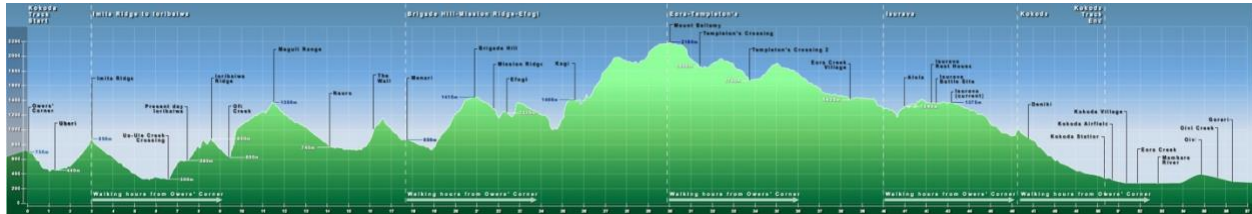


# Topography of Kokoda

See the website for more details: <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/kokoda-track-1942-1943/resources/topography-kokoda>

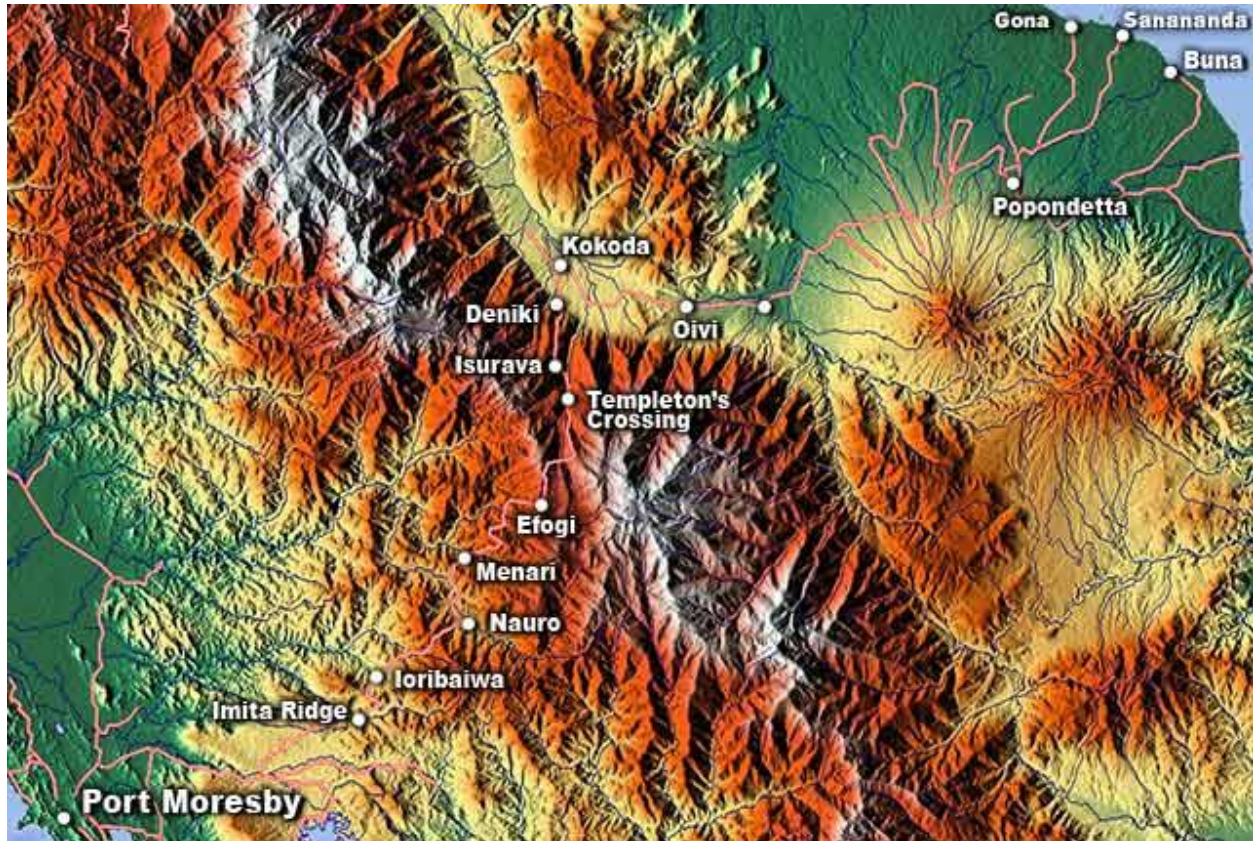
*The 96-kilometre Kokoda track takes about 50 hours walking time. That is about two kilometres per hour...*



Putting this in perspective, brisk walking speed on flat ground is six kilometres per hour. A two kilometre per hour rate gives some indication that Kokoda is no stroll in the park.

