



Crazy Horse Memorial, photo by Charles Bennett

Taken for Granite

A very great vision is needed, and the man who has it must follow it as the eagle seeks the deepest blue of the sky.

Thasunke Witko (Crazy Horse)

DESPITE BEING A GREAT WARRIOR, the famous Lakota prophet, Crazy Horse, was known for his modesty and humility—cherished virtues in Lakota culture. So it's not difficult to imagine what he would have thought about the largest sculpture in the world being carved in his honor.

Sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski began work on his mammoth masterpiece in 1948. When he died 34 years later at the age of 74, the face of Crazy Horse had barely begun to emerge from the granite mountain, located about 10 miles west of Mount Rushmore. Ziolkowski's wife Ruth took over the operation, and the face and head were dedicated in 1998, just in time for the 50th anniversary of the project.

The genesis of the memorial was a letter Ziolkowski received in 1939 from Lakota elder Henry Standing Bear. (Although the self-taught Polish-American sculptor had worked briefly on Mt. Rushmore, it was his capturing of the sculpting prize at that year's New York Worlds Fair that brought him to Standing Bear's attention.)

Standing Bear thought there should be a Native American memorial in response to Mount Rushmore, since the genocidal policies of the four presidents depicted there in regard to America's native people amounted to little more than extermination. He wanted to show that "the red man had heroes, too," and Crazy Horse—who played a decisive role in the defeat of Custer at Little Bighorn—was the natural choice.

Ziolkowski moved to South Dakota in 1947, and began acquiring land around Thunderhead Mountain, near Rapid City.

Although he had little money, he arranged for government-owned land to be exchanged for property owned by the Lakota people.

As to the memorial's design, no one can fault Ziolkowski for thinking small. The four 60-foot tall presidential heads at Mt. Rushmore could together fit *inside the head alone* of the 563 foot tall monument, which will depict an enormous man of stone sitting astride a horse with a flowing mane, while surveying the surrounding hills. A worker suspended on a scaffold from the summit appears as little more than a fly perched on Crazy Horse's gargantuan nose, its nostrils eight feet in diameter and nine feet deep.

In the early days, Ziolkowski had old, faulty equipment and no funding, and his obsession with the project doomed his first marriage. He remarried Ruth Ross, a volunteer worker 18 years his junior, who subsequently bore him ten children—boys who could work on the mountain and girls to help serve visitors, who now arrive at the site at the rate of over a million a year.

Tourists have become a crucial source of funding, paying for tours and purchasing T-shirts, souvenir rocks from the blastings, and various 'native' bric-a-brac at the large museum and visitors center. The family twice turned down Federal funding—opting to retain control—but the non-profit collects tens of millions of dollars annually from donations, tickets, and merchandise sales.

While many Lakota living in the region praise the memorial, others believe the project has become a tribute not to Crazy Horse but to Ziolkowski himself, whose body lies entombed at the base of the mountain. No verifiable photos exist of Crazy Horse—who always avoided having his picture taken—and some Native Americans suspect that the face of the memorial is modelled not on eyewitness accounts of the warrior's likeness but on that of the sculptor himself.

(The Ziolkowski family has copyrighted their image of Crazy Horse, refusing even to allow its use on a state memorial coin.)

Crazy Horse bore no children, but several thousand documented relatives are currently living, and disputes routinely flare up as to which are his legitimate heirs. The issue isn't merely symbolic: the Crazy Horse brand adorns everything from bars to beer to burger joints throughout the region and beyond. One of the three court-appointed administrators of Crazy Horse's estate (with the ironic name of Fred Clown) has sued for profits on use of the name, seeking damages in the billions of dollars, as well as title to the monument and the surrounding land.

The location of the memorial is itself a thorny issue. The Black Hills are sacred to the Lakota, the focus of their traditional creation stories, and Crazy Horse spent his entire life fighting to protect them. To this day the Lakota refuse to accept payment for the confiscation of their land, and \$1.3 billion in compensation and interest granted in a 1980 Supreme Court ruling against the government sits unclaimed. (About a dozen South Dakota casinos currently provide significant revenue to the various tribes.)

In any case, there is general agreement among locals as to why the memorial is taking so long to complete: Whites grumble that stretching out the project keeps the dollars flowing in, while the Lakota simply smile and rub their fingers together. With so much at stake, disputes over the memorial will likely continue, perhaps even until the project is one day completed.

Regardless of the family's motivation, however, one can't help but admire the vision of Ziolkowski and his heirs in conceiving such an ambitious project and persevering over the decades to complete it, despite all the obstacles and opposition. Just don't expect it to be done any time soon. ■