

Kosciuszko's Ideals and Legacy

Australians deserve to know more about the man behind the mountain. Kosciuszko: commander, strategist and champion of human rights. His ideals were noble and his legacy profound.

Ideals

Kosciuszko saw the toleration of slavery as the darkest stain on a free America. Before going back to Europe, he pleaded for the emancipation of slaves in his Last Will. Also, he left behind his entire fortune to buy out slaves and give them an education. Kosciuszko, a man of the highest moral virtues, belongs to humanity's elite.

He also believed in the principle of freedom and supported the democratic system of governance. So staunchly did he support these ideals that he fought for them in the American War of Independence (or American Revolutionary War) (1775–1783) and in the Polish-Russian War (1792).

Legacy

He became famous in the United States for his unconventional and innovative military ideas and defence strategies. One of these was the design and construction of the West Point Fort on the Hudson River between 1778 and 1780, where, at his suggestion, the West Point Military Academy was later founded.

Kosciuszko's sense of humanism moved and inspired many political leaders. William Henry Harrison (later a President of the United States) ended his address to Congress with the following words: "If one day, by common world agreement, there should be built a temple dedicated to those who gave the greatest benefits to mankind, and if the statue of our greatest countryman Washington, was placed in the area designed for the most dignified, just beside him should be placed the statue of Kosciuszko."

The Polish people admired their military leader so highly that they built a great monument to honour him: the Kosciuszko Mound in Krakow. Poles of all ages, from around the country, voluntarily constructed the Mound between 1820 and 1823.

Poland, with its turbulent history and centuries of suffering, was repeatedly invaded and even ceased to exist as a nation for over 120 years, due to the greed and aggression of other, more powerful countries. The Poles wanted to acknowledge, and show gratitude for, the values of freedom and democracy for which Kosciuszko had fought. Today, Kosciuszko is a hero of *many* nations and peoples.

Strzelecki and Kosciuszko

Sir Paul Edmund Strzelecki – a Polish explorer, geologist and philanthropist – named Australia's highest mainland mountain in honour of Kosciuszko in 1840. Strzelecki's father had fought under General Kosciuszko. The explorer named the mountain after the international hero because he felt that no greater name could be bestowed upon the highest mountain of mainland Australia. Strzelecki saw it as a symbol of democracy, freedom and human rights.

The naming of the mountain also reflected Strzelecki and Kosciuszko's concern for indigenous people. When Strzelecki explored the areas around Mount Kosciuszko, he was accompanied by James Macarthur and two aboriginal guides: Charles Tarra from Taralga in the Goulbourn Plains district and a local man named Jackey.

We also know that Kosciuszko, a friend of Thomas Jefferson, campaigned for the liberation, equal rights and education of Negro slaves; he even left his American Estate to buy their liberation in 1798. He was well ahead of his time because slavery was not abolished in the United States until 67 years later, in 1865.

In his report on the naming of the mountain to the NSW Government of the time, Strzelecki stated: "Although in a foreign country, on foreign ground, but amongst a free people who appreciate freedom, I could not refrain from giving it the name of Kosciuszko". The NSW Government of the day considered these reasons and agreed to the name.

Australia, which is the sixth oldest continuous democracy in the world, embraces the same values as those for which Kosciuszko fought. Australia's highest mountain, with its name 'Kosciuszko', ideally expresses these values.