Walking might not be quite the right word to use to describe progress across the Owen Stanley Range: Almost all of the 50 hours are spent descending or ascending; carefully negotiating your way down a narrow track, crossing a slippery log bridge over a fast flowing stream at the bottom, then climbing steeply and slowly. Sometimes the ascent so closely approaches the perpendicular that hands must assist feet. In the worst of these places the rate of advance is as slow as one kilometre an hour.

[Topographic map of Kokoda](#)



Topographic map of Kokoda. [Source: [www.maps-for-free.com](http://www.maps-for-free.com)]

Those who complete the trip from south to north will remember, about a third of the way through the journey, that hour when the track follows along the bank of the Brown River. Apart from the last hour into Kokoda it is the only decent length of flat walking on the Kokoda track. This luxurious hour beside the Brown River is paid for, in full, by 'the wall', an incredibly steep climb which follows hard upon the river flats.

A typical days effort might be crossing from one to three ridges, which usually run at right angles to the track. The southern half of the walk, though not the highest above sea level, is nevertheless the more difficult half. The ups and downs, as the chart shows, are more frequent and precipitous.

The rain will find you at any height and cloud will sometimes descend to 1000 metres, giving the feeling of walking through thick mist. In the Mt Bellamy - Templeton's Crossing region the track rises to over 2000 metres above sea level. Here temperatures can drop at night to as low as five degrees centigrade.

From the second map it can be seen that the Owen Stanley Range acts as a barrier between the north and south coasts. The Kokoda track makes its way through the barrier where it is thinnest and where the mountains are lowest in altitude. From Kokoda to the north coast the land is low lying and crossed with rivers fed by streams from the mountains. When this area floods, even today, no movement by land is possible between Kokoda and the sea.

## Teaching and learning activities for the classroom

### Group work - The topography of Kokoda

Sir Kingsley Norris, who walked the track as senior medical officer for the Australian 7th Division, gave this famous description of it:

"Imagine an area of approximately one hundred miles long. Crumple and fold this into a series of ridges, each rising higher and higher until seven thousand feet is reached, then declining in ridges to three thousand feet. Cover this thickly with jungle, short trees and tall trees, tangled with great, entwining savage vines. Through an oppression of this density, cut a little native track, two or three feet wide, up the ridges, over the spurs, round gorges and down across swiftly-flowing, happy mountain streams. Where the track clambers up the mountain sides, cut steps - big steps, little steps, steep steps - or clear the soil from the tree roots."

"Every few miles, bring the track through a small patch of sunlit kunai grass, or an old deserted native garden, and every seven or ten miles, build a group of dilapidated grass huts - as staging shelters - generally set in a foul, offensive clearing. Every now and then, leave beside the track dumps of discarded, putrifying food, occasional dead bodies and human foulings. In the morning, flicker the sunlight through the tall trees, flutter green and blue and purple and white butterflies lazily through the air, and hid birds of deep-throated song, or harsh cockatoos, in the foliage."

"About midday, and through the night, pour water over the forest, so that the steps become broken, and a continual yellow stream flows downwards, and the few level areas become pools and puddles of putrid black mud. In the high ridges above Myola, drip this water day and night over the track through a foetid forest grotesque with moss and glowing phosphorescent fungi. Such is the...route for ten days to be covered from [Ower's Corner] to Deniki."

For the teacher

*A black and white version of the scrollable map should be handed out to each group of students for this exercise. A full colour version can be printed for your classroom wall.*

### *The map*

This map shows that it takes the average person 50 hours and 20 minutes walking time to walk the length of the Kokoda track from Owers' corner to Kokoda station. As the track is 96 kilometres long, that is an average rate of close to two kilometres an hour. The hour markers are spread evenly along the bottom of the map but that is not quite right. Walking uphill would be slower than walking on the flat and the downhill slopes are so steep and muddy it is as slow as walking uphill.

For the student

Your task is to make the map more accurate by changing the 'hour' markers along the bottom of the map to better reflect the actual rate of progress. On flat ground the markers should really be

placed further apart-to represent quicker movement- and on steep slopes they would be closer together to represent slower movement.

Underneath where the hour markers are now, draw a new set of hour markers assuming that walking along the flat ground, or on gentle slopes, would be at a rate of three kilometres an hour. Up and down the not so steep slopes would be two kilometres per hour. For the very steepest slopes, where you need to use both hands and feet to climb, one kilometre per hour would be the best you could manage.

Remember that, at the end, you still must have a total of 50 hours and 20 minutes walking time.

#### Hints

To mark a walking rate of one kilometre an hour place the markers only half as far apart as they are now. To mark a rate of three kilometres an hour place the markers half again as far apart as they are now. There are just five or six places where you can walk at three kilometres an hour. From hour markers 14 to 16 is one of them.