

KOSCIUSZKO AND STRZELECKI:

The Mountain and the Men!

By John F. Brock

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Figure 1. (Left) Painting of Sir Pawel de Strzelecki, (centre) Image of Mount Kosciuszko, Australia (Right) Portrait of Tadeusz Kosciuszko

ABSTRACT

When Pawel de Strzelecki became the first European to reach the top of the highest peak on mainland Australia his exhilaration conjured up reminiscences of his homeland, Poland, to which he would never return alive. The nostalgic vision of the Kopiec Kosciuszki in Krakow, which was a memorial to the great Polish freedom fighter and greatest hero, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, came to his mind compelling him to name this mountain in his honour in a place of freedom and democracy thousands of miles from their home. He also picked a white wild flower as a romantic reflection of his lost love, Adyna Turno, to whom his desired marriage had been blocked by her family. Pawel de Strzelecki only made the long journey back to his hometown of Poznan in western Poland when his remains were exhumed from Kensal Green Cemetery in London, having been buried there in 1873, in a Strzelecki family mission spearheaded by Pawel's descendant from his brother Peter's direct line, Ryszard, with sons John and Les. In 1997 he was laid in the crypt of merit at the Church of St. Adalbert in that quaint village in the country landscape reunited with his place of origin, a sacred shrine to which I was most honourably escorted by Ryszard and Les in 2006.

General Kosciuszko and his battalion of Polish troops helped George Washington drive the English from US territory, being inspirational in leadership and camaraderie for the victory of the American forces over British occupation in the War of Independence. He was also instrumental in designing and setting out the expansion of the training bastion for future troops at the United States Military Academy West Point, New York.

After leaving Poland, Strzelecki would travel the world, basing himself mainly in London, but certainly making his way to most parts of the globe, in particular Australia between 1839 and 1843. During this period he would carry out many expeditions to the southern Snowy Mountains of NSW and Victoria, as well as mapping and making a physical description of NSW and Van Dieman's Land, publishing a book on this material.

This paper studies the lives of the two great Polish patriots and how their pursuits were interwoven by adventure, lost loves, surveying, service to humanity and the dedication to freedom in a world of democratic liberalism.

INTRODUCTION

My admiration and casual interest in Tadeusz Kosciuszko turned obsessive when I read the fateful line that he was “an Army Surveyor”! That set me on the road to research and write this paper, especially mindful of the wonderful bestowal of the rights to Poland to host the 2022 FIG Congress in Warsaw. I already knew that Pawel de Strzelecki had received surveying training and experience testified by his monumental work “A Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land”, in which his surveying and cartographic skills are demonstrated masterfully, along with his expert knowledge of geology, flora, fauna and anthropology.

I had always known that the second highest mountain (elevation 2209 metres) on the Australian Continent had been named after Surveyor Thomas Townsend, but only this year I became aware that our 3rd tallest peak Mt. Twynam (2195 m) was named after NSW Chief Surveyor Edward Twynam. Now there is the set of our three highest summits all being named after surveyors! Then, of course, we have the world's greatest precipice (8849 m) named after the great Surveyor-General of India, Sir George Everest, with our profession being honoured with such eminent sites now bearing the names of some of our predecessors.

The marked parallels in the lives of these of these two Polish heroes are remarkable indeed, providing the naming of Australia's highest mountain with full justification and vindication in terms of the Universal regard with which both men were revered by the citizens of the free

World along with their selfless sacrifices on behalf of their own countrymen together with citizens of countries other than their own.

ORIGINS OF TWO INTERNATIONAL ICONS

Tadeusz Kosciuszko – The Early Years



Figure 2. Mereczowscyżna birthtown of Tadeusz Kosciuszko.

Tadeusz Andrezej Bonawentura Kosciuszko is said to have been born about 4 February, 1746 in Mereczowscyżna, which is now in modern day Belarus. Some sources identify his birthtown as being near the town of Kos (or Kosava). His paternal ancestry was Lithuanian and Ruthenian (Belarus region) tracing its line back to King Sigismund I, “The Old”, a monarch of the 15th century, a legendary patron of the arts, to which Kosciuszko would also aspire. Growing up in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,

Roman Catholicism dominated, but they were surrounded by Russians who followed the Greek Orthodox Church. TK was the youngest son of a nobleman (“szlachcic”) titled as the “swordbearer” of the palatinate of Brzesc which was capital of the Brest region. His mother, Tekla, was from the Ratomska family.



