

Lech Paszkowski

SIR PAUL EDMUND DE STRZELECKI

Paul Edmund de Strzelecki was born on July 20, 1797, at Gluszyna near Poznan, in Western Poland under Prussian rule. His father, Francis, was a descendant of an old line of Polish knights who can be traced back to the 14th century. Paul's mother, Anna, née Raczynski came from another knightly family. His parents died when he was ten and he was brought up by his mother's relatives. In the years 1810-1814 he was probably educated at the Piarists Fathers College in Warsaw. Paul served with the Prussian army in a cavalry regiment, but left the service after receiving the rank of ensign.

Subsequently he met Alexandrina Turno, the daughter of a substantial landowner Adam Turno. Paul and Alexandrina, whose pet name was Adyna, were very much attracted to each other but her father troubled by Law suits and shortage of money looked for a wealthy suitor. Thus, he prevented the marriage between Paul and Adyna who was nearly seventeen.

Embittered Strzelecki collected some funds from his sister and brother, probably a part of the inheritance of their parents, and then travelled through Austria, Saxony, Switzerland, Italy and Dalmatia.

In Italy Strzelecki met Prince Francis Sapieha who was greatly impressed with the brilliant personality of the young man and offered him employment as a plenipotentiary on his very large estates on the eastern outskirts of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. As an administrator Strzelecki displayed great energy and ability. He restored the estates to a good financial position. Four years later Prince Francis died, leaving in his last will a large sum of money to his talented plenipotentiary. Eustace Sapieha, the son of Prince Francis, who arrived from England, refused to recognise his father's last will. Some legal disputes followed but the matter was settled out of court and Strzelecki received about one quarter of the sum bequeathed.

Embittered again Strzelecki left Poland apparently at the end of 1829. He went to France where he stayed probably about two years and gained some professional knowledge of geology. From November 1831 till June 1834 Strzelecki lived in England, but little is known about this period of his life except that he travelled to the north of Scotland. It is a mystery as to how he became a member of the exclusive Alfred Club of London patronised by the High Society of England.

In June, 1834, Strzelecki took a ship at Liverpool for New York. In the United States he travelled extensively, also visiting Canada. He sailed to Cuba and Mexico, returning to New Orleans proceeding up the Mississippi and Ohio to Cincinnati and Baltimore. From this port he went to Brazil, exploring the provinces of Sao Paulo, Minas Gerais and Gran Chaco, travelled through Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and Chile. At Valparaiso he boarded H.M.S. *Cleopatra* and visited Peru, Equador, Costa Rica, San Salvador and the ports of western Mexico. He explored the Gulf of California where he visited the gold and silver mines in the province of Sonora. He made several forays into Utah and northern Mexico.

After returning to Valparaiso in Chile he boarded H.M.S. *Fly* and in July, 1838, sailed to the Marquesas and Hawaii. There he examined closely the volcano and crater of Kilauea. He is now credited with the introduction to world vulcanology of the Hawaiian word *ale mau mau* in reference to the burning lava reservoirs. In November, 1838, he disembarked at Papeete and stayed for eleven weeks as the guest of the reigning queen Pomare IV of Tahiti. Strzelecki boarded the French barque *Justine* and visited the islands of Tuamotu, Gambier (Mangareva) and Tonga. The barque reached the Bay of Islands in New Zealand on February 17, 1839. Strzelecki examined the mineralogy and geology of the North Island and visited the British resident, James Busby of Waitangi. On April 10 the *Justine* sailed for Sydney, where she arrived fourteen days later.

The main object of the visit to New South Wales was, he said, to examine its mineralogy. His first Australian expedition led to the Blue Mountains and beyond. When exploring in the vicinity of Bathurst, Strzelecki found traces of gold. On October 16, 1839, Strzelecki wrote to James Walker: 'On this side of the Dividing Range the variety of rocks and embedded minerals augment indications most positive of the existing gold and silver veins.' Ten days later, on October 26, 1839, he wrote to James Macarthur: 'I have a specimen of native silver in hornblende rock, and gold in specks in silicate, both serving as strong indications of the existence of these precious metals in New South Wales.' Another place where Strzelecki found gold was the bank of Cox River, near Hartley. However, the Governor of the colony, Sir George Gipps, requested him to keep the news secret because the maintenance of discipline among 45,000 convicts would become impossible. So, publicly Strzelecki kept silent, except for his early communications to a few friends.

