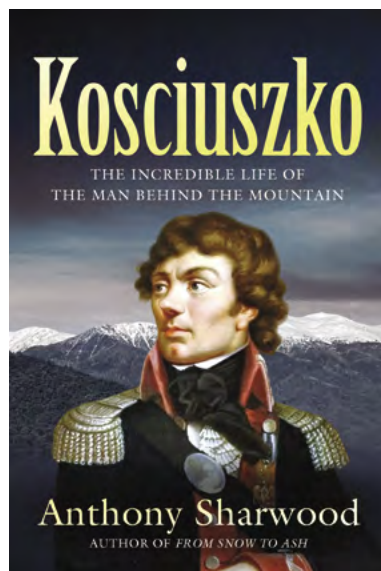


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Kosciuszko: The Incredible Life of the Man Behind the Mountain

By Anthony Sharwood

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As pure a son of liberty as I have ever known, and of that liberty which is to go to all, and not to the rich alone.
— Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States and author of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, describing Kosciuszko

Australia's highest mountain is named after him, a man who never stepped foot on the Australian continent, as well as a bridge in New York city, an Alaskan island, a town in Mississippi and also at least '360 plaques, pedestals, slabs, statues, sculptures, markers, mounds, busts and obelisks scattered in a dozen countries'. Yet,

most Australians could not spell or pronounce his name correctly let alone tell you why our tallest mountain is named after him.*

So, who exactly was Andrzej Tadeusz Bonawentura Kosciuszko?

Kosciuszko was a true son of the Enlightenment and what we would now call a Renaissance man—he spoke four languages plus a smattering of other languages. He was renowned for his military prowess, and as an engineer, composer and painter Kosciuszko was also the subject of art and literature himself. In 1803, the author Jane Porter published the widely popular historical novel, *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, based on his life, and several English poets wrote poems about him (Coleridge, Keats and Byron, to name a few). He was a revolutionary leader in Poland and a proponent of liberty for all, from black slaves in America to the serfs on his feudal land in Poland.

Sharwood takes us on a rollicking road trip through history, namedropping the entire time—Washington, Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin—and also 'a journey across three continents and four countries to places where Kosciuszko fought, lived or bear his name'.

Sharwood's style is engaging and eminently readable. It is clear from the outset that he really admires and respects Kosciuszko as a man and as a historical figure on the world stage. Very soon, the reader comes to admire and respect Tadeusz Bonawentura Kosciuszko, too.

The book is divided into three sections. Section One, the largest, deals with Kosciuszko's early life—how he came to be the man that he was, his time in America, and his significant contribution to the

American War of Independence and the colony's ability to win that war. We also learn the very interesting fact that the idea of founding the very famous United States Military Academy at West Point was, in fact the brainchild of Kosciuszko—every year the anniversary of his birth is commemorated at Kosciuszko Memorial at West Point.

Section Two describes his return to a weakened Poland under siege on three sides: the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Prussians (a German state) and the Russian Empire, with Kosciuszko taking up the fight in 1794. It proved to be a doomed revolution remembered in history as the Kosciuszko Insurrection, leading to his time as a prisoner of the Russian emperor until he was eventually released to a life of exile, first in France and then in Switzerland.

Section Three is largely devoted to Mount Kosciuszko itself, a description of its landscape and environs. Also discussed is its importance to the First Nations people of Australia and the ongoing debate about the suitability of its name.

Overall, this book is as beguiling and fascination a read as any historian could hope to come across, and leaves the reader, particularly the Australian reader, with the question: 'Why doesn't the world know more about this extraordinary figure in history?'

* The answer to that question is that Polish explorer Pawel Strezlecki, the first westerner to climb the mountain in 1840, named it after Kosciuszko because he admired him and thought that the mountain resembled the Kosciuszko Mound created in Krakow, Poland, in 1823 to commemorate Kosciuszko and his achievements.