Figure 3. Tadeusz Kosciuszko at the age of 15 years.

His quest to acquire academic achievement began in Lubieszow in 1755, but his studies were postponed when his father died in 1758. During his early period, as a pupil at the RC Piarist College his studies included Polish and World history, philosophy, Latin, German, French and



Figure 4. King Stanislaw Poniatowski.

law, later adding geography, geometry and engineering. Poland's King, Stanislaw Poniatowski, founded the Corps of Cadets in Warsaw in 1765, which would evolve into the Warsaw University. TK excelled there as a young student, and, under the King's sponsorship he was awarded a special "King's Grant" to go to Versailles in France to study military and civil architecture. In this era soldiers were considered to be the top intellectual order of society, especially in mathematics, physics and applied sciences. His tutelage was inclusive of the art of fortifications under the oversight of the best teachers, one of whom was the highly respected military engineer Marquis Vauban. He even expanded his repertoire of knowledge to embrace art at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, gaining a romantic reputation as a musician as well.



Figure 5. Palace of Cadets, later to become Warsaw University.

His subsequent time in Poland was mixed with uncertainty and upheaval. He was disappointed when his services were rejected by the Polish which had suffered a sound drubbing during the failed Bar Rebellion, then his brother squandered the family fortune with which TK had planned to buy an officer's commission in the national army. To make his presence in

Poland even more precarious he attempted to elope with Ludwika, daughter of General Jozef Sosnowski who was the patriarch of a prestigious Polish family. When the pair was apprehended before they could cross the Polish border, TK was badly beaten by the General's henchmen for his indiscretion and risked a sentence death for such a deed!

Kosciuszko in the USA

However, before his fateful departure from his homeland, TK's destiny was forged when he met with a US delegation in France, one of whom was Benjamin Franklin. Passing an advanced exam in engineering and military architecture, TK impressed his American colleague enough for Franklin to extend an invitation for him to travel to the USA where his services would be keenly required. Departing by the end of June 1776, one month before the signing of the US Declaration of Independence, TK's journey with a group of fellow military

recruits heading to Philadelphia was a decidedly rough one, during which TK feared that the vessel would be wrecked near the West Indies.

It would not take long for TK's talents to be noticed by the Great US Revolutionaries, especially George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, and with TK's strongly moulded views on personal freedom and liberty, his appointment as Deputy Engineer in Charge of the entire American Army was swift. Gaining notoriety, TK was commissioned in the role of Colonel of Engineers, eventually receiving promotion to Brigadier-General for his expertise. His surveying/engineering skills were critically instrumental in winning the war against the British, with particular reference to Saratoga, being regarded as the turning point of the struggle. Designing, surveying and building the fortress at West Point over 28 months, it was so impregnable that the English forces never dared to attack it, the site becoming termed "America's Gibraltar." Coupling his field brilliance with revolutionary guerilla fighting tactics he was able to support General Nathan Greene menacing the British battalions which resulted in their ultimate surrender at Yorktown in 1781.

Returning to Poland in 1784, TK joined the local patriotic movement against Russian oppression, eventually being seriously wounded, suffering imprisonment in a Tsarist gaol and finally succumbing to his severe battle wounds in Solothurn, Switzerland on 15 October, 1817 aged 71. His embalmed body would be transferred from the local church to a crypt of honour in the Wawel, a Polish castle reserved for royalty and heroes.

