mobile phones and dress them all up in the same clothes, and they learn to trust the guy at work they thought was a jerk, becau7se he's on top of the mountain holding the rope."

Another leader in multi-day leadership training organisations is Perth-based Adventure West. the company trains around 800 businesspeople a year in how to get the best out of themselves and others. It specialises in operating training programs in Australia's most rugged areas, such as Western Australia's Kimberley region, as well as in South-East Asia.

A team leader with the company, Mr Colin Hendrie, says the experience often helps people realise the futility of just sitting around discussing things without taking action.

"We had on group of people who sat outside a cave for 36 hours simply trying to decide how to go about exploring it," he said. "They eventually realised they may not be approaching tasks entirely effectively." BRUCE Riley, 54, a successful Sydney businessman, limps into Kokoda village just in front of the CRA team. He is completing his second Kokoda trek with Lynn. For much of this one, he has hobbled up and down mountains with a fractured right ankle. But despite the pain and the almost overwhelming brutality of the track, he believes the experiences have been the most important of his life.

"If you do Kokoda, the there's nothing else," he says. "You get tremendous maturation and a wonderful sense of achievement. I feel like nothing is too difficult any more - when things are tough all I have to say is 'remember Kokoda' and it all becomes easy."

The CRA team, now sprawled in the lush grass at the end of the journey, nod their heads in unison. They are all stunned by the beauty of the track. But more than, they made it back alive.

A few weeks after returning from Kokoda, the corporate high-flyer and trained psychologist, Karen Dunshea, is still mulling things over. She believes she has changed but feels it is more "intuitive than cognitive".

"I can't really express it in words," she says. "But practically I'm more patriotic and I have applied some of the teamwork and leadership things we discussed over there, but it's not just about work; the Kokoda experience applies to general life. It was a really humbling experience to be at the bottom of the pile in physical fitness; I sort of have to come back to a base level; it's very valuable to be humbled."



Corporate Leadership Testimonials

"If the aim of the Kokoda Track Leadership Experience was to develop personally, to learn more about teams and how they work, to identify personal strengths and opportunities for growth, to learn about leadership, to identify how I might instil better leadership qualities in myself, to appreciate others, to learn and appreciate Australia's history, to live and learn and appreciate another culture then all of these aims, and more, have been achieved.

"The trek provided an opportunity for me to look at myself and at how I operate as a person and as a team member. All the expectations and demands that I place on myself! How I operate as a person and as a team member. All the expectations and demands that I place on myself! It made me look at how hard I can be with myself. I identified a need to learn to focus more on what I did that was good and contributing and positive? What are some of my strengths? Now a week later, things are starting to consolidate more. I can talk objectively about how I feel and what I learnt, and feel OK about it. I'm even laughing more about my own weaknesses and difficulties (not maliciously, but in a friendly, human, self-respecting manner). I'm glad I had an opportunity to be humbled and then to re-learn to laugh at myself - another positive learning.

"I think the following excerpt from my summary of the trip conveys some of the difficulties I experienced and the manner in which I dealt with them. It was the walk from Isurava, up to find the crashed Japanese Zero:

"I was doing really well I thought. Keeping up, close to the front. No packs, so lighter work than normal. The guide going ahead, then a couple of the "A team" (the others) then me. Then we turned off the track and started to cut a path through the jungle. Up up up. Up up up. Very steep. Clawing at mud and tree roots. Grabbing onto slender young tree trunks - their size belying their strength! Up up up. Puff puff puff. Up up up. God I was finding this increasingly difficult. Keep going keep going. Up up up. Finally, I came across a solid tree perched at the edge of a small flat piece of ground about a metre square. Exhausted and almost in tears, I leant my back against the tree. Xiaoling stopped and I told her she could go on - I just needed to get my breath. Then, so exhausted, I burst into tears. Quiet tears. Tired tears. A couple of the others came along and I told them to keep going, that I was just getting my breath. Terry stayed, so did Christine. Charlie came along. He checked under my hat to see if I was still awake!! (Hahaha - a remnant from me flaking out at every stop in the first two days). "What's wrong mate?" he asks. Into tears again. He gave me a quick hug and I explained that I was "still having fun". That must sound so funny burbling out through a teary voice! I wasn't upset or miserable. I was just so tired. Charlie said I didn't have to continue on up, and I could wait there until the others returned. What a silly idea! I told him of course I would keep on going, otherwise I may as well have stayed in the village! I soon found out that I was 7/8th of the way up when I stopped. Still, I had desperately needed the rest."

