

# The Varirata Adventure

Feeling bored on the weekends because you got nothing to do?



**UNIQUELY  
PNG**  
WITH BONITA DUBA

Take a trip to the land in the clouds. Yes, take a trip to the Varirata National Park, like what two of my friends and I did last Saturday. Our trip was organized by Sogeri Hikers and we booked our spots during the week to go for the Family Trip Tour on Saturday 8th July. We were looking forward to a day filled with a boat ride, hiking and swimming.

We left Port Moresby in the morning and headed for the countryside. When we drove up the Sogeri road, the air was cold and the place was quiet. Signs of the rain hitting the mountain region was seen with the flooded rivers and lakes near the road. I could see grasslands underwater and banana trees halfway submerged.

As we ascended the mountain range, the morning fog didn't clear in some of the areas and I started humming the first verse of the song "I See Fire" from the movie *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*. The scenes reminded me of the Dwarves and Bilbo climbing the misty mountains.

Of course, they did it on foot while I was inside a 25 seaters bus. The locals told the guides that it would take up to 30 minutes for the water level to drop so waited.

After 30 minutes, our tour guide Kevin, told us that due to the risk with the crossing, we would not be going to the Dam, instead, we were going to Varirata Park for the views and to have lunch. Then we would drive back down to the

picnic areas where everyone could go for a swim and finally, we would stop at Rouna Falls Look out.

The change in plan worked out for one of my friends as she had never gone up to Varirata before and we were hoping to go there one day. Our wish was coming true.

The drive up to Varirata was cold and my ears popped at one point but it was nothing compared to the foggy scene that greeted us when we arrived.

We joined some mothers and their children on the trail leading up the mountainside.

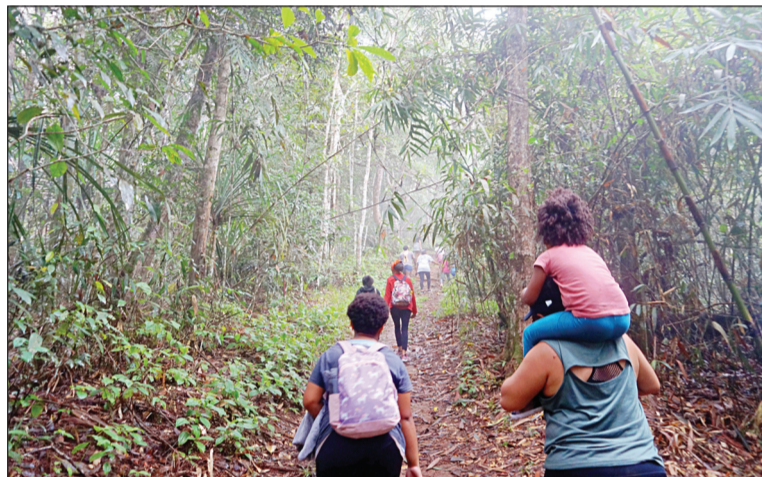
There was a canopy of rainforest trees and bamboos providing shade yet we all worked up a good sweat. A few of us slipped and some laughed but the experience was worth it.

I had to stop twice just to catch my breath. The trekking took a total to sixty minutes but we turned back when we realized that time was catching up to us.

When we got back down to the lookout area, one of my friends was in state of panic as she had discovered two leeches on her shoes. My other friend was able to knock it off her shoes with a twig. We weren't the only ones though, two other girls found leeches on their shoes.

The mountain was still covered with fog and we were only able to see the city for just a few minutes before the fog covered it again. The drive down to the picnic area was short and as soon as we were parked, everyone raced for the water. I only had time to put down my bag pack and my shoes before slipping into the cold water.

It was freezing but bearable and wonderful. Cold showers in the city are nothing compared to the water coming down from the mountain. I didn't swim as I was scared of catching a cold or giving a chance



