

A Head Above
By WALTER and KELLY ROGERS
South Dakota

The annual Volksmarch at the Crazy Horse Memorial drew 14,804 people to South Dakota's Black Hills June 5–7. Just a few days earlier, nearly 500 tons of rock were blasted off the mountain, marking the end to 50 years of work on the memorial, and giving participants a stunning view of its completed face.

The perseverance of the Volksmarchers — participants in an annual, non-competitive hike — emulates those of both the subject, Lakota Chief Crazy Horse, and the original sculptor of this inspirational endeavor, Korczak Ziolkowski (pronounced “jewel-KUFF-skee”).

In 1948, Lakota Chief Henry Standing Bear announced, “My fellow chiefs and I would like the white man to know the red man has great heroes, too.”

Chief Crazy Horse was chosen as the subject for a monument in the sacred Black Hills. Crazy Horse, considered a great Lakota leader who was always concerned about the welfare of every individual within his following, lived at a time when his ancient ways were changing, in drastic and often tragic ways.

He was dedicated to protecting his people and had no equal as warrior or chief. He was a deeply spiritual man and wanted only peace for his people.

Crazy Horse died under grievous and deceitful circumstances at age 37, but his memory and his spirit live on in the hearts and minds of Native Americans.

Born of Polish immigrants in 1908 and orphaned at age 1, Korczak Ziolkowski endured a cruel childhood. He was a self-taught artist and had a successful career. Ziolkowski was a prize-winning sculptor by 1939, the year he began assisting sculptor Gutzon Borglum on his creation at Mount Rushmore.

At age 34, Ziolkowski volunteered for World War II and was among those landing on Omaha Beach.

After the war, he accepted an invitation from Native Americans and dedicated the rest of his life to the Crazy Horse Memorial, destined to be the world's largest sculpture.

Ziolkowski worked on Crazy Horse without salary. Despite decades of financial hardship and racial prejudice, he devoted the rest of his life to creating this Indian memorial in the Black Hills until his death in 1982 at age 74. He was buried in a tomb near his sculpture.

The completion of his dream was left to family and followers.

Both Korczak Ziolkowski and Crazy Horse gave themselves totally for causes in which they believed.

They both struggled and overcame great obstacles, faced their enemies head on, and refused to back down.

Because of their courage and dedication, both Korczak Ziolkowski and Crazy Horse serve as inspirations for us today and for generations to come.

WT