In February, 1851, Edward Hargraves returning from the Californian diggings made his historical discovery, south-east of Orange. The Australian gold rush started, as well as the controversy of who the real discoverer in Australia was? The three main competitors in the dispute were Roderick Murchison of London, W.B. Clarke, a geologist of Sydney and the miner Hargraves, not to mention a less known lapidary of Sydney, W.T. Smith. Strzelecki kept silent for five years and did not take part in the public arguments. He left the defence of his discovery to his Australian friends. But, no doubt, he was angry when Hargraves was named 'the first discoverer of gold in Australia' and received a reward of £10,000. So, finally he published a small booklet *Gold and Silver* in 1856, defending his priority, but it only draw attention away from Strzelecki's more notable achievements.

Strzelecki's discoveries of gold had the potential of changing the history of Australia, if Sir George Gipps had accepted the suggestions of the explorer expressed in October 1839. The great human wave of the gold prospectors which filled the empty land of California would have gone to New South Wales and Victoria. In such a case the history of Australian development as a nation would have certainly been different, but the destiny of Strzelecki's discoveries was that they should remain as a one line entry in dusty books.

On December 22, 1839, Strzelecki set out from Sydney, taking with him a servant, two horses and a cart. The objectives were 'Snowy Mountains, Port Phillip, and Launceston and Hobart.' Before leaving Sydney he had arranged to meet James Macarthur (the son of Hannibal) at Ellerslie near Tumut. The two explorers joined forces in a mutually agreed

plan, each sharing the expenses. Proceeding in a southern direction they made a foray to the highest massif of the Snowy Mountains. On March 12, 1840, Strzelecki, Macarthur and two Aboriginal guides, reached a peak most - probably Mount Abbott. The Aborigines were sent down to prepare a night camp. Strzelecki by aid of his instruments detected one of the six peaks as being higher than others. He named the summit and the whole massif Mount Kosciusko. Macarthur started to descend but Strzelecki set out to conquer the highest point.

After leaving the mountains they entered the country which Strzelecki named Gippsland. Actually the first known explorer who entered East Gippsland, in the Deddick River area, was John Lhotsky in March, 1834. While passing through the Tambo Valley Strzelecki's party entered an out-station, in the vicinity of the present Ensay, which belonged to a squatter named Lachlan Macalister. The country between the Tambo and Macalister rivers had been explored some weeks before by Macalister's overseer, Angus McMillan, who was looking for new pastures for the stock of his employer. But the land from the Macalister River to Westernport was completely unknown.

The party reached Lake King, which was named by Strzelecki after his friend Captain Philip Parker King. Making further progress, the party crossed several streams which Strzelecki named after his friends. The largest of them he named the La Trobe River. After crossing this river, in the vicinity of the present site of Moe, the country side became very difficult, densely wooded. Progress was impeded by thickets of scrub and almost constant rain. About twenty kilometres past Moe the horses were abandoned. Food became as scarce as dry fuel and their gun- powder was often dump. They survived eating raw koalas and progressing slowly south of present Poowong towards Western Port, which was reached on May 12, 1840, three weeks from the day when the horses were left.

The party arrived in Melbourne one week later and aroused in Melbourne great 'sensation', enthusiasm and marked publicity. Strzelecki immediately concentrated his efforts on preparing a report for Governor Gipps and publishing a pamphlet with the description of Gippsland supplemented with the first map of this province. It caused an instant rush of settlers and their stock to occupy this splendid country.

After forty-one days in Melbourne Strzelecki boarded the brig *Emma* on July 7, 1840. She visited briefly Geelong and left Port Phillip Bay three days later. It is nearly certain that the brig sailed to Portland Bay and Strzelecki had the opportunity to examine the palaeontology of the beaches in the Port Fairy area. The *Emma* arrived in Launceston in Tasmania on July 24.