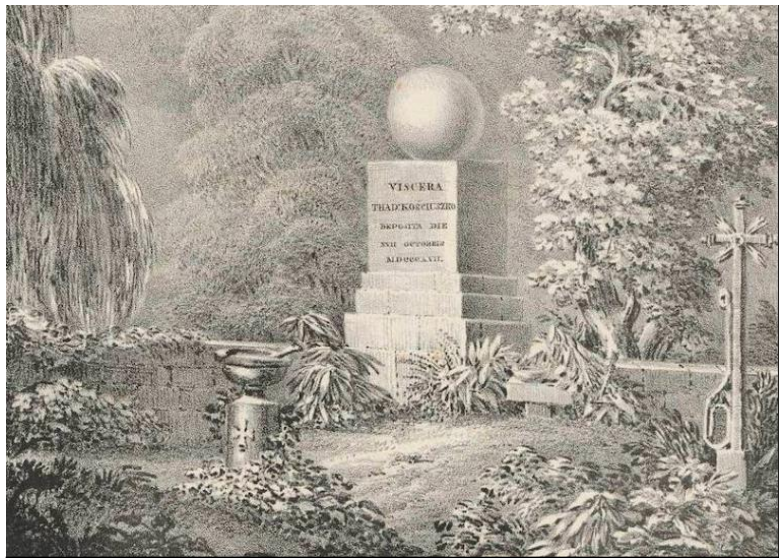


Fig. 6. Monument to Tadeusz Kosciuszko at Solothurn, Switzerland.

In the USA TK's fortified masterpiece at West Point had been emblazoned with beautiful, tranquil gardens satisfying his avid expertise in gardening. As a fitting tribute to his excellence in surveying and engineering this establishment now houses the US School of Military Engineering producing first class graduates qualified in all of those areas in which TK excelled. TK's house in Philadelphia still remains and is now a museum to his period in the USA.

Pawel Edmund de Strzelecki – The First Years

At the time of Kosciuszko's 1817 death in Switzerland, Pawel de Strzelecki was 20 years old. He had been born in Gluszyna (near Poznan), Poland on 20 July, 1797 being the youngest of three children to a nobleman. At this time Poland was under the control of Prussia. His father died in 1801, followed by his mother's passing in 1807, at which time his aunt sent him to be educated in Warsaw at the age of ten. He moved to Krakow when he was 17, returning to the family estate to be reunited with his brother and sister four (4) years later. His older brother Florian Piotr (Peter) de Strzelecki is the great great grandfather of my close schoolmate Leszek Strzelecki who has been an invaluable source for intimate details of Sir Pawel in addition to escorting me around his homeland on two occasions, on the first visit showing me the crypt of TK in the ancient Wawel in Krakow, and on the second journey to view the special crypt of eminent Poles where his ancestor Sir P now lies in Poznan (western Poland).

