

Death Railway



Kokoda – 2011



At Private Bruce Kingsbury's (Victoria Cross) grave at Bomana War Cemetery (Port Moresby PNG).

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Bookings. I had been thinking of a Kokoda Trip for a few years now and have mentioned it to friends as a goal of mine for some time. However I have kept putting it off, because of one thing or another and due to cost, training and so on.

So, with overseas travel curtailed in 2011; a cancelled Vegas trip in August (because my friend postponed his US wedding) and my wife unable to get leave for an extended trip, due to a new job in 2011 (Consultancy) - an opportunity arose where I could fit in a solo mission.

The hardest thing to arrange is the actual time to fit it in. Last year in October I was in Vietnam with my family on Grand Final day; being a Collingwood fanatic; it was tough to be in Vung Tao whilst the boys ran out; and I was watching it on the Australian Channel; even better with the draw and I was back the next week and watched it from the Balcony of the Melbourne Cricket Club.

So having said all that, I wanted to find a balance with where I could fit it in. I wanted to see all of the AFL season including finals; so Jan - October is out, I have several Trail Bike Enduro's too throughout the year; the last one being the Sawmill Rally in November. So December is the time to go; even though it may be a

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little wet underfoot on the trail. I think sometimes even if the dollar is low or the weather is less than perfect, if you don't throw caution to the wind; you continue to postpone or become one of those 'Gonna' people. I like to live by the Nike philosophy and I won't die not knowing.

I have made my booking and paid a \$500 deposit to Kokoda Trekking; at the moment there is only one other person on my trek; and the trek company says once you book; doesn't matter if there is one or ten persons; they will still go, even if there is only one person booked - which is good because it would be extremely painful if you had flights; accommodation and trek bookings and it got cancelled because of lack of attendance. Apparently some trek companies are like this - if they don't get their quota of people; they will cancel - I suppose this is something to keep a look out for with these type of tour companies.

Travel Insurance. Today (17 Feb 11) I booked my travel insurance with World Nomads; I emailed the company and made sure they have 'medical evacuation' included within their policy, because some may or may not have this provision within their policies; and getting a chopper into the trail would be super expensive. My tour company recommended two travel insurance companies and one was World Nomads; so they get my 2 weeks cover and \$75. So I'm sorted in that respect. Note; you have to provide the trekking company with your travel insurance details prior to going, along with a few other things and a Doctor's certificate to certify you are healthy and not going to drop dead on the trail.

Training. Bottom line - I have to get fit and lose some weight. I re-joined my old Martial Arts Club - Peninsula Hapkido, I am already a First Degree Black Belt; so my goal here is to train and practice for my Second Degree Black and at the same time; shed some Kilos and get fit for the Trail. I've also been abstaining from alcohol in Feb Fast, so a dry month for Feb and to kick off my training.

I've been walking about 5kms every second day; I'll load this up as we get closer. I have designed a training program that starts in September; increases distance, weight on my back and some cross-training with Hapkido, bike riding and hills.

I'll report back in a few months and update the blog on how my training is going. About August, I'll purchase some boots that I will wear on the trail; I'll break them in during my training phase; coz I don't want to be breaking in new boots on the trail.

I've hiked the Blue Mountains extensively over the past 13 years; and have some equipment from those hikes still in the shed; I'll need a new back pack however as my old one has been used a lot in the Nattai National Park (NSW) and has seen better days. There is a long equipment list that is required and I'll get onto that closer to the hike. Having said that; everything must be broken in; to avoid blisters and making adjustments on the trail.

Porter. I've organised a Porter too; so that I have a wing man and someone to carry some gear for me. It's a good investment at \$550. This price pays for his wages, food, flights from Kokoda back to Port Moresby etc. So it's good for the local economy and local PNG people. I read if you want to give a gift to the Porters; they love all types of Army Clothing; particularly Army style pants. I'll have to remember this and purchase some prior to leaving, to offer as a gift to my Porter.

Let the training begin.

Andrew.

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Tuesday, February 22, 2011

Setback

As mentioned I rejoined my old Martial Arts Club - Peninsula Hapkido - formerly known as Morgans Hapkido in Frankston Victoria. I was up to about my 3rd or 4th class and we were doing 'Yousel' which is a grappling exercise where you go to ground and try and get your opponent to tap out. You try and get any form of lock on, be it a wrist, arm or leg lock or similar and your partner taps out.