"As a team member, an individual needs to feel that they can contribute and that their contribution is meaningful and acknowledged. Although I would see this encouragement as primarily a task of a leader, the individual is also responsible to some degree for their own involvement in a process. The Kokoda experience helped to develop and reinforce the notion of individual responsibility in the team - even when I am tired and miserable (or there is some other constraint), I can still contribute and I can change the level of my involvement in what I am doing. I thought that this trek, while developing teamwork and leadership skills, also helped to develop and reinforce the notion of individual responsibility for how you choose to act and what you choose to think. Individual responsibility for one's choices and actions is something often missing from today's world."

"A thoroughly rich learning opportunity which I would grasp with both hands if it were presented to me again.....The program ought to be continued The concept has enormous potential in developing people as individuals, as leaders, and as team members".

Karen Dunshea, BA (Hon Psych)



'How often in life do we really enjoy success of achieving a goal when we have done it entirely on our own? Who do we share the success with? Who appreciates the hardship that has gone into achieving the success? Who understands the depth of the emotions that we feel? To me, the Kokoda experience really highlighted the power of teams and the richness of the feeling of team success.'

'The Kokoda experience provided an ideal environment to understand team dynamics. A group of people of diverse interests and backgrounds are thrown together to face adversity together. The success of the individual is very closely linked to the success of the team. The success of the team is dependent upon accepting individuality and difference. It is also dependent on exploiting strengths and managing the weakest link. Having clear objectives and working towards a common goal was a key element in our team's success.'

'I found the Kokoda experience very useful in helping me to understand my own personal strengths and weaknesses. I am a highly competitive person who places very high expectations on myself and to a certain extent on other people. Whilst I believe that I am understanding of people's differences and their relative strengths and weaknesses, I have great difficulty coping with people who do not appear to want to realise their potential. Motivating and exciting people to realise their fullest potential is one of my greatest challenges of leadership.'

Andrew Rosengren, Rhodes Scholar
Manager - CRA Gold Development



"The trek provided an excellent opportunity for me to learn more about Australian culture. I was not particularly interested in the military significance of the Kokoda Trail before the departure. However, Charlie's encyclopaedic knowledge of the Kokoda campaign and actual experience of the hardships have changed me. The heroic history should be more publicised and the Kokoda spirit widely promoted. The Diggers fought inch by inch to fulfil their duty as soldiers. How much of this spirit is still alive in modern society? What is the main personal drive for good performance, promotion or fulfilling one's professional duty? Where is the balance between contribution and reward? I will certainly remind myself of these questions more frequently and strive to fulfil my duty as an ordinary citizen.

"I feel the barriers between different cultures and races were insignificant in the bush and in the face of adversity. However, I did observe a difference between myself and some other team members. I had a more serious approach to the trek (Re my argument that we came to train and test ourselves, not for a holiday). It was interesting to analyse my own thinking process. Initially, I was frustrated with others' relaxed approach to the trek, gradually, as I focused on the outcome of the team and outstanding performance of others, my thinking changed:

"In the end, it is the outcome not the attitude that counts. I should examine my own approach. If it does not fit into the style of most staff members, or respected by them, then I have to change my approach to get the best team results. Having fun may be an important part of daily work which I must respect."

Xiaoling Liu
Stratum 11, Senior Research Scientist
Comalco Research & Technology
MELBOURNE VIC



'To say I gained a sense of achievement from completing the Kokoda Trail would be an enormous understatement. I have not only learnt important life skills, I have also had an opportunity to identify my weaknesses and establish in my own mind what qualities I value in a leader. In the process I have made some life long friends. Regardless of what I write in this report, it will never truly capture this experience.'