Failed Love Sends Strzelecki to the USA and Further

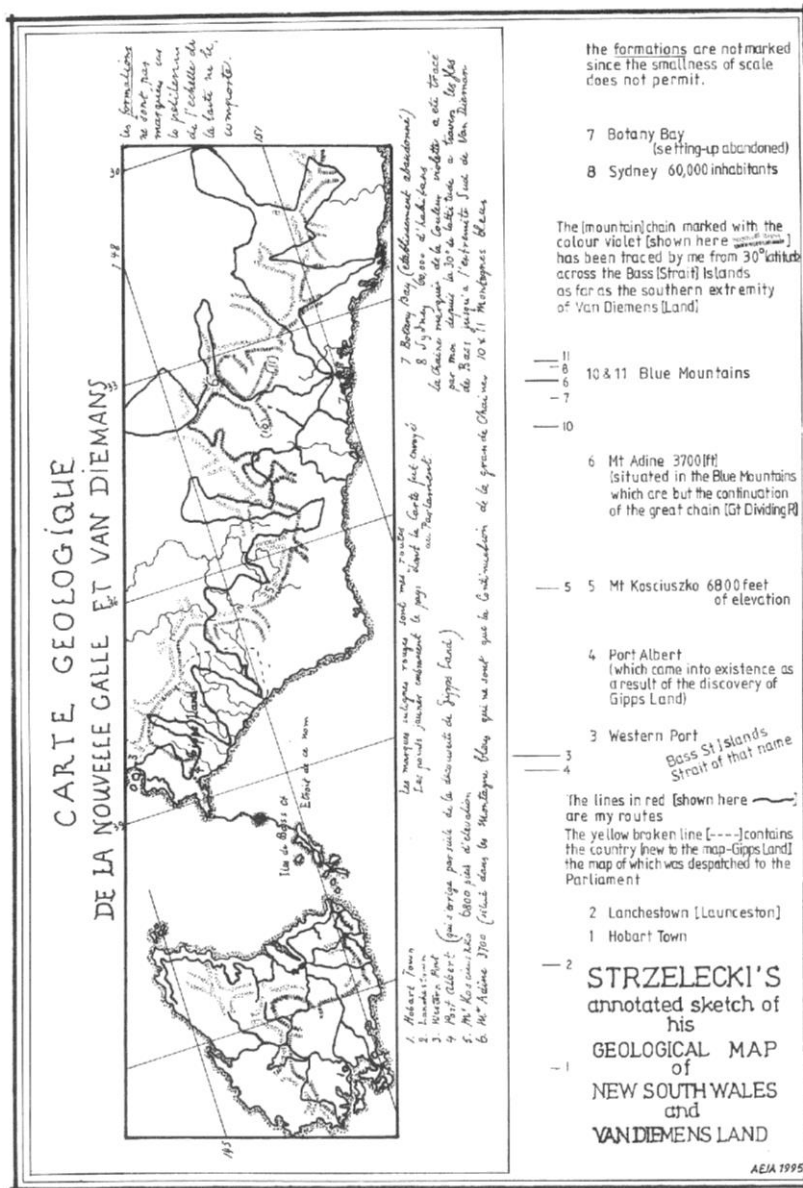
After a stint in the Prussian cavalry he became a tutor, falling in love with his pupil's 16 year old sister, Adyna Turno, when he was 23 years old. When the Turno family rejected Pawel's affections for their daughter, the couple tried to elope, but like his hero Kosciuszko, the attempt was thwarted. PS, devastated by his failed love affair, decided to leave Poland after the November Uprising of 1831, initially journeying to England then Scotland. During this time he set up his first academic connections and began his research. Leaving England on the "Virginian" on 8 June, 1834 he arrived in New York on 22 July. It is here that he embarked enthusiastically on a career of scholarly endeavour, research and exploration. He became self-educated in a vast range of the sciences engaging in practical experience, spoke four languages – Polish, English, French and German – and was an avid pursuer in the areas of geology, mineralogy, botany, surveying, cartography and geography. Following in the footsteps of the Polish Generals Kosciuszko and Pulaski, he went to Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond and Charleston. Venturing further he explored the Appalachians, and the locality of the Canadian Great Lakes, as well as Montreal and Quebec. Conducting research wherever he travelled, he visited the Antilles, Cuba and Mexico early in 1836 then on to South America. Landing in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Costa Rica and El



Figure 7. Young Pawel de Strzelecki.

Salvador, he first encountered slavery in Brazil, a practice he abhorred and wrote strongly against its shameful conduct. Boarding the ship “Fly” in Valparaiso on 20 July (his birthday!), 1838 he headed into the Pacific for the Marquesas Islands, Hawaii, Tahiti, Gambier, Tonga and New Zealand. After a few months there he left NZ on 10 April, 1839, finally making it to Sydney on 25 April, 1839.

Strzelecki in Australia and Naming Mount Kosciuszko



In overall time Strzelecki's presence in Australia was rather brief, returning to England at the end of 1843 after an action filled stay. He quickly forged strong acquaintances with many well appointed individuals while he was there. NSW Governor Gipps was a proven ally, while the whole Macarthur family, Elizabeth, James and Edward along with their cousin, Hannibal, became close associates, with James even accompanying him on the Snowy Mountains expedition during which they climbed to the peak of New Holland's highest crest together. While he was in Tasmania he built up a close relationship with Governor John Franklin and his wife Jane.

Fig. 8. 1840 map attached to PS's book "A Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land."