From the moment of landing in Tasmania Strzelecki found himself under the care of Sir John Franklin, the Governor, who showed him remarkable friendship and placed the entire resources of the colony at his disposal. Lady Franklin his 'strong-minded wife was fascinated and enthralled from the first meeting with the stranger'. The explorer spent two years in Tasmania, in the course of which he made three most extensive and detailed expeditions to almost every part of the island.

In early December, 1841, Strzelecki made a maritime expedition to the Bass Strait islands, which lasted two months. Most probably the Governor designated to him a small

cutter *Shamrock* of 30 tons with an experienced crew. The most important feature of this expedition was Strzelecki's correction of Matthew Flinders' map in the portion embracing the eastern coast of Flinders Island and small islands named Goose, Badger, Chappell and Green. Later when H.M.S. *Beagle* arrived in Tasmanian waters, under the command of Captain J. Lort Stokes, Sir John Franklin ordered him to include Strzelecki's corrections into the official Admiralty charts.

During this survey, on January 13, 1842, Strzelecki climbed the highest ridge on Flinders Island, which Capt. Lort Stokes named later Strzelecki's Peaks. Strzelecki also landed in Sealers Cove, climbed Mount Wilson and examined for the first time the geology of the Promontory. According to his own map he landed at Cape Liptrap and walked once more to Corinella, apparently examining the local coal deposits. At the request of Sir John Franklin he examined the coal mines of southern Tasmania and during this survey discovered new deposits. He also found in Tasmania traces of gold and copper. It was also stated that he 'greatly influenced Sir John Franklin's thoughts' on the subject of irrigation. On September 29, 1842, Strzelecki boarded the paddle-steamer *Sea Horse* and sailed for Sydney.

He stayed another six months in New South Wales mainly as a guest of Captain Philip Parker King of Port Stephens. Strzelecki examined the geology of the Hunter River and Karuah Valleys. He went north passing the Liverpool Range and Plains, Narrabri, entering the Namoi River country and reaching the 30th parallel. During his geological investigations in Australia Strzelecki found, gold, silver and copper, as well as iron pyrites (bisulphenides), sulpharsenides, sulphurets, sulphates, oxides, phosphates and arseniates of iron; oxides of titanium and malybdiates of lead (wulfenite). Among the nonmetallic minerals he traced opals, carnelians, agates, marble, kaolin (porcelain clay), coal and asbestos. After four years in Australia he departed on board the barque *Anna Robertson* on April 23, 1843.

The ship sailed through the Arafura Sea, visiting western New Guinea, Timor, Sumba, Sumbawa, Lombok, Bali, Java, Borneo, Manila, before reaching Canton and Hong Kong at the end of July, 1843. Strzelecki left China about August 11, 1843, on board the paddle-steamer *Akbar*, visited Penang, Singapore and arrived in Suez about September 17. He departed from Alexandria on board another steamer, the *Oriental*, sailing to Marseille via Malta and Alger. From Paris Strzelecki reached London on October 24, 1843. At first he was undecided as to whether to settle in England or France. Shortly after he received a most friendly address of recognition from the settlers and ladies of Tasmania, accompanied by a subscription of £400, £100 of which was contributed by Sir John Franklin. Strzelecki used this money to cover the greater part of the cost of publishing his book *Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, which appeared in May, 1845. The book received many flattering reviews and the personal commendation of Charles Darwin: '*I congratulate you on having completed a work which must have cost you so much labour and I am astonished at the number of deep subjects which you discuss. (...) I heartily wish that one quarter of our English authors could think and write in language one half as spirited yet so simple*'. Later the editor of the *North American Review*, James H. Perkins, wrote on the same subject: *Strzelecki ... has*

done more to make New South Wales and Tasmania scientifically intelligible than all other inquirers'. The book, however basically scientific, contained some extracts from Strzelecki's 'Journal', like descriptions of a Brazilian jungle or calamity on a slave ship, which proved his great literary talent and forceful pen. Strzelecki always showed everywhere a great sympathy towards the native people, thus, the chapter on the Australian Aborigines, in his book, is still worthy attention. This book became an unsurpassed source of knowledge on Australia for at least forty-five years. On November 28, 1845, Strzelecki was naturalised as a British subject. Seven months later he was awarded the gold Founder's Medal of the Royal Geographical Society for his book. On this occasion Lord Colchester proclaimed Strzelecki 'a geographer of no ordinary merit' and mentioned 'the beautiful geological map'. The map reproduced in the *Physical Description* was a reduction by John Arrowsmith from the original map by Strzelecki, was of a colossal size of twenty-five feet long and five feet wide. It was the first large geological map of eastern Australia and Tasmania.

