

## DIARY OF MT VICTORIA EXPEDITION FROM WEBSITE

### ***Soc's expedition to the summit of Mt Victoria - the highest mountain in the Owen Stanley Ranges of Papua.***

On Monday morning, 11th May, Soc and an intrepid group of travellers set off to take on the arduous mountain walk to the top of Mount Victoria at an altitude of 4040m. This is a trek that Soc is trying to get up and running as a commercial enterprise for the people of Kanga Village which is situated near the far end of the Yodda Valley NW of Kokoda. There were not enough people for this to be such a trip as the minimum requirement for departure is 8 clients. To keep faith with his Papuan friends, and keen clients, Soc decided to go ahead and arrange the trip as a Private Expedition, of which he is the Group Leader and Michael Lucas of Kanga Village is the Expedition Guide. Both Soc (once) and Michael (3 times) have completed the climb before.

The adventurers are **Caren Jenkins** from Brisbane, trek motivator and recorder, completed the Kokoda Trail with Komplete Kokoda for ANZAC 2008. **Randall Wynn** from Cairns, a geologist who did the Trail with KTL in 2008. **Jeremy Scriven** - a surveyor from the Sunshine Coast who loves exploring new boundaries. **Paul McDonald** - Robyn Kienzle's cousin's son - a cartographer from Sydney. With this combination of skills, it will be a very interesting and educational journey.

#### **Tuesday 12th May - Day 1 - Camp Kanga - 400m**

This trek is a bit of a logistical nightmare as all food has to be carried by porters for the two weeks journey - no airdrop half way like on the Trail, so that excess baggage is a real problem. It took two planes to get them and all their gear to Kokoda. Then they were held up negotiating with some of the local landowners - a story for trekkers to tell on their return. Food for all the porters had been pre-ordered from the local trade store but prices have doubled since the road to Popondetta is cut by the lack of a bridge over the Kumusi river - so that blew the budget. The porters then left Soc's tent behind that he had left with them from his last Kokoda trek - all in all not a good day - but I am sure the 13th will be better?!

#### **Wednesday 13th May Day 2 - Macgregor's Lookout - 1320m**

Soc rang about 4pm to say they had had a good day and arrived early at their first campsite. No rain, everybody happy and coping well. Had to employ two more porters to carry the load but will send them home after 2 or 3 days then send two more home after 4 or five days. They are at an altitude of around 4000ft and it was not cold although Soc anticipated it would be a cold night.

#### **Thursday 14th May - Day 3 - Camp Cloud - 1960m**

Got a call from Soc round 4pm again. Another good day with their target of Story Camp achieved in good time. Today involved some of the most hazardous walking of the trip, along razor back ridges and over matted tree roots described by Caren as "walking on air". All survived unscathed with the porters doing a great job helping them across any danger spots. They didn't mention their altitude tonight but looking at the track they are taking on a map, the whole route looks like the shape of a foot including the ankle. Mt Victoria is positioned just under the heel. They are currently making their way down the front of the ankle.

## **Friday 15th May - Day 4 - Camp Jade - 2960m**

Soc reported in right on time at 4pm. They are now at the bottom of the front of the ankle on the foot. In more scientific terms, they have been heading WSW and tomorrow will turn NW along the roundabout ridge that ultimately takes them to the summit, which will actually be behind them for a few days - frustrating I am sure. They are over 9000ft ( Soc never quotes altitude in "those French things" i.e. metric) and it is getting pretty cold. They will probably send a couple of porters home tomorrow. All are well.

## **Saturday 16th May - Day 5 - Camp Grassland - 3520m**

It was before 4pm when Soc rang today to say they were in camp for the night at an altitude of over 11,000ft and the temp was 14degrees C - anticipating it will get much colder during the night. Everyone is going well - the porters say they are not cold yet - 6 of them will head home tomorrow. Tomorrow they will reach the first of the Lakes - Lake Ohma and will continue on to Lake Ranu to camp - this Lake is near the top of the toe on my imaginary "foot" path - hopefully first hot shower for the trip and past the area where shortage of water is a problem. Jeremy is the official photographer, taking photos of everything from tree climbing kangaroo poo to rhododendrons. Soc says it hard to get away from him even to pay a call of nature -keep your head down or your photo will be taken!!