His total travels in Australia entailed about 12,000 kilometres, to the Blue Mountains and Western Goldfields where he discovered gold near Orange in 1839, keeping the find secret at the request of the Governor who was in fear of a convict uprising upon its disclosure. Subsequent expeditions took him south through the Snowy Mountains, Gippsland, covering much of Van Dieman's Land (later named Tasmania), and then back up north to the Hunter region and northern NSW. While on his missions of discovery he studied and mapped the geology of the localities through which he passed, collecting samples of minerals, fossils and fauna combined with meteorological observations of temperature, rain, humidity and atmospheric pressure. He made compass readings of his traverses to prominent natural features like mountains, waterways and valleys. It is most interesting to take account

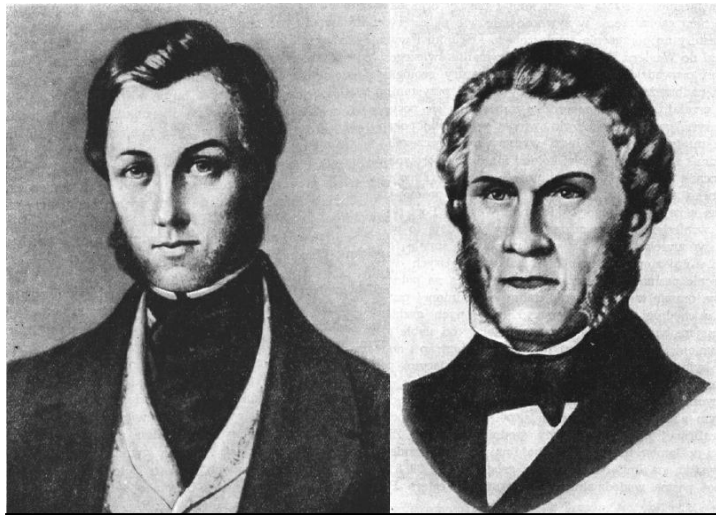


Figure 9. Images of James Riley (L) and James Macarthur (R).

that, along with two Europeans, James Macarthur and James Riley, PS chose to conscript two Aboriginal guides, Charlie Tarra and Jackey, in an effort to enable him to comply with tribal territorial rights and be sure to respect any traditional sites which they may encounter. In so doing, PS was able to avoid any hostile confrontations, and it was especially lifesaving on one occasion in Gippsland when their food was exhausted, as the indigenous men identified natural bush sources of tucker to save the party from starvation.

Figure 8 is definitive proof that PS when drafting his maps of his Australian visit spelt the name of the highest mountain named by him as “Kosciuszko”, as it was over 30 years before Ryszard S was successful in winning his campaign against the historically illiterate National Parks and Wildlife Service, who had removed the “z” from the name, as “it did not look like correct ‘English’?” You will notice that the height, as determined by PS, for Mt. Kosciuszko is shown as 6800 feet, when it is actually 7310 feet? In the account of the climb PS makes mention that he had dropped the barometer, thus resulting in his erroneous correction of 1000 feet less than his measured 7800 feet (about 500 ft too high)!

From an analysis of James Macarthur's diary (found in 1942) it has been possible to clarify the incorrect dates given by PS in his recollections of the Kosciuszko trip written in his book. The two men identified the highest peak (2228 m) while standing atop Mt. Townsend on 12th March, 1840. At the summit of Mt. K a plaque displays some of the following information. It was at that time that PS described “a pinnacle, rocky and naked, predominant over several

others”, being chosen by PS as a point of trigonometrical survey. This eminent configuration he recorded “struck me so forcibly by the similarity it bears to a tumulus elevated in Krakow over the tomb of the patriot Kosciusko (sic), that, although in a foreign country, who appreciate freedom and its votaries, I could not refrain from giving it the name of Mount Kosciusko (sic).” Having ended his naming formality, PS took the time amongst the fresh



Fig. 10. Adyna Turno and Sir Pawel.

mountain air to pick a white mountain daisy for his beloved Adyna Turno to whom he would enclose the flower in a letter which said: “Here is the flower from Mount Kosciuszko – the highest peak of the continent, the first in the New World bearing a Polish name. I believe you will be the first Polish woman to have a flower from that mountain. Let it remind you ever of freedom, patriotism, and love.”

