



28 APR, 2024

We'll continue to walk together, side-by-side

Sunday Telegraph, Sydney

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PM Anthony Albanese



As an Australian, there are few experiences more humbling than to walk the Kokoda Track.

To be in the place where Australians and Papua New Guineans faced a merciless invader and fought for the same thing: home.

This week I had the privilege of walking in the footsteps of those giants, and to do it in the spirit of friendship that was forged between our two peoples in those darkest of days.

Joined by Papua New Guinean Prime Minister James Marape, it was a trek like no other.

Starting at Kokoda itself, the welcome our party received at each village was so warm and uplifting.

During our relatively short journey, it was a pleasure to meet many Australians walking the entire Track in what has become an Aussie pilgrimage in memory and respect.

It is beautiful but challenging country, yet every step along the way I reflected on how easy our group had it.

Like so many Australians who have trod that sacred ground, I tried to imagine what it might have been like knowing there was a chance that any of those majestic trees might be hiding a sniper, or that every bed of long grass might reveal a terrible, sudden flash of bayonet.

In 1942, in a place that now feels like paradise, 625 Australians were killed.

That is the great weight of history

you feel on the Kokoda Track, that great artery of mud and suffering and perseverance that holds a place of such power in Australia's shared memory – and PNG's.

So many Papua New Guineans helped Australians – troops, coast watchers, shipping pilots, nurses and carers.

Villagers who risked their lives. Stretcher bearers whose courage was matched only by their kindness.

They were angels walking tall through the hell of war.

Together with our extraordinary soldiers, they cemented the powerful bond and friendship between Australia and Papua New Guinea that lasts to this day.

All this was on my mind when we reached Isurava, the scene of the battle that claimed the lives of 99

Australians and wounded another 111.

What a solemn privilege it was to join all the Australians and Papua New Guineans on that hallowed ground for the Anzac Day dawn service and utter the words: "Lest we forget."

I will always treasure my time in PNG, from the friendship of Prime Minister Marape, who kept his promise to walk with me every step of the way, to the kind attention of every one of the porters who made it all possible.

Not least Bela, who looked after me; I could not have done it without him.

PNG is our nearest of neighbours and our closest of friends.

After this week, I am more confident than ever we will keep walking together side-by-side towards a better future.



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Anthony Albanese
Prime Minister



Anthony Albanese on the Kokoda Track, and (inset) with his porter Bela – all decked out in Rabbitohs gear.