'To say that this was the hardest, most prolonged physical and mental challenge I have ever undertaken is a bit of an understatement.'

'As for lessons in leadershipI was dubious that evening, and through much of the program as to what exactly we CRA people were learning that might help us in our day to day work. However, as the journey was completed, the many small pieces that had been put in front of us came together to complete a picture of team membership, team leadership and self leadership that is simple, infallible and universal.'

'Simply put, the Kokoda experience is one I will never forget and which has truly enlightened me in many ways. I believe I am a stronger and more determined person as a result.'

Michael Cox, Engineer, Minenco Pty Limited

University of Western Sydney Student Leadership Reports



I am sitting here, 4 days after returning from Kokoda, struggling to put into words an adventure that could possibly have been the most amazing and horrifying time of my life. Since I have been home, I have been asked by so many people, what my trip was like, and words just don't seem to properly describe or encapsulate the true spirit of the Kokoda Trail. For me, the Kokoda experience was not about coming up with an exact definition of 'leadership' is. Rather it was about learning about myself - finding my limits, achieving my goals and striving for an understanding of who I am - and then asking myself, how can I apply this knowledge to becoming a better leader.

As I mentioned earlier, Kokoda had both its up's and down's (Literally). But let me start with the down points and move up (I always much more preferred to go up the hills than come down!). The unbelievable physical exhaustion and pain was obviously the main thing holding us back - but that was to be expected. Here are a couple of extracts from my diary that can perhaps explain a little of what we going through:

"I am also feeling very disheartened because my body is in tatters. There is not one section of my legs that doesn't have chafing and insect bites. Both my hips are plastered with tape and I have 2 washing up scourers taped to either side to stop the pressure of my pack. both my shoulders are strapped due to chafing, and my feet are cold, wet, wrinkled and covered in open blisters. My thighs are bruised and my muscles are in agony. I am praying so hard for strength and that these problems ease off by morning. Tonight is a cold night and the rain has soaked me through - it is impossible to get dry here."

"Charlie said to us before we came, that the land was unforgiving. I think I now know what that means. It demands your uttermost concentrations and respect. One false move and you're gone."

However, although I know I was in a hell of a lot of pain, I can now sit back, and actually appreciate it. It is only when you put yourself in a strongly adverse situation, that you can truly appreciate the relief that comes after it. The steeper the hill, the greater the pain; the muddier the descent, the greater the pain; the further we walked, the greater the pain, and the stronger the feeling of relief at the end.

Learning about the life of the Australian soldiers in Kokoda and hearing some of their stories was very moving. Before I came I knew little about the history of the war. But I did know one of the original Diggers, and I know that every time I spoke to him about the Trail, it brought a tear to his eyes. And so when I was there, even though it was not nice to hear about the pathetic leadership of the Australian Government and the stories about the hypocrisy of people who simply were just too ignorant to care, it was still an honour to be walking on behalf of someone who had fought so hard against these forces back in 1942. It is now my desire to learn more about the war, and apply my 'real life' experience, so I can continue to appreciate the work that so many young Australians did to secure my future.

And this leads me to talk about the most amazing aspect of the Kokoda journey. And that is the people of Papua New Guinea - the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. I have never met more generous, selfless, humble people in my life. Every step of the way, it was our guides desire to put us first. To hold us up, if it meant they would fall. To shelter us from the rain, if it meant they got wet. To put us number one, even if it meant they were last. Frank, Colin, Bobby, Steven, Matthew, Alex, Dic and Job all reminded me of the truly beautiful qualities of the human spirit. Living in Western civilisation, I think we are stripped of our desire to serve others. We are



often greedy, take advantage of others, and always have our sights set on winning in the face of anything. However, the people in the villages of Kokoda lead such simple lives, and stemming from this is their devotion to each other, to their Church and to the wellbeing of their community, and even when us ragged, worn out trekkers crawled into their presence, they poured out this same selfless devotion on us.

