

Kosciuszko's Life

Our mountain is named after a remarkable individual. Tadeusz (Thaddeus) Kosciuszko was an accomplished man: a brilliant commander, strategist and champion of human rights. He professed, and fought for, the ideals of liberty, equality, egalitarianism and selflessness.

Early Years

Kosciuszko was born in 1746 in Mereczowiszczyna, in Eastern Poland. He graduated with distinction from a military school in Warsaw and received a scholarship for further studies in Versailles, France. There, he studied the art of fortification construction, as well as architecture and other subjects in the liberal arts. He mastered surveying and engineering, and returned to Poland after six years with a high-ranking military post in the Polish Army. He was set for a brilliant military career.

Young and full of life, he fell in love with a Polish magnate's daughter – Ludwika Sosnowska – but was caught trying to elope with her at the Polish border. Threatened with the punishment of death, he fled Poland (it is believed) with the help of French friends.

Soldier and Commander

Kosciuszko ended up in America. France, due to her conflict with England, was very interested in undermining English influences abroad and hence supported the fight for the independence of the American Colonies. With his reputation as a very clever, skilled soldier, Kosciuszko was 'snapped up' for the cause and was appointed Deputy Engineer in charge of the American Army, later becoming a Colonel, and finally a General.

He became a friend of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. He distinguished himself during the American War of Independence by his competence, creativity, bravery and modesty. There are many wonderful stories about his military achievements and skills.

The Return Home

On July 15, 1784, after seven years in America, he returned to Poland, which was in a state of crisis, having been partitioned by stronger, aggressive neighbouring countries (Russia, Prussia, and Austria). In 1792, during the 'Second Partition of Poland', with the Polish Monarchy having collapsed and the nation in turmoil, crowds of people turned to Kosciuszko to lead them. Kosciuszko accepted.

By then, it was too late to defeat the Russian Army, but Kosciuszko mobilised the whole nation to defend itself by using guerilla-type warfare. Kosciuszko's rebels remained undefeated by the much larger Russian forces. However, Kosciuszko was wounded by the Russians in Maciejowice and taken as a prisoner-of-war. He spent two years in solitary confinement before being released.

Later Years

His subsequent years were spent visiting America, England (where he published his own compositions: two polonaises and a waltz) and France. He later settled in Switzerland as a prominent figure, where he wrote a book on partisan warfare.

Kosciuszko died in 1817; he was recognised simultaneously as Poland's greatest hero, as a great American, and as an Honorary Citizen of France. The Parisian Newspaper *Le Monitor* wrote of him: "Kosciuszko's gifts to mankind made his name the property of the civilized world."