

Short History of the Kokoda Track Memorial

Just as the battles along the Kokoda Track in Papua-New Guinea have become a defining symbol for Australia of the whole Pacific war, so too the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway has attained unique stature among our war memorials.

Because it is a living, growing memorial, and an educational resource, it forms a link with the past for today's and future generations. That link is made even stronger by the Walkway's connection to Concord Repatriation General Hospital which for seven decades has served the military and veteran communities.

The Walkway was conceived during the "Australia Remembers 1945-95" program to commemorate the end of WWII. After land along the foreshore of Brays Bay was identified as ideal for an 800 metre pedestrian link between Concord Hospital and Rhodes railway station, a steering committee was formed to make the memorial walkway a reality.

The committee included representatives from Concord Hospital, the RSL on behalf of the veteran community, the then Concord Council, Concord Rotary Club and the NSW Department of Urban Affairs.

The Walkway was envisaged as a memorial dedicated to all World War II veterans, which would also provide educational facilities, with the potential for health promotion activities, and, in time, a significant tourist attraction.

The initial stages of the Walkway were built with the support of the Department of Employment and Training, which granted \$1.3 million to give dozens of long-term unemployed people practical lessons in landscape gardening, paving, carpentry and horticulture. It quickly became apparent that this was to be a memorial of great natural beauty, environmentally sensitive, and an appropriate tribute to the men and women of Australia and its neighbouring allies who had sacrificed so much in the fight against aggression.

On 3 October 1996 the then Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon. Bruce Scott MP, opened the first stage of the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway, which included the magnificent granite walls of the centrepiece with the WWII photographs sandblasted onto them, and the pathway itself.

In the years that have followed, the hundreds of tropical plants and trees have flourished, creating a canopy reminiscent of New Guinea along with 22 remembrance stations. The memorial rose garden opposite the entrance to

Concord Hospital has blossomed, framed by a circular wall on which individual memorial plaques can be mounted.

Concord Council (now City of Canada Bay) built the refreshment and souvenir kiosk and the car park, while Concord Rotary Club provided the BBQ facility. The Ralph Honner Kokoda Education Centre was opened on VP Day, 14 August 2009, by the then Premier of NSW, the Hon. Nathan Rees. The centre is an outstanding educational facility, equipped with multimedia technology, providing an enhanced learning experience for the 3500 students who visit the Walkway each year. Many thousands more, including significant numbers living overseas, log on to the KTMW website to learn about Australia's role in the Pacific war.

Since 1998 the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway has thrived under the stewardship of its Board, whose members serve in a voluntary capacity. The initial chairman was the late Rusty Priest AM, former State President of the Returned and Services League, followed by John Haines AM, and current chair is Jennifer Collins, former Deputy Commissioner of DVA . Day-to-day management of the Walkway is in the hands of Concord Hospital, through Alice Kang, Director of Marketing and Community Relations.