When I returned home to Australia, after telling people my stories, many of them went on to call me their hero. And I think to myself, how flattering, yet how sad - that people can call me a 'hero' after simply walking and surviving the trail, yet we cannot recognise the everlasting, all-giving commitment of the Fuzzy Wuzzy's to the Aussie soldiers during the war. I can say in all certainty that there is no way I could have survived the Kokoda Trail without the help and support of our Fuzzy Wuzzy guides. And I would bet my life on it, that the Aussies likewise wouldn't have survived and defeated the Japanese, if it wasn't for this same help and support by their Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. And I am only reminded and reassured of the significance of this term 'angel', every time I think back to my experience in the village of Naduri. The stars that night shone so closely and brightly above us, as the sounds of the

village people singing, floated back up to heaven where they belonged. And it was then I knew, that God had sent me so many Angel's to look over me and guide me to the finish.

Let me finish with a passage that sums up my Kokoda experience that I wrote in my tent on the night of day 8:

"Thinking about the war really helps to keep things in perspective. It is so easy to become content with what you have, and it is only when you push yourself beyond your maximum limit, that you can truly appreciate the relief. I don't want to become 'satisfied' in life, or 'content', or take things for granted. It is too easy to do that. Whilst this leadership program has taught me valuable concepts such as leading with humility and love, it has shown me how far I can be stretched. A true leader knows that their limits are always growing and expanding - they are never content or lazy in what they do, but are always striving for adversity. The Bible tells us that through suffering comes perseverance. Through perseverance comes character. And through character comes hope. I believe these are all qualities of an exceptional leader, and I believe Kokoda has put me one step in that right direction."

Genevieve Nelson, 18 Years



Diary of a UWS Kokoda Leadership Student - Linda Adams - 18 years

DAY 1: Thursday, 9 July 1998



I flew off scared. Not scared of whether or not I can do this but scared of how I will react to the challenge and exactly what that will tell me about myself and how others perceive me.

Long day. Amazed by how different the sense of this place is despite just how close it is to home.

Stunned. The reality of what I am about to set upon has finally hit me, and I am reminded of the fact that this is just the beginning.

In our group this evening I realised that most of us want to learn how to work as part of a group. We have all been so focused inwardly that we're still to learn how others can nurture and even bring out what things lie within ourselves.

What do I want from Kokoda? I want a sense of realism. I want to feel life in its purest and rawest sense. I want to know just how much fight I have in me. I want to learn how to relate with others so that we all realise the same end goal.

I also want to begin the search for faith, because just now I am aware of the fact that I will need it in some form or another to get me to Kokoda.

DAY 2: Friday, 10 July 1998

I have an extremely good reason for not writing last night ... I was walking. The thing that gets to me is that it could've been avoided. I'm not too flustered by it though because I have discovered by ability to appreciate and care for others when I am feeling pretty darn low myself. I was convinced before coming here that I'd discover a terribly selfish part of me, I was wrong. I guess I'm not really as bad as I had first perceived. Maybe legendary Linda - is not such a bad person after all.

I am also shocked at myself for not being sore. I think that I must be delusional. I am aware of the fact that when you know you're going to be walking for God knows how long you just keep going, despite how you feel. Pain is not a factor when giving up is not an option.

The jungle is so inspiring. I just might find it in myself to draw again after being rejected from Artexpress in the very last cull. I guess that the ticket was right ... this is paradise and the whole experience of Kokoda is humbling. I am very small. I haven't cried yet ... I'm still too proud.

We did have some problems last night. Helen got sick, but she's a true battler, and in the Kokoda spirit she just kept soldiering on. Maree's been hit by the struggle Kokoda will hold for her and, surprised me by gaining a second wind. She has decided to rise to the challenge. Cindy, I don't know why, but she has a defeatist mentality. I am finding it really hard myself to handle someone who is being so negative. It's hard to have sympathy for somebody who just doesn't seem to be giving her all. I guess she might just help me learn something about my low tolerance level when it comes to weaknesses. Maybe Cindy will show me how to see positive attributes in a person who is so reliant on others to get through the day. Maybe I'll just have to experience a humbling low before I can understand it.