During the autumn and winter of 1846-1847 the disaster of the great famine came to Ireland. The British Relief Association was formed in London and Strzelecki at once applied for appointment as an agent. He was sent to the counties of Sligo and Mayo but soon became the Central Agent in Dublin in charge of the whole operation. Strzelecki devoted himself to the relief of this great misery and his success was beyond any doubt, although obtained at the cost to himself of an attack of typhoid fever, traces of which remained with him for the rest of his days. For the services rendered in Ireland the British Government nominated Strzelecki one of the first Civil Companions of the Bath, bestowed on him on November 21, 1848. In 1849 he returned to Ireland again and his combined sojourns in this country amounted to nearly twenty-four months.

On May 4, 1849, Strzelecki gave evidence on the Operation of the Irish Poor Law, before the Select Committee of the House of Lords, answering 142 questions. He did not hesitate to tell the English Lords that the conditions of the Irishmen were the worst in any civilised country, including Russia. He told the English Lords that the Irishmen, were improving themselves rapidly, and were as good and capable as Englishmen, particularly in Australia. Strzelecki also predicted that the Frenchmen in Quebec would never be Anglicised. Lord Overstone when conveying to him the resolution of thanks of the Relief Committee, said that he had, indeed, afforded 'abundant proof that he possessed those high moral qualities which the British public always hold in the highest esteem'. Strzelecki was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society on May 9, 1853. In June of the same year he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London.

Strzelecki was a shareholder of the Peel River Land and Mineral Company, which became a subsidiary of the Australian Agricultural Company of N.S.W. In March, 1853, he was elected to the position of Chairman and Managing Director with a salary of £600 per annum. At the suggestion of Strzelecki both companies received a small group of Saxon and Mecklenburg Merinos from Germany to improve the stock in N.S.W. He held the position of managing director until January 1856, when he resigned, but remained as one of the directors of the Company Board till May 19, 1857.

His philanthropic interest were not limited merely to Ireland, as he helped to promote

the emigration of many families to Australia. He was an esteemed member of the Family Colonisation Loan Society initiated by Caroline Chisholm, also of Lord Herbert's Emigration Committee and of the Duke of Wellington's Emigration Committee. He was also a member of the Crimean Army Fund Committee.

Sir William Fraser stated in his memoirs that Strzelecki in 1856 received a secret mission from Lord Palmerston in 1856 and went to the Crimea and paraded there sometimes in the uniform of an officer of British Navy. He went indeed in July, 1856, to the Crimea in company of Lord Lyons who was taking over the command of the Mediterranean fleet. What Strzelecki did in the Crimea is not certain but he remained there at least to the end of November, 1856. He was also closely associated with Florence Nightingale and helped her in facilitating, through his friends, the publishing of a series of her articles.

When the British Government gave up hope of finding the lost polar expedition of Sir John Franklin, Lady Jane decided to organise a private search party. Strzelecki came to her aid and was able to assist in the collection of needed funds.

On June 20, 1860, Strzelecki received a honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Law from the University of Oxford, and on June 30, 1869, the Order of St. Michael and St. George for his 'five years' explorations in Australia, the discovery of gold, the discovery of new territory accessible to Colonization and finally for the construction of topographical and geological maps, based on astronomical observations'.

Strzelecki died in London on October 6, 1873, and was buried in the Kensal Green Cemetery. He should be remembered not merely as an early discoverer of gold and silver, nor as the explorer who named Mount Kosciusko and produced the first map of Gippsland, but as the man who had a great vision for the future of Australia. He was a man concerned with the Australian environment, ecology and conservation of forests, the man who advocated the plans of vast scale irrigation in New South Wales and Tasmania, who foretold a very bright future of the Australian wool industry, the man who first proposed a vast and detailed geological survey in this country, as early as 1845. Strzelecki also was named 'a pioneer of Australian meteorology'.

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