After returning back to Europe, his efforts are said to have saved upwards of 200,000 lives from starvation in the Irish potato famine, but at the cost of nearly losing his own life and weakening his own health for

many years. For his “five years” of colonial Australian exploration and investigation he was knighted by Queen Victoria on 30 June, 1869 with the Order of St. Michael and St. George (KCMG). He was also a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, being awarded a gold medal for his southern

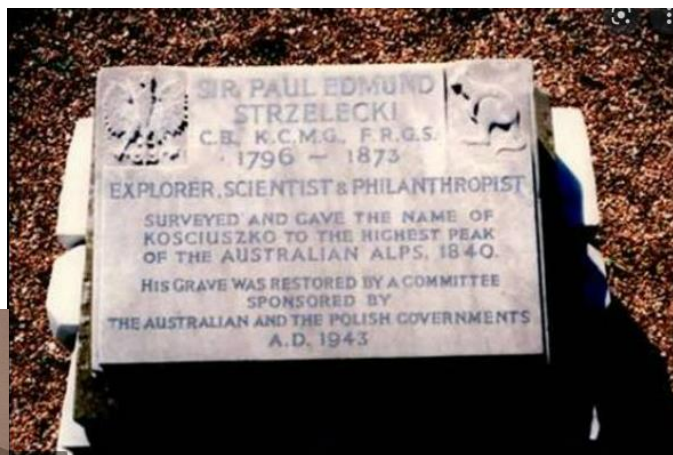


Fig. 11. Sir Pawel memorial in Kensal Green cemetery.



Fig. 12. Sir Pawel memorial in St. Adalbert's.

expedition. PS died on 6 October, 1873 in London being buried in Kensal Green Cemetery. Upon this memorial stone PS is said to have “**surveyed** and gave the name of Kosciuszko to the highest peak of the Australian Alps, 1840.” Many place names are attributable to him especially in Australia, and he is said to have measured the heights of over 40 mountains, lakes and homesteads throughout his time. His final

trip back home to his beloved Poland came in 1997 when his remains were exhumed from the London burial place to be placed in the crypt of merit in St. Adalbert's Church in Poznan, his place of birth, where he now resides with the repute of achieving the legend as an "Explorer, Scientist and Philanthropist."

CONCLUSION

The kindred biographies discovered about the incredible lives of these two Polish-born World heroes is quite amazing! Broken love, linguistic versatility, noble ancestry, Universal reverence, widespread World travels, charitable sacrifices for other nations and a burning passion for democratic equality in a free society make these two intellectual giants part of an elite fraternity of Renaissance men who have contributed to a much more egalitarian, less oppressed lifestyle on our planet. And ... once again, I must strongly emphasise that their practically resourceful exploits and achievements find their origins in their training and experience in Surveying, the profession of Earth's icons!



Figure 13. Statue at Lake Jindabyne in NSW's Snowy Mtns transported from Poland placed for Australia's Bicentennial in 1988 with PS pointing to Mount Kosciuszko in the distance.