DAY 3: Saturday, 11 July 1998

A little sleep and so began the 'easy' day. We had a frank team talk and decided that our goal was to plug it away together. The team's desire to reach our day's goal together was very strong until well after lunch. Then Helen got sick. Her constant struggle gave three others an excuse to slacken off a bit.

Today was very emotionally trying. Those of us who could were constantly supporting those that 'couldn't'. This wasn't too tough on me until I started to get the feeling that some of us just 'wouldn't'. No matter what any of us said could make the day go faster.

What I found was that when the weaker ~~ones had a lot more drive in~~ me that when I kept hearing the word 'can't'. I found this really draining. Perhaps I have changed a little already. I think I am now conscious of the group mentality and have adapted my personal desires to those held by the team. I have decided that we're all going to make it to Kokoda, even if I have to drag the bloody lot of them up those hills.

Today we didn't reach our planned destination but we finally came together, even if it did take a terrible low for us to achieve that.

The day started out really well, our spirits were high and we moved along slowly but surely. I felt positive about the day as well as a new energy that had come from within as an answer to the general positive connection of the team.

When Cindy had another moment of defeat the whole team's psyche fell a couple of notches. It was at this point that I realised the close connection between our personal feelings and that of the entire team. It's only day 3 and already we are a highly cohesive group. That's got to be impressive within itself.

After distributing Elise's pack, something which was very hard for all of us, especially Cindy, we pushed onto Naoro.

Now Naoro is a story. I'm writing this 5 minutes after it happened and am still utterly stunned by the feelings running through me. We met our first village. Just as I had become convinced that Kokoda was beautiful scenery, I learnt that the beauty of Kokoda was the people. They are poor, bordering on destitute but have more than we could ever hope to achieve. If I reach their level of contentment within my own life I will have reached by highest goal. They are so happy. There is a closeness between them that has forced me to look at my own relationships in a frenzied attempt to find something just as special.



I am utterly humbled by them, they came to sing to us, one village group had walked for over an hour, that means three hours our time. They are intensely shy. If you smile at them they turn their heads and giggle, purity personified.

And when they sang. The closest thing to angel's voices. And what amazed me even more was that they weren't aware of just how beautiful they all sounded. From them and the fact that I have forgotten what I look like, I have finally become aware of the fact that beauty is in being, it is in faith and in passion and ones ability to genuinely care for others

.... skin just holds the spirit inside you, it stops it from flying up to heaven.

I cried. Not from exhaustion, although I know that if I let it, it would totally overcome me, but because it has taken me so long to become conscious of something so very simple. I took a simple living people whose strength comes from each other and their God to teach me something I have known all along. I absolutely love this place and right now, would not care if I never went home because right now, from the perspective that I have been looking at the world from, home is sterile. Home is constructed, artificial, consumed by inanimates, things I no longer have desire for, or care to be involved with.

I now know that I'm doing law because I care money ... pah! I now know how much more important I have to build my family up in my own eyes, and I know myself for the first time after two years of searching it has taken three days in this glorious place, not only to reach this conclusion but to finally become it. I am no longer afraid of myself and feeling like me and not somebody else. I know what I can do, and so far, I have not reached my limit. I like who I am and that means that I have a deeper appreciation for the people around me.

I am making companions for all time because Kokoda can never be expressed in words. Perhaps in a deep sigh, or a little glance upward, or the smile, the smile that makes you feel like your face is going to split but no words. Kokoda is a spirit I now have within me, and I'm actually looking forward to the 14 plus hour day we have ahead of us tomorrow!

DAY 4: Sunday, 12 July 1998

Tomorrow Myola!!! I'm gonna sleep and sleep and sleep!! I'm gonna eat then eat then sleep some more!!



I'm still loving this place. From now on when I meditate I've got a mantra that beats 'ohm' to a pulp. I have a vision, a vision of 30 or so men, women and children singing to me and asking questions like 'what colour is the soul?'.

We went really well today. We're about, oh, I don't know how far behind but we finally made a team goal.

