

Australia celebrates unsung hero of the Irish famine

Long celebrated here in Australia for his work mapping this country, Polish explorer Paul Strzelecki is now being honoured in Ireland for his heroic efforts during The Great Hunger (also known as the Irish potato famine), where he aided more than 200,000 children.

An exhibition in Dublin's National Museum of Ireland pays tribute to his extraordinary life and achievements.

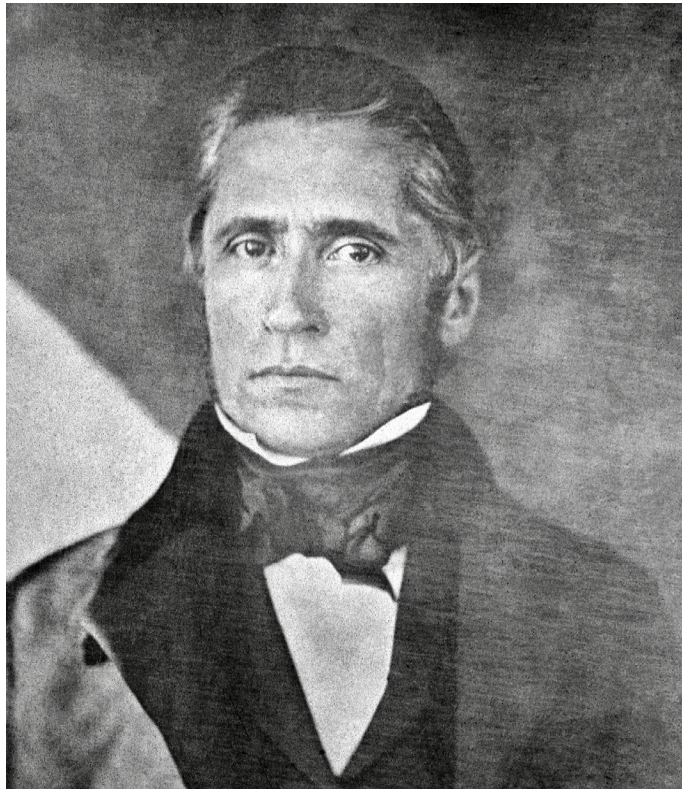
The creators of the exhibition, commissioned by the Polish Embassy in Dublin, were two academics infatuated with Strzelecki: Professor Peter Gray of Queen's University Belfast and Professor Emily Mark-Fitzgerald of University College Dublin. The exhibition unveils the story of Strzelecki, whose contributions to famine relief remain lesser-known yet profound. It features seldom-seen images from major museums and libraries across Ireland, Britain and Australia.

Count Paul (Paweł) Strzelecki came from a noble family. He was educated in natural sciences and engineering.

Strzelecki ventured from England to Australia, where he explored the continent and conducted significant scientific research. His expeditions and discoveries greatly enriched Australia's understanding of its geography and natural features.

Among the places named after the explorer in Australia are the Strzelecki Ranges, a mountain range in Victoria; Mount Strzelecki, a mountain on Flinders Island in Tasmania; Strzelecki National Park in Victoria; Strzelecki Track, a famous outback road in South Australia, known for its challenging conditions; and Strzelecki Desert, which stretches from South Australia, into Queensland and New South Wales.

Strzelecki was the first



European to climb Australia's tallest mountain, Mount Kosciuszko in New South Wales, in 1840 and he named it in honour of a Polish patriot.

Strzelecki dreamed of completing a geological survey of Australia.

While his work focused on geography, geology, and mapping, he also interacted with Indigenous people in Gippsland, Victoria. He observed and documented aspects of their culture, including their customs, languages, and the use of local flora and fauna. His accounts added to the understanding of the Indigenous people's way of life in the Gippsland region.

Strzelecki returned to England and it was from there that he launched his humanitarian mission to Ireland during the famine.

He went to Ireland to provide aid, travelling extensively throughout the country as the main agent of the British Relief Association from 1847 to 1849. He developed an innovative approach to

directly feed malnourished Irish children through schools, saving countless lives from hunger and disease. He also supported immigration from Ireland to Australia during the famine.

October 6th marked 150 years since the death of Strzelecki and in commemoration, the Polish government proclaimed 2023 as the Year of Strzelecki.

In celebrating the achievements of Strzelecki, activities and events are being hosted in various parts of the world where he left a lasting legacy.

Kosciuszko Heritage, a Polish non-profit volunteer group aiming to keep Strzelecki and Kosciuszko in living memory here in Australia, organised events throughout 2023 to honour his memory.

They invited Professors Gray and Mark-Fitzgerald to give a talk in Sydney about their Strzelecki exhibition earlier this year. The Professors also delivered the lecture at University of Melbourne.

AUSTRALIAN CELEBRATIONS

SAT 18 NOV
SNOWY MOUNTAINS, VIC: Unveiling the Strzelecki Memorial Plaque at Towong Hill Heritage Drive at 10am, followed by a concert with Paderewski Youth Orchestra, a group of 13 violinists and pianists from Chicago.

SUN 19 NOV
KHANCOBAN AIRSTRIP, NSW: Polish Aboriginal friendship flights over Geehi and Mt Kosciuszko.

13 - 17 DEC
GIPPSLAND, VIC: Travel in the footsteps of Strzelecki and his monuments. Traralgon, Heywood, Korumburra, via Strzelecki settlement, to Corinella and back to Melbourne.

SAT 16 DEC
ROWVILLE, VIC: The official closing of Strzelecki Year at the Polish House 'Syrena' in Rowville. Artistic concert and film screening.

SUN 17 DEC
KEYSBOROUGH, VIC: Farewell Mass at Divine Mercy Shrine.

For more details, click [here](#)

Ernestyna Skurjat-Kozek, President of Kosciuszko Heritage, said: "Ten years ago, we never dreamed that Ireland would recognise Strzelecki as its national hero and that Irish professors would teach us here in Australia about the Good Samaritan.

"In August 2013, we took the first steps to convince Irish parliamentarians what a distinguished figure Paweł Edmund Strzelecki was in the history of their country. Then everything went quickly - like a breeze. A breakthrough moment was the premiere of the exhibition about Strzelecki's humanitarian action, opened personally by President Higgins at the Royal Academy in Dublin."

The exhibition has since been put online for all to see. You can access it at www.strzelecki.ie.