



CONDITIONING GUIDELINES FOR THE KOKODA TRACK

The Kokoda Track is a unique environment which puts your body and mind through some unique stresses. It is important to be as specifically conditioned as possible for the extraordinary challenges that you will encounter.

The terrain is very steep, slippery, wet and humid. In addition to the aerobic fitness required; the constant stresses and strains on the muscles and joints of the feet, ankles, legs, knees, hips and back require a specific conditioning which is not easy to duplicate here in Australia. These recommendations provide a general guide to the type of conditioning you'll need.

To start with, gradually increase the amount of time that you walk each day. Eventually you want to be able to walk all day with a 15-20minute break every 45mins to an hour. If you can do this comfortably for two days in a row, up and down steep hills, you'll be fit enough for the track! (Apart from fitness, you need to pace yourself, stay well hydrated and be mentally strong)

The longest day for most people can be around 10hrs, some days you'll only walk 4-5hrs

As you get closer to the departure date you will need to get more specific in your conditioning ie; walking for long periods up and down steep bush tracks, wearing the gear and carrying the pack that you'll be using on the track. The ultimate would be bushwalking in the hills all day in the rain, as this is the closest you'll get to the conditions on the track.

If you progress gradually and listen to your body you'll get to the starting line in good nick which is a big advantage!

Tip for walking up hills

Climbing a steep hill really tests your anaerobic threshold. A good tip for walking hills is to either pace yourself slowly so that you can maintain your speed without getting into oxygen debt (focus on your breathing). You can also go a bit quicker but stop for a short 30sec breather before you get too fatigued, then go again. The more you push your limits in training, the easier it will be on the track.

Strength and Flexibility

Apart from having the endurance to walk for 8-9 days and the power to climb hills, you'll also need good strength and flexibility to avoid injuries such as sprains, strains and overuse injuries. These can be minimised by doing some daily stretching (see Wayne for suggested stretches) and strengthening your muscles and joints by making sure you do some stair or hill climbing at every opportunity (you'll develop more strength by going down hills slowly and in a controlled manner) Squats, sit ups, push ups are also good for improving overall strength.

Note: Quarter Squats on one leg while balancing, are great for strengthening the muscles that stabilise the knee joint. Stretching the muscles that connect the hip to the lateral side of the knee will also help to prevent knee soreness.

Balance

Balance is best developed by doing lots of bushwalking in the hills, especially tracks that are not graded and where you may need to scramble over rocks and creeks – the steeper the better. Balance also refers to balance in your training. Make sure you intersperse hard and easy days and allow for adequate rest too – especially if you are out of condition.

Dealing with setbacks

The most common setback will be an injury or illness. The risk of this happening can be minimised by looking after yourself. Eg; having a balanced training schedule, good time management, being organised, making time for rest and relaxation, eating well and not abusing your body. What ever you have to do to protect yourself from illness or injury, do it. The discipline and mental toughness required will pay big dividends on the track.

If you do have an illness or injury that sets you back a week or two, don't panic. Seek treatment as soon as possible, rest a few days and then ease yourself back into it.

Getting Started

In the months leading up to the more focused 3 month training period, all you need to do is work on your baseline fitness. If you're starting from scratch we suggest that you gradually build up from 30minutes walking to one hour brisk walking 3-4times per week and once a week do some stairs for 30 minutes or go for a 30-60minute walk in the hills. Cycling and swimming are also good recovery sessions.

If you prefer going to the gym make sure you are doing more endurance type activities such as bike, stepper, cross trainer, treadmill together with some light strength work.

Suggested Routine for 3 months prior to your trek date

Month 1

Monday - Recovery Day (swim, cycle or easier walk – 30minutes) and stretch
Tuesday - Rest day
Wednesday - Easy Day (30-40min walk)
Thursday - Medium Day (as above – 1hr)
Friday - Easy Day (30-40min walk)
Saturday - Medium Day (1-2hrs inc hills)
Sunday - Hard Day (long bushwalk in the hills with day pack 5kgs – 4hrs+)

Strength and flexibility exercises each day. (Wayne to demo)

Month 2

Monday - Recovery Day (swim, cycle or easier walk – 30minutes) and stretch
Tuesday - Rest day
Wednesday - Easy Day (45min walk inc hills)
Thursday - Medium Day (as above – 1.5hrs)
Friday - Easy Day (45min walk inc hills)
Saturday - Medium Day (2-3hr inc hills)
Sunday - Hard Day (long bushwalk in the hills with day pack 5kgs – 5hrs+)

Keep doing strength and flexibility exercises each day.

Month 3

Monday - Recovery Day (swim, cycle or easier walk – 30minutes) and stretch
Tuesday - Rest day
Wednesday - Easy Day (1hr walk in the hills)
Thursday - Medium Day (as above – 2-3hrs)
Friday - Easy Day (1hr walk in the hills)
Saturday - Medium Day (4-5hr bushwalk in the hills)
Sunday - Hard Day (long bushwalk in the hills with day pack 7kgs – 6-8hrs+)

Keep doing strength and flexibility exercises each day.

Note: you can switch the days on which you do hard, medium or easy walks as long as there is opportunities to recover and rest between hard days.

The focus during the last 6 weeks before you depart should be on doing lots of steep and slippery hills. When ever it rains take advantage and get out there. Make sure you are wearing and carrying the same gear you'll have on the track

Peaking and Tapering

2-3 weeks prior to the trek we usually do a 2 day expedition walk which is 2 full days of walking steep hills back to back. This is usually the toughest walk we do prior to the track itself and is normally scheduled 2-3 weeks before the trip so that you are at your peak at the right time.

After this walk you'll probably need a couple of days complete rest and then keep doing some medium and easy walks every second day for at least 1-2hrs so that you maintain your condition but start to freshen up a bit. Keep walking until 2-3 days before departure but take it easy.

It may also be helpful to schedule 2-3 visits to a physio or masseur 1-2 weeks before going especially if you have any soreness or tight muscles and joints.

Make sure you eat and drink especially well the week before you go and get a good night's sleep each night.

Try to organise your week before you go to be a low stress week. Plan ahead!

A Word of Warning

Don't increase intensity too soon as this may lead to injury and you'll be back where you started.

We provide a medical form which you will need to have completed by your doctor. If you have more immediate medical concerns, please see your doctor before commencing any unusually strenuous exercise.

If you are commencing a gym program or Pilates class in preparation for the trek, please inform your instructor of your goals and pace yourself early in the piece until your body gets used to it! The last thing you want is to train too intensely early on and have to nurse a chronic injury while trying to increase your fitness.

Good luck with your training and please don't hesitate to give us a call if you experience even the smallest sign of an injury.

Disclaimer

The above guidelines are general recommendations for the average person who is reasonably fit and not suffering from any significant medical conditions or injuries that could be aggravated by bushwalking. If you have specific medical conditions or injuries that could be aggravated by following these recommendations, it is your responsibility to get a clearance by your doctor before commencing any training.

For more information, **Email:** gabrielle@freespiritadventures.com.au or **Phone:** 0414410963