We decided that we wanted to reach Efogi and aimed at doing that, when Charlie said at lunch that would be impossible, we settled on reaching the top of Brigade Hill. It took 18 hours of walking to get us up there but we did it.

I was team leader for the second half of the day and it was my job to get the troops up that 'speed bump'. There was a lot of tension so I let the healthy people go ahead and I chose to stay with the slower group. This was the most difficult decision I have had to make so far. I had to put aside what I wanted and do what I knew I had to. For the first time I felt like one of them, but none of them, and all the while trying to be positive and lead.

I think this is perhaps the most frightening experience so far feeling weak.

DAY 5: Monday, 13 July 1998

Last night I was terrorised by a wild pig. Pure fear.

The day began with a speech at the memorial at the top of Brigade Hill. We soon found out that we were sitting at the grave sites of 72 Australian soldiers. I cried. I cried for the pain I am feeling physically and for my inability to ever comprehend just how these men could have been feeling mentally especially, and physically.



I'm here and I will still never really understand. I can only ever imagine. I also learnt that politics depends on trends ... Kokoda was not a campaign that the government thought that it could flog off to the people so as to build support and stinking morale so they just ignored it ... 'bloody bureaucrats'.

We walked down the 'hill' to Efogi 1 where we met the man who buried these 72 men at the age of 18. We saw a couple of guns that these men's lives depended on, a couple of dog tags and some change. To see this man that has done such an unbelievable service to Australia brimming with pride but without thanks from the Australian

Government really pissed me off. His only thanks comes from people like us. Stinky trekkers who care enough about what happened here to visit him and simply shake his hand.

The hospitality of these tribes are amazing. They have all been truly happy to see us.

We continued from Efogi 1 to Efogi 2. When we reached it we found that Jill and Helen were far too ill to continue so today, they were flown out. We waved to them from the top of the next hill as we continue on to Naduli. I am deeply saddened by our loss of them. They had so much desire to go on, probably more than a few of us who are still 'able'. Shit happens. We will insist that they get shirts and hats.

Today certainly seemed to be the day for crying. As we waited for everybody on the top of a ridge before Naduli we were told that we were to receive a welcome. When we were all together we continued on only to find a path paved with flowers, banana leaves and ferns. I was astounded. Never before in my life have I

felt just so special. These people had spent probably hours preparing this for us just because we came with Charlie. As we came to the end of the flower path we were greeted by the villagers of Naduli standing behind an archway hung with flowers. Then they sang. I let a few tears fall, I cannot get used to feeling so completely happy all of the time regardless of how physically tired I am. My feet are raw, I have a heat rash all over my shoulders from my backpack straps and considering that it took us about 18 hours to get here, my muscles are a little tired.

After the singing, Alex's mum threw flowers at us as we entered the village. We walked on through shaking each person's hand, I tried desperately to think of something other than 'hello' or 'thank you' but the whole intensity of the moment had left me dumb. Staying on the flower path we were shown to a hut covered in flowers with a table overflowing with flowers and fruit. Again, I was totally overcome. I now know the true feeling of humbleness and I surprised myself in that this is something I cannot recall feeling before.

We sang and danced into the night. I don't think I have ever laughed so hard or had so much fun. The children are angelic, their faces light up as their voices fill the air. These people make me think that life and how we Westerners live it have managed to miss something. I now know how to appreciate the little things. Right now, I could not ask for anything more. I am very lucky to be me.

DAY 6: Tuesday, 14 July 1998



I met Ovoru. A 'fuzzy-wuzzy angel'. I have never felt such a sense of pride from somebody before. He wears his police uniform, a hat with a rising sun on it given to him by a trekker, a service medal and an RSL badge.

He is the reason I'm going to do something.

We walked from about 9.00am to 11.00pm. We camped on top of Kokoda Gap under the moonlight, and so close to the stars I could've touched them. Now I know how insignificant I am compared to the great mother nature.

