

Transcript

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Paralympian takes on Kokoda track

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Reporter: Steve Marshall

ELIZABETH JACKSON: He's used to speeding down the side of the mountain at more than 200 kilometres an hour on one ski.

But over the past nine days, Australia's gold medal winning Paralympic skier Michael Milton has been battling uphill in the jungles of Papua New Guinea.

One of the country's most successful athletes swapped his skis for a crutch to take on the infamous 96-kilometre Kokoda track.

Our Papua New Guinea Correspondent Steve Marshall caught up with Michael Milton when he arrived back in Port Moresby.

MICHAEL MILTON: It was nine days in the jungle, but in general, the health is good.

Normally when I hike for long distances, my hands are the first things that go, with blistering and problems. And certainly there was a little bit of pain there, a couple of days ago with the rain that we had.

The calluses on them get soaked with water. They go white, and they go soft, and they start to hurt. But in general, I'm in very good health.

STEVE MARSHALL: One would imagine it would be the other part of your body that was feeling the pinch?

MICHAEL MILTON: Yeah, no. The leg goes through a fair bit of work training as a skier and an athlete. The leg is usually the strongest part of me, and it's the upper body walking with crutches that tends to break down first.

STEVE MARSHALL: So one has to ask, why on earth undertake this assignment?

MICHAEL MILTON: You know, one of my goals in life is to learn more about myself, and try and learn about my physical and mental limits.

And you know, the Kokoda track, Mount Kilimanjaro, a few other things that I do, speed-skiing and things like that, are all there to really test myself and to push my limits and see where they are and how far I can extend them.

STEVE MARSHALL: Well you know, you head downhill quite quickly. How did you go, going the other way?

MICHAEL MILTON: (laughs) In general things went absolutely perfectly to plan from my point of view. I was always confident of getting along the track, but was never sure how hard, you know, it would be, and how much work it would be to get across.

But with a few adaptations to my crutches, with some different tips with like a ski pole end to dig a spike in to actually grip in the mud, and also some big baskets to stop them sinking too deep in the swampy areas. It actually went very, very well.

STEVE MARSHALL: How were you received by the locals along the way?

MICHAEL MILTON: You know, it's usually the same anywhere. You get, you know, a one-legged guy walking along in crutches in a place that you wouldn't normally expect to see one.

And you know, you get a few looks, and a few stares and a few, you know, congratulatory waves and messages and stuff.

So, no in general I think they're, you know, firstly curious, but also, you know, thinking that it's pretty cool to see me out there.

STEVE MARSHALL: A lot of people that do the track obviously is to make a connection with the diggers of 1942 that staved off the Japanese.

Did you make any connection personally out there?

MICHAEL MILTON: Absolutely. You know, one of my goals to walk the track, aside from the challenging physical, mental side of it, was to really learn about the history of the track and what went on, and try and get a feel for what it might have been like to be out there with people shooting at you. And you just... you learn that you can't.

You know, you learn all that you can really do is deal with the environment

yourself, deal with the rain, and the mud and all of those things. And that you just can't imagine people shooting at you as well.

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Paralympian Michael Milton talking to Steve Marshall in Port Moresby.

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