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### **PNG accuses Aust of Kokoda mining overreaction. 29/09/2006. ABC News Online**

[This is the print version of story <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200609/s1752164.htm>]

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PNG says the track will not be damaged. [File photo] (ABC TV)

## **PNG accuses Aust of Kokoda mining overreaction**

By PNG correspondent Steve Marshall and staff

The Papua New Guinea Government says the Kokoda Track is not in danger, despite an Australian mining company carrying out exploration in the area.

An Australian company has been carrying out gold and copper exploration near the 96-kilometre track between Papua New Guinea's north and south coasts.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard says he is prepared to step in and stop the company from developing its mining operation.

PNG Mining Minister Sam Akoitai says Australia is overreacting to exploration in the area and says the Kokoda Track will remain unscathed.

"At this stage there is exploration and if there is minerals found along the Kokoda Trail (sic) that does not mean we're going to dig it up. No way," he said.

"We will make sure that we preserve the Kokoda Trail."

Mr Akoitai says the track is just as important to Papua New Guinea as it is to Australia.

Meanwhile, a senior figure in the RSL says there should be a national campaign to stop mining near the Kokoda Track.

The Prime Minister says he is waiting for a report from a high level delegation that has been trying to convince the Papua New Guinea Government to preserve the track where Australian soldiers fought and died.

## **RSL**

The former president of the New South Wales RSL, Rusty Priest, says mining should be stopped and local people compensated for lost revenue.

"If you look at what happens when you put a mine in the centre of something. I think Bouganville and Oktedi are good examples - for a while they will reap the benefits of money, but then what happens when you're left with a hole in the ground and all these ecosystems around destroyed?" he said.

## **'Big ask'**

A Canberra academic says it is not always possible to preserve battlefields.

Australian National University Professor David Horner says stopping mining could be a big ask.

"The fighting didn't take place along the whole track," he said.

"It's all very well for us to talk about wanting to preserve the track, but of course it is in another country.

"Battlefields haven't always been preserved ... so it's a bit of an ask to ask another country to preserve quite a large area."

### **In other developments:**

- Prime Minister John Howard says he has sent a high-level delegation to Papua New Guinea to express Australia's concerns about proposed gold and copper mining at Kokoda. ([Full Story](#))
- The Papua New Guinea Government says Australia has more important issues to worry about than mining taking place along the Kokoda Track. ([Full Story](#))

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