



📷 It has been a lifelong dream for Megan to do the trek. Picture: Supplied

■ NSW ■

KOKODA: MEGAN WIBLEN, 19, WALKING THE FAMOUS TRACK FOR HER LATE FATHER WHICH IS A LIFELONG DREAM OF HERS

EXCLUSIVE, Justin Lees, The Sunday Telegraph

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WHEN Megan Wiblen tackles the Kokoda Track she will be driven on by three things — the memory of her late father; her own dogged determination, and an army veteran at her side.

The 19-year-old is walking the famous trail to mark the 75th anniversary of the Kokoda Campaign, in a stirring project organised by Legacy and the

Australian Defence Force. She is one of 24 young people helped by the charity, most of whom have lost a father who was part of the armed forces, who will be accompanied by 15 serving ADF veterans as mentors.

“It has been a lifelong goal to do it and experience what our soldiers - experienced,” the occupational therapy student from Smithfield in Sydney said.



📷 Megan Wiblen will be one of 24 young people who has been helped by charity to walk the Kokoda Trail. Picture: Supplied



📷 She will be walking to remember her late father. Picture: Supplied

Megan’s late father David, a navy veteran of the Gulf War, will not be far from her mind on the 96km track. So will the hardships of the men who fought there in 1942 as part of the wider war around Papua New Guinea — Australia’s first real battle for survival.

And overcoming the personal physical and emotional challenges of 10 days and nights on the mountainous jungle trail are a huge driving force. “Being able to say I’ve completed it is what I’m really looking forward to,” she says. “Not many people can say that.”

With only about 5000 Australians walking the track each year, Megan is right. One of those who can say it is her track is mentor and training partner, Army Sergeant Wendy Turnbull.

The Dolls Point mum-of-four, 51, walked Kokoda in 2015. And she can't wait to go back. "I did it with my sister before, but I am super excited to be taking someone younger.

"This time I am looking forward to spending less time worrying about what lies ahead and more time looking around and experiencing it — especially the battlefields," she said.



📷 Wendy Turnbull is one of her mentors and training partner. Picture: Supplied

Wendy, who will be out hiking with Megan this weekend in preparation for the August-September expedition, notes Megan is "a determined little thing; she's great. That will set her in good stead".

"I think they are going to be very tired," she says of the youngsters, also noting they may find the emotional aspects of the war sites more confronting than expected.

“It is very spiritual, especially the battlefields like Isurava and Brigade Hill,” she said.

Major General Stuart Smith AO, DSC, who is Legacy Australia Ambassador and former Legacy ward, saluted the trekkers.



 The Kokoda Trail stretches 96 kilometres. Picture: Getty

“This Challenge brings Legacy youth and the current generation of serving veterans together in a life-changing experience,” he said.

“Climbing the Track amid rain, mud and exhaustion will deepen their understanding of the courage, teamwork and initiative demonstrated by those who fought at Kokoda 75 years ago.

“As someone who has benefited as a child from Legacy’s support, I know this challenge will shape stronger, more resilient young leaders ... and strengthen the enduring relationship between Defence and the wonderful national institution that is Legacy Australia.”



📷 It has been a lifelong dream for Megan to do the trek. Picture: Supplied

Tony Ralph, chairman of Legacy Australia, said the trek was the highlight of the Legacy calendar this year. “The 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Kokoda is a significant milestone in our national history, our military history and Legacy’s history,” he said.

“Personnel of the Australian Defence Force have recognised that these people are special, that they do need a hand, they do need a big brother and have chosen to join with them on this amazing trek.”



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