

KOKODA



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ABC RELEASES KOKODA VR IN AUSTRALIAN-FIRST VIRTUAL REALITY LAUNCH

In an Australian media first, ABC NEWS, in conjunction with co-production partner Torrens University, today launches a Virtual Reality (VR) experience bringing to life the experiences of our World War II soldiers on the legendary Kokoda Track.

The 40-minute, fully interactive VR experience will be made available to upper primary and lower secondary school students around the nation through educational VR incursion providers and via free direct download to school devices.

Kokoda VR will also be released on the Steam VR store, for use on the HTC Vive virtual reality system, as an app for iOS and Android mobiles, and as a 360-degree video through YouTube.

Complementary teaching resources and extra features will be provided on the Kokoda VR website, at www.abc.net.au/kokodaVR

“Travelling to Kokoda to see where these momentous events played out in person is out of reach from most people. But with virtual reality, that educational experience is now possible for every student in Australia,” said Nathan Bazley, Kokoda VR’s Executive Producer.

“With this immersive production, we can now show every student the main events of Kokoda, how the area looks now compared to how it looked then, the equipment used, the men involved, the strategies, the victories and the failures.

“Virtual reality is a powerful learning tool – it is proven to lead to better engagement and recall. This makes it perfect for explaining complex historical events to children. However, it’s not exclusively for kids – we designed it to be a fascinating experience for all audiences, young and old.”

It was 75 years ago today that Australian and Papuan soldiers retook Kokoda from Japanese forces, an important event in the Pacific campaign.

Kokoda VR immerses users in the main events of the Kokoda campaign. Using real locations and authentic artefacts sourced from military museums, combined with animated characters, it tells the story of the track – and the people who experienced it.

Users learn about the Kokoda experience through first-hand character accounts, sound effects, graphic labels and embedded archival media. They can move around within the VR spaces, looking behind trees and other objects and picking up and handling individual artefacts. The users must solve problems in order to progress through the story.

The ABC is the first Australian media organisation to release a fully-interactive VR experience. A year in the making, the project was the brainchild of Bazley, working with a small team from Australia’s premier news education brand Behind the News entirely out of the ABC’s Adelaide studios.

“This ground-breaking project demonstrates the innovation and creativity of the ABC’s content makers in finding new ways to deliver compelling, quality content that engages audiences of all ages,” said ABC Director, News Gaven Morris.

“Kokoda VR is a tremendous resource for students – and anyone else interested in this significant event in Australian history.”

A companion Kokoda Augmented Reality (AR) mobile phone app is also in production. It will allow users to explore some of the WWII artefacts in their homes in 3D and learn the stories behind each of them. The Kokoda AR app will be available later this year for free through the Apple and Google Play app stores.

How we did it:

The Kokoda VR team used a technique called “photogrammetry” to capture the terrain of the track itself, along with more than 40 real WWII artefacts from the collection of the South Australian Army Museum. This gives the experience incredible authenticity and detail.

Other authentic touches include using real horizons and skies from each location. Bark and leaf textures captured from the track were used to “grow” 3D trees. The restored Capri Theatre in Adelaide, originally built in 1941, was the inspiration for the cinema scenes. Even the small sections of scribble and typewriter script shown in the VR experience were taken from the original marked-up scripts of Chester Wilmot, the ABC’s Kokoda war correspondent.

In July this year two Kokoda team members, Matthew Holbrook and Luke Gibbs, took off for Port Moresby. Over six days, they captured major parts of the Kokoda track, primarily with high-resolution SLR cameras. All up, they took almost 30,000 photos, which were used to recreate the 3D locations as accurately as possible. In addition, 360-degree panoramas were captured to form the background layers and the sky of each scene.

Atmospheric audio and sound effects were also captured at each location and added spatially using the Unity 3D design engine to help bring this virtual world to life.

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