



50km Kokoda Challenge

Training for the 2014 Kokoda Challenge started in 2013, just after we had recovered from the 2013 event. With countless push-ups, burpees, sit-ups, squats and walks, the training was very tiring and tough. Even more so, were the practice hikes. We hiked a long way. The longest I have ever walked on a practice hike was 30 plus kilometres. The toughest hike was the night hike. Starting at 10pm, the nine and a half hour hike meant that we were still hiking by the time the sun came up, and this was just after Athletics Day too! But all the training finally paid off, when the big weekend arrived.

At 10:30am we got to Numinbah Valley (Checkpoint 6) for the 48km start. By now, the 96km trekkers had been walking since 7am, but due to bush fires, they were starting at the finish line, so we would pass them. After a long amount of waiting and photos, we were finally allowed to start at 12 noon on Saturday the 19th of July.

We passed Checkpoint 7 quickly (with a little hiccup from a misplaced trekker) and made it to Checkpoint 8 by 3pm. This was a major checkpoint where we could see our lovely teachers, (our parents weren't allowed to go to this checkpoint). We had a lovely lunch of rolls with ham, salami or chicken on them, and some sweets.

We didn't stay for long, but kept walking, hoping to meet the 96ers sometime soon. After a never ending downhill section, we met them just before we arrived at Checkpoint 9, and exchanged a lot of hugs, high fives and smiles. This was around 5pm. We passed through and found two of the four stickers the 96ers had put up in different places, but when it got dark, we missed the last ones.

After a massive uphill climb, checkpoint 10 came into view. We walked along a road for a long time after that, and went by this really creepy house with an eye painted on the window, and finally arrived at checkpoint 11, the dinner stop, at 9pm. Had a lot of tears by this point, and were very happy to see our caring parents and teachers. A few injuries, but we all carried on. It was very dark and freezing cold by this point.

We were all unrecognisable with our hoodies and lights on, but we counted on sound not eyesight. Now there were only 18 kilometres to go, but they took a long time, due to a sick trekker who struggled to walk without stopping every now and then down the track. We had one very sore knee, and very, very sore muscles.

Went through Checkpoint 12 and 13, (after a lot of stumbling in the dark and wondering where the stupid checkpoints were hiding) only stopping at 13 for a toilet stop, which slowed us right down. Some of us were half asleep, so it didn't help when we got lost and went the wrong way. We struggled the last 4km, taking forever just to finish it. When we finally got to the finish, we waited for each other and walked across the line together, as a team. The finish time was 3am on the Sunday morning. Then they made us climb up the stairs to the stage. Stupid people! Overall, it was a great experience, and I made a lot of new friends. The 96ers crossed the line at 5:30pm after 6 people dropped out. A massive shout out to Mr Cullen! Thanks for your motivation and your excessive weirdness! You are the best teacher ever, and are outrageously talented. See you next year!

Debbie Auld