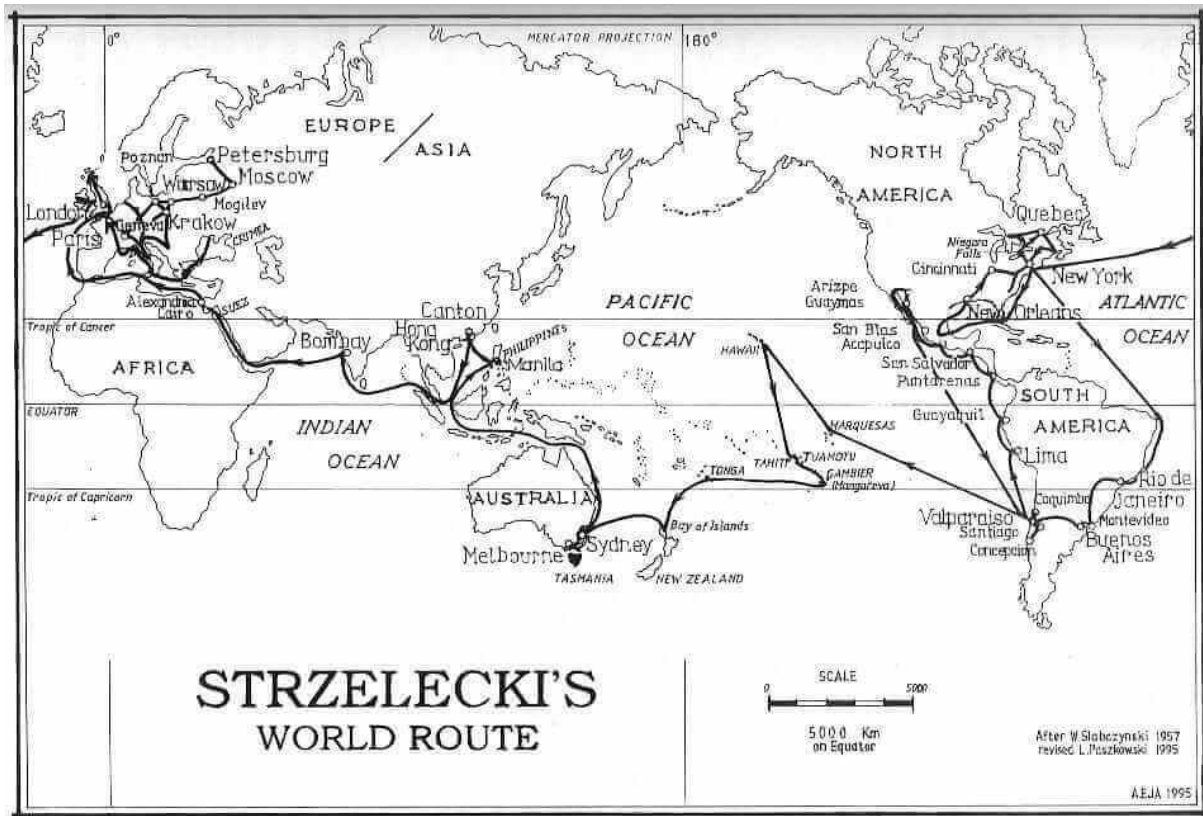
Fig. 14. 1980 Robert Wilson portrait of TS with theodolite and survey plan.

DEDICATION AND APPRECIATION

May I dedicate this paper to one of my dearest friends, the late Ryszard Strzelecki, whose passion and enthusiasm for his Polish ancestry invoked my great personal interest in Poland and the influence exerted by his relative on Australia. Ryszard also took me to Poland twice, on one occasion to visit the burial monument to Kosciuszko in the Wawel and on another trip to pay respects to Sir Pawel at the special crypt of St. Adalbert's Church in Poznan.

APPENDIX A

Map of Sir Pawel de Strzelecki's World Travels (Figure 15)



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BIOGRAPHY

Private land surveyor since 1973, **Bachelor of Surveying** (UNSW 1978), **MA** (Egyptology) from Macquarie Uni., Sydney (2000), **Registered Surveyor NSW** 1981. Now Director of Brock Surveys at Parramatta (near Sydney). Papers presented on six continents including Brunei, Nigeria, Morocco, Papua New Guinea, Hawaii, Bulgaria, Finland, Colombia and all states/territories of Australia as well as Norfolk Island. Stalwart of FIG International Institution for the History of Surveying & Measurement awarded **FIG Article of the Month March 2005, January 2012, June 2014 & April 2017**. Institution of Surveyors NSW Awards – **Halloran Award 1996** for Contributions to Surveying History, **Fellow ISNSW 1999 & 2002 Professional Surveyor of the Year**. First international **Life Member** of the Surveyors Historical Society (USA), Rundle Foundation for Egyptian Archaeology & Parramatta Historical Society, **Foundation Member** Australian National Maritime Museum & Friends of National Museum of Australia. **Member** of Bradman Crest, International Map Collectors Society, Royal Australian Historical Society, National Trust of Australia, Hills District Historical Society, Prospect Heritage Trust, **Friends** of May’s Hill Cemetery and St. John’s Cemetery.

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