

A MONUMENTAL TASK

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

South Dakota's majestic Mount Rushmore depicts four presidents the sculptor considered responsible for the spread of the United States across the continent. And it was built on land stolen from the Lakota. Mount Rushmore was declared complete on Oct. 31, 1941 — 80 years ago.

ONE MOUNTAIN. FOUR FACES. 14 YEARS OF WORK.

LATE 1800s
American and European settlers begin pushing into the Black Hills of South Dakota, igniting a war with the Indigenous Lakota people.

APRIL 29, 1868
The U.S. government signs the Treaty of Fort Laramie, giving the Lakota exclusive use of the Black Hills.

AUGUST 1876
After gold is discovered in the region, settlers flock to the Black Hills. Congress breaks the 9-year-old treaty and the U.S. takes over the land.

1885
New York attorney Charles Rushmore visits the region to close a deal for a tin mine. A mountain known as the Six Grandfathers — a sacred spot for the Lakota — is renamed for Rushmore.

1923
The Lakota sue the U.S. government for theft.

1924
In hopes of luring more tourist dollars into the region, South Dakota historians become interested in carving a gigantic sculpture into the side of the mountain — figures important to the history of the old West: Lewis and Clark and Lakota leader Red Cloud, for example.

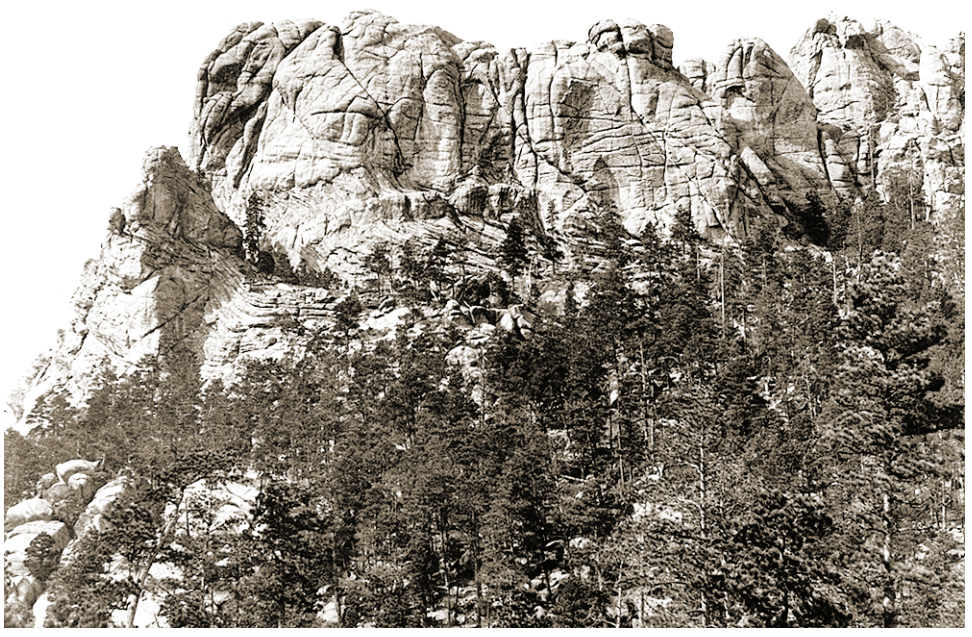
They begin pursuing Gutzon Borglum, who had allied himself with the Ku Klux Klan and the Daughters of the Confederacy. For 10 years, he has been working on a carving of Confederate leaders into the side of Stone Mountain, east of Atlanta, Georgia.

FEB. 25, 1925
After years of funding and construction issues and personality conflicts, the