I was battling a blue belt (I am a first Degree Black Belt) and I beat him the first two times predominantly on brute strength; and really thats not the best way to go about things; because there is a lack of technique in that game plan. But for this exercise it seemed to be working. However, my time in the Dojo had been limited and my fitness was pretty crap, so by the third/fourth bout I was absolutely stuffed; I got rolled over and put in a dousie of an arm bar and I tried to save myself from tapping out; my foot got stuck underneath me and I hyper-extended all my toes. My small toe looked dislocated and the other three small ones all red. It swelled up immediately and looked seriously angry.

That was it for the class for the night - I was out and couldnt continue; I went home and applied ice for several hours, rang 'Nurse-on-line' and spoke to a nice nurse who confirmed what I was doing was the right thing for my injury. Rest, Ice and elevation etc. She told me to see a Doctor the next day, dont under any circumstance do anymore exercise and stay off it. Dont bump it or injure it any further.

So the next day I went trail bike riding in the Otways with the Clayton Trail Bike Club. I was initially concerned about the massively swollen foot fitting into my Riding Boot - but as the boot has an inner boot; i just took this inner boot out and my foot had plenty of room. So the ride was on - I only knocked it once which sent a shiver up my whole body and I vowed not to do that again. The day went like any other out on the KTM 520 - lots of erosion mounds to fly over; loads of loamy soil to spin the back wheel on and hills to climb and have fun on.

So whats all this got to do with Kokoda I hear you ask? Well, I re-joined the dojo with my two boys with the mindset of losing some weight and getting fit again. At the start of the 'get fit for Kokoda' program I weigh 103.7 kgs. Thats too heavy to try and trek with; so my goal is to get my wieight by December, down to 93 kgs. I want to reduce in size by 10 kgs - I think this is doable and realistically it is about 1 kg a month. So I have started with Feb Fast - where you don't drink for a month and have been exercising almost daily. This toe injury is a setback; but instead of walking (which is troubling me at the moment) I will get on my Mountain Bike and go for a pedal.

Here's hoping my foot gets better quickly.

Your Injured Martial Artist,

Andrew

(Note, two weeks later I had my toe x-rayed and it was confirmed as broken. The Doctor suggested I take two months off all forms of exercise - which is a difficult scenario. Im just going to be cautious in the Dojo and when out walking.

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Training.

I've been training now for several months; some hiccups along the way but generally doing well with walking and the gym. I'll ramp it up in the next few months; conscious not to peak too early. I went back to Hapkido (Martial Arts) to cross-train, but I've found I pull up way too sore - age catching up...so I have permanently hung up the belt.

My plan is to walk 500 kilometres in the next three months - Sep, Oct and November 2011.

I'm in the gym doing 4 sessions a week; and generally I walk to the gym (the long way) and walk about 6kms there. In the last 3 months before the track I'll combine some hill work as well which will be in some picturesque places on the Peninsula - so that should be fun.

I plan to drop 5kgs before I go (average bag of spuds); which will help in hill climbs and the like - to be honest I could do to drop that 5kgs anyway. I read somewhere the average person loses about 5-6 kgs on the track anyway - so at the end of the year I could realistically be 11 kgs lighter. Lets see if that comes to fruition. I haven't been that light since my RAAF days.

Boots.

I have purchased my boots I'm wearing on the Trail and these are Columbia Brand boots; they have a good grip and it hasn't taken long to wear them in; Gortex uppers. They are Cherry-Ripe to go; I've even given them a few coats of "waterproof" spray; and I'll take spare laces.

Medicines.

I went and saw a Travel Doctor (a specialist in tropical climates and medicines); I've subsequently had all inoculations and boosters.

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The Map

. Ive even got some Cholera vaccine to take before I go along with Malaria tablets. Had to have a blood test to ascertain if Hep A and B levels were up to date - seems Hep B is - but I need a Hep A booster shot which I'll sort next week. The Doc gave me a travel pack of pills and potions for stomach upsets and that type of thing for the first aid kit - which will be invaluable if needed.

Hope injuries keep at bay and I can keep up with the gym and walking. Im enjoying the protein shakes. The month of September I am staying off the grog. In October there are two footy Grand Finals and a Long Room Lunch - so only 3 sessions of grog in that month. I'll also abstain in November - so I should be in tip-top shape by Dec 2. Trek Day.

No more entries until I fly out - Melb to Brisbane - Bris to Port Moresby. Until then....

Andrew