PART 2

Commentaries and Vignettes

Kokoda World Heritage

Kokoda Initiative Partners
The Kokoda Initiative is a partnership between the governments of Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG) for the sustainable development of the Kokoda Region and Brown River catchment. Under the fourth goal of the Kokoda Initiative, both governments are investigating the possibility of a World Heritage nomination for the Kokoda Track and surrounding Owen Stanley Ranges to promote and protect its exceptional heritage values. PNG placed the region on its World Heritage tentative list in 2006 as a mixed cultural and natural site, with a formal nomination yet to be developed.

A preliminary desktop World Heritage scoping study of the Owen Stanley Ranges commissioned by the Australian Government in 2009 found that there are several sites within the Owen Stanley Ranges that are likely to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value.

The Kokoda Track is most famously known by Australians as the site of a major World War II battle in the Pacific and has since become a pilgrimage site to an increasing number of Australian trekkers each year. The cultural values are also attributed to the local Orokaiva and Koiai cultures that have withstood massive changes in the last century.

The tentative listing noted the region as ‘one of the most biologically important areas in the Asia Pacific’ with natural values evident in its extreme altitudinal and climatic variation, wide range of vegetation types, exceptional levels of endemism especially for bird species, and its role as an important refuge for migratory species.

The Owen Stanley Ranges is also home to what is believed to be the oldest reliably dated human occupation sites in Sahul, the single landmass of Australia and PNG during the last Ice Age. The Kokoda Initiative has since supported archaeological surveys to add to the knowledge of the region’s cultural heritage values. Preliminary studies confirmed that the region is home to a diversity of archaeological landscapes reflecting drastic changes over time and identified the ridgelines and valleys of the region and the Myola basins as priority areas for further investigations, which are to commence in early 2014.

A project to record the oral history of Papua New Guineans’ experience of the Kokoda campaign is to also commence in 2014, where the PNG National Museum and Gallery will partner with Australian experts to record stories from the local people and their descendants. While the first phase of the project focuses on two pilot areas along the Kokoda Track, it will also scope the potential of expanding the project across PNG. This project also provides an opportunity to deepen our understanding of Orokaiva and Koiai cultures and their ongoing relationship with this spectacular mountain range.

Managing the impacts of the trekking industry on the heritage values and sharing the benefits of sustainable tourism among the local people remain the top priorities for Kokoda Initiative partners. It is hoped that a World Heritage nomination for the Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges will be completed by 2015, at which point, a comprehensive community-based management plan for the region will be in place.