DAY 7: Wednesday, 15 July 1998

Woke up cold but watched the sun rise above the cloud line. Never before have I seen such wonders. We walked downhill and came to Templeton's Crossing. The day started out really well, my spirits were high for the most part of the morning. Then we had another Cindy confrontation. I keep seeing myself in that girl and I think that's why she frustrates me. I know she can do it on her own but I think she's just too scared. She still hasn't let go of home.

With these feelings of her I found it really hard to be 'strong' one. I had a moment of selfishness, where I had just had enough of being so goddamn positive all the time and carrying these people's spirits all the time. Today was a physically tough day for me and I just cracked. I wanted a weak day but I couldn't

afford to place any more pressure on the team by asking for help. I am too proud to anyway. I had reached my breaking point, I could not give anymore. I went ahead. Sarah followed me being the highly perceptive legend that she is and gave me a shoulder to cry on. I shocked myself. I thought I was a bottomless pit of happiness and giving but guess what! I was wrong. I'm human.

I need to recognise my ego and learn to focus on it because for too long I think I have mistaken ego for sheer pride.

I have become a lot more open about my feelings. Something I have learnt from Sue.

I have made lifelong friends in the space of just seven days.

DAY 8: Thursday, 16 July 1998



We built a bridge over Eora Creek. I've never been prouder of something I've helped to create before in my life. I know that none of my art has soul. This is something really hard for me to admit but I know it's because for too long I have focused on how my paintings look rather than how they feel.

I'm writing this in Day 9 and am finding it very hard to remember what happened yesterday. The days have started melting into each other. All I know is that we walk for at least 12 hours a day and that my patience is wearing thin.

I'm tired, I'm sore and despite how much I love this place, I'm feeling the effects of being here

for eight days.

Last night we walked in the dark for about three hours. Thank goodness for singing and screaming.

What's worse though is how mentally drained I've become. I realise that I haven't yet felt a mediocre emotion. I have felt things in their purest and most crippling sense. Every emotion I have felt has been absolute. I know that these great highs and lows are taking their toll on me.

We sat on the site of old Isurava, I sat where the battle that saved Australia took place, too much to totally comprehend. Wow.

DAY 9: Friday, 17 July 1998



Woke up at Isurava. I love my fellow trekkers. It's funny how you come to know complete strangers inside and out. U know on a regular kind of holiday none of this closeness could have come about. It's Kokoda that's doing it. Every one of us is out of our element and reaching out for some kind of solace. I'm very lucky to be 'stranded' with these people.

Despite the pain, there's always a laugh to be had, a song to be sung and a kind of honesty about that is truly refreshing. Kokoda is changing me. I can feel it slowly seeping into my soul. Little things now get me through the day. A pat on the head from Tom or a 'hey sexy babe' from Maree. I know I'm coming home tuned into those little everyday occurrences and just how important they are in the type of society so many of us feel victims of.

Kokoda has given me my spirit. I can recognise it, and although I cannot yet describe it, I know it.

We walked up a hill near Isurava and saw a Japanese fighting plane. For the very first time in my life I had the opportunity to see with my own eyes something you wouldn't even find in a history text book. Three hours later we came down the hill. I was shitty, Cindy complained about how long it took and I was dumbfounded by her priorities. I know it's because she's still scared of holding us up.

My feet were the sorest they'd ever been. My little toe is very inflamed. Every step gives me an excuse to stop but my bloody mind is made up. Either way, no-one would let me give up, they care too much.

Started walking again, as we hit fields of choko vines it started to rain. And hard. Now I was wet, sore and tired. I felt like utter crap. Everybody's spirits were down. We ate lunch in the rain and walked for another four hours until we came to Hoi village.



We've reached the final pit-stop before Kokoda. It was raining, I didn't care. I stood out in the rain with Nicola and Sarah and sang 'it's raining men'.

Bitten by the silly bug we went down to the river. It was quite a wide one with lots of big rocks and steep descents. We decided to go rock sliding. I don't think I've ever laughed so hard. We just jumped in with our clothes on. Tom got rock shards in his big toe, Katrina and I got bruised bums, and Nicola nearly got swept downstream.

We got out, stood under a tarp the boys had put up and stood near the fire.