## **Sunday 17th May - Day 6 - Camp Lake Ranu - 3700m**

A late call today as they were having too much fun exploring the lake area, enjoying being out from under the jungle/forest canopy, investigating the fascinating rock formations and having a hot "top and tail" . Soc offered to rig up a hot shower bucket for Caren - but not the boys - Caren stated she was a *princess* but not *precious* so would manage the same as the men! Paul solved the problem by stripping off and streaking in and out of the lakes - very quickly as it is close to freezing!! Air temperature 2degrees C. Have had mainly fine weather. They have sent four porters home but will keep the remaining 12 right through. Some of them suffering headaches from altitude sickness but not too badly. Caren got on the phone and filled me on the details of **campsites and altitudes I have inserted above.**

## **Monday 18th May - Day 7 - Camp Mt Thynne - 3170m**

Looks like they have lost some altitude as they move along the ball of the foot and into the instep. Should be pretty steady climb from here on - at least they are now heading towards their target. Ice on the tents this morning. Rarefied air making them breathless and lots of Nurofen being consumed - not that that does much good for the head but perhaps eases the other aches and pains! Weather holding, thousands of great photos being taken.

## **Tuesday 19th May - Day 8 - Camp Dickson's Pass**

No call from Soc today which indicates they could be under heavy cloud cover. The satellite photo of PNG certainly shows thick cloud over the Owen Stanleys. This interferes with sat phone reception as well as slowing them down. They are ahead of schedule and had allowed a couple of extra days for bad weather so should not be a problem except that no doubt it is very cold! Their next stop was to be in the area called Winter Heights. Lets hope the weather clears more quickly than it is here on the Gold Coast where it has been blowing a gale for three days.

## **Wednesday 20th May - Day 9 - Camp Mt Douglas - 3460m**

Soc rang around 4pm. As suspected, had not been able to get reception due to cloud cover and the fact that they were down in Dickson's Pass. Two cold wet days of slipping and sliding and waking up in damp camps. All enjoying a hot cup of soup when he rang. from their camp site at Mt Douglas. All being well should be pretty close to the summit tomorrow, and on its top Friday.

## **Thursday 21st May - Day 10 - North West Face of Mt Victoria**

Another cold, wet, cloudy day but they reached their campsite that allows them to make an early start tomorrow and reach the **summit**. They hope by heading off early they will have clear skies to see the **view from the top**. **Jeremy sent a special birthday message to his daughter Jackie who is 19 tomorrow!!**

## **Friday 22nd May - Day 11 - same camp, 3725m**

Soc rang early today with the bad news that they had complete white out when they awoke this morning - heavy cloud, mist, rain and wind - visibility only 30ft. Unless it lifts, plans to reach the summit have to be put on hold. Matter of waiting for it to clear before they can progress - lucky they are ahead of schedule. Would have been a miracle if they had managed good weather for the whole trip. Here's hoping tomorrow is better.

## **Saturday 23rd May - Day 12 - MOUNT VICTORIA**

THEY MADE IT! At around 12.30 today Soc rang to say they were at the top. They woke to clear skies and a temperature of minus 12 degrees C, and ice on their tents but they could see from coast to coast so the views were magnificent. It was hard work struggling to the rocky summit, past frozen waterfalls and with limited breath. Their GPS read 4047m. Soc rang again around 4 to say goodbye to Suzanne who is off to Bali with Harvey World Travel tomorrow - they had made camp but had not lost much altitude or gained any warmth. Keen to get down to warmer climes tomorrow.

## **Sunday 24th May - Day 13 - the descent**

Soc was extremely upset when he rang as he had just heard the news that John Beleni died of a heart attack a couple of days ago. John is like family to us. His father worked in the Kienzle house at Mamba as our cook for more than 20 years. Anyone who has traveled to Kokoda with Soc will know JB as his right hand man at Kokoda. We will miss him so much and his brother Manasa is with Soc as his porter on the mountain so it will be a sad journey home. They should be back in Kokoda Tuesday a.m. John organised their transport to Kanga and had even thought of doing the mountain with them - thank God he did not.

They are now down to around 3300m, and it is warmer but the rain is about to start and their knees are all hurting so that they made camp at about 3.30pm. Caren said to let it be known that Kilimanjaro is a *walk in the park* compared to this trek! She has now done both.

## **Tuesday 26th May.- Day 15 - Back at Oro Haven Kokoda**

Soc rang at 2.30pm to say "mission accomplished" - the round trip completed. Not without some pain on the last few days as they were forced to follow a very rough up and down track back to the Ebei because the recalcitrant landowners of the Komo area had blocked the shorter route.

They had been expected on Monday night, and when they did not arrive, a group of Soc's old Gailala mates from Mamba arrived to escort them safely home!!

Their food lasted the distance, the porters are all paid and have gone with Manasa to join the mourning party for John Beleni at his block. They will return to farewell them tomorrow at 9am when the charter flight is expected. Their next contact should be from Port Moresby tomorrow.