



## Short History of the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway

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Just as the battles along the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea have become a defining symbol for Australia in the whole Pacific war, so too the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway (KTMW) 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 over seven decades has served the military and veteran communities.

The Walkway was conceived by Concord Hospital 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 the 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 NSW Returned and Services League (RSL) on behalf of the veteran community, the then Concord Council (now City of Canada Bay), 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 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 Papua 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. To date, over 500 plaques dedicated to individuals or groups (primarily related to service in WWII) adorn the walls.

Concord Council built the refreshment and souvenir kiosk and the car park, while Concord Rotary Club provided the BBQ facilities. 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 hundreds of 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. In November 2022 a new website was launched, allowing digital visitors to view expanded sections on our education program, our commemorative events, historical images of the campaign, further

reading and other resources. These enhancements and updates have meant the website is now a resource in itself.

Each year, many more thousands experience the Walkway itself, either in organised community groups or individually, who visit the Education Centre or use the covered function area, while others take advantage of the Walkway precincts as a destination for a peaceful walk or respite, or using the Walkway path to and from the hospital.

The Walkway continues to expand its education objectives, witnessed by the launch of the immersive Virtual and Augmented Reality programs in the Education Centre on 3 November 2021.

On 3 November 2022 (the annual Kokoda Day commemorative event), the Walkway was proud to unveil two significant projects: a digital honour roll featuring the name, rank and date of death of the approximately 625 Australians killed in the PNG/Kokoda campaign (projected onto the windows of the Education Centre); and the Private Bruce Kingsbury VC Memorial Garden, in front of the Education Centre in memory of Private Kingsbury. Also on that day the NSW State Government proclaimed 3 November to be 'NSW Kokoda Day', in honour of those who served in the campaign.

The Walkway continues to enhance its operations and activities. QR codes have been added to each Station, allowing visitors to view expanded details associated with each location on our website (including audio of the Station text for those with a vision impairment). Our educational and general promotional activities have been enhanced by the revitalised military history talk series, updates on our social media platforms and articles on stories of some of the individuals or groups who have a plaque in the Memorial Rose Garden. We continue to improve our services and activities on an ongoing basis to ensure the Walkway meets the needs of current and future generations.

Since 1998 the 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 RSL, followed by John Haines AM, and current chair is Jennifer Collins, former NSW/ACT Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA).

Day-to-day management of the Walkway is in the hands of Ms Alice Kang OAM, former Director of Marketing and Community Relations at Concord Hospital.

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