The locals brought us food. PNG bananas, sweet potato, more of that green stuff and bananas.

Charlie, after lots of sucking up and cuddling, let us all sleep under the tarp. I slept in between Katrina and Tom. Tom, jealous of my air mattress, kept using me as a pillow. I've known the bloke for 10 days and we're already acting like brother and sister. He's a very beautiful person. At one point I was tossing and turning and he put his arm around me and patted my back until I settled, just like a father.

We woke up at about 6.00am the next morning.

DAY 10: Saturday, 18 July 1998

I was a little confused this morning. It's all over. In about two hours I will be on plane flying in 20 minutes what took us 10 days.

I don't want this whole experience to end. I want to hold onto it forever because I'm scared that as soon as I begin talking or reminiscing about it in past tense my memories will slowly become fragmented and fade. I don't want to go home. I have become Kokoda and I don't think that I can let enough of it go to slip back into life as it is at home.

I'm scared, sad and a little lost.

I spoke with Katrina and Sue as we hobbled towards Kokoda about how things are going to be when we get back. We're all scared that we might change back into our old selves. We're also a little apprehensive about how we're all going to hold onto this feeling of closeness we all now feel towards each other. Will it fade just like memories of Kokoda? We want to keep it all alive within ourselves forever but we're not sure how to.

We reached the half way mark at about 9.00am and gave some Cronulla football jumpers to locals and took some photos. They were ecstatic, I'm still stoked at how closely these people follow rugby in spite of where they are and we call ourselves die hard footy fans. They sure do bring a new meaning to the whole idea.

Walking into Kokoda was almost surreal. I felt like I was watching myself crossing the finish line but a part of me was desperately trying to coax me back in an attempt to forever hold onto the moment. I didn't jump for joy, the whole thing was a kind of anticlimax. I kept waiting for someone to shout or for something to explode. I cried because it was over and I cried because my body was glad although my spirit wasn't.

We visited the memorial, got some pictures in front of the famous sign, said good-bye to our sticks and began the walk to the airstrip. The plane that followed us in only took Sarah, Nicola, Hamish and the couples. The rest of us waited and ate the last of our food ravenously.

Tom struck a deal with a young girl to get us all a bottle of coke each. Half an hour later she came back with re-used, lukewarm bottles. Best thing I've ever tasted.

Charlie paid a fellow 10 Kina to double him back to Kokoda so he could make a phone call. The plane came followed by Charlie bearing gifts, then he gave us cold drinks and sandwiches mmmm sandwiches. We ate what our bodies let us and gave the rest to the locals.

We flew back to Moresby on a shaky little plane, got into a Loloata shuttle bus and boated back to Loloata. Bang, bang, bang, Kokoda was gone.



Memories, photos and physical reminders are all that remain yet I will forever hold a part of Kokoda inside me. I have the spirit now, it has shown me who I am and for that I will never let it go. I now know what matters in life.

I would go back there in a second to feel again the sense of oneness I now have within me, but in its rawest sense. The surroundings, the people and my emotions, so rich, so pure and intense. I've experienced every emotion and discovered that the only ones that stay with me are those of happiness and love. These are things I don't want to ever let go of.

At Loloata, I washed. I hadn't realised how filthy I had been until I stepped out of the shower after watching the brown water trickle down the plug hole and was hit with the stench of my clothes. Boy oh boy! I really did smell like a man!

I talked to Maree about the whole experience and when she told me that I helped her spirit keep her going I felt so at peace with myself.

I ate. Even though I couldn't fit much in I tasted a bit of everything, savouring it all. Pineapple juice mmmmmmm. I got my t-shirt and cap and a very 'Charlie- hug', he jumped on top of me. That action probably sums up the man. Happy and always willing to share a little of it with you. I love him. He's taught me so much about myself just by being 'around' looking out for us. I am thankful for the faith he had in us to do it on our own, he didn't hold our hand but if we ever reached out for his he took it.

We went to bed at about midnight because Charlie was putting on a great little show for us. I slept like a log totally at peace with who I was.