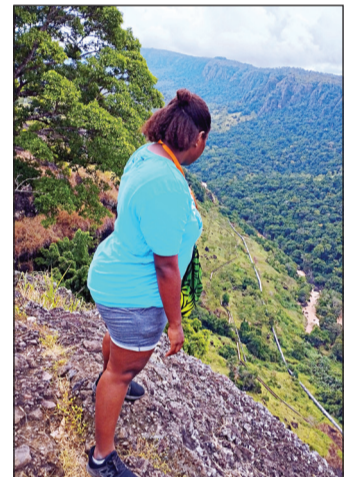
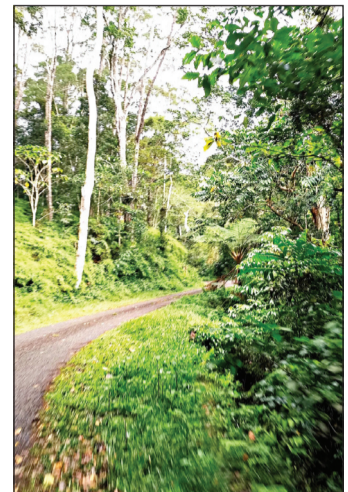
for my asthma to jump in.

All was well until I was trying to cross to another section when I saw a black and yellow snake swimming up to where I was about to lower my foot. I tell you, the way I jumped up and climbed back up to my friends was nothing short of a miracle.

The next stop was the Rouna Falls Look Out point which came with

the surprise of Lady White. One of my friends was able to climb on top of the saddle and thus able to take a picture.

Though we didn't get to the destination we expected, we enjoyed ourselves to the fullest. We all planned to go for the next trip up to the Dam as it is still something to do on our Bucket List but that will be a story for another time.



## Kokoda Tribute helps the children of Sogeri

By BONITA DUBA

LITTLE children sitting on the ground to get an education is wrong. This is what went through Martin Hook mind when he first visited the Sogeri Elementary School.

Martin or Marty, as he is known, hails from Australia and is used to seeing children sitting on desks and learning in his country.

Even at the Elementary level of education. Watching the children of Sogeri village sit on the ground to get an education made him strive to put his carpenter skills to use when he was not trekking through the Kokoda.

Marty is a trek Leader who has successfully led groups of Australians on the Kokoda Track and has recently come back after four years to lead one of the first recorded group since COVID-19 outbreak.

Every time he is up here, he helps the Sogeri and Koitaki people whenever he comes to Papua New Guinea.

In 2010, when he came back to PNG to lead another trek, he was in Sogeri a full three days ahead and decided to check out the local village.

Upon entering the school grounds, he was taken aback when he saw little elementary students sitting on the ground and doing their school work. It wasn't right. With his skills as a builder and a carpenter, he decided



to do something about the situation.

When he went home to Australia, he organized fundraisings and returned in February but not to walk another trek. Instead, he stayed a full two weeks and then bought sheets of plywood.

While residing in a local boys' hostel, he built desks and chairs for the children to use.

And that is where he started his mission to help the local elementary students of Sogeri. This was what started the Kokoda Tribute. Marty went on to organize more fundraisings to come back to the villages and help the children. He said that if his carpentry skill could help in something, it would education.

"The most important thing to develop is education," said Marty.

Ever since then, he has brought as many medical and school supplies as he possibly can with the help of his friends. One of them was Kate who joined in the effort to assist on the medial side.

Kate Ross-Stubbs, whose father was one of the engineers that pioneered the construction and engineering of the Sirinumu hydro power project, is now a nurse and she helps by bringing in medical supplies so she can help bandages cuts or sores that the little children have. For her, the place and the people held a special meaning in her heart.

This year, the Kokoda Tribute was able to supply 24 desks to Rouna Elementary and the last time Marty was in PNG, they supplied desks to Sogeri Elementary.



Apart from that, Marty took his work a step further in the children's education by showing them that there was more to life than their villages. This was accomplished with organizing school trips into the city

for the children. This year, for the first time, 10 of the trekkers he had walked with expressed an interest in staying back the extra three days just to help with the children.

The night before trips, the trekkers made 220 sandwiches, bought boxes filled with biscuits and bottles of cordials for the students' lunches.

This year, they would be taking 200 students from Sogeri Elementary, 100 from Rouna Elementary and 40 from Depo Elementary school into the city.

On Wednesday, the first trip was for the Sogeri Elementary students who went to the National Museum so they would learn about the stories of their own country.

They were then driven to Nature Park so they could see the animals and then finally to National Varirata Park for a run through the jungle.

Though these schools are on holiday, the students were more than happy to get back into uniform for the trips. These trips, in a way, opens the little one's minds to the possibility that they can achieve anything when they excel in school. The children learn about their history, their unique environment and have fun away from classrooms.

Marty is looking forward to advertising that the trekking be more than just walking but also helping the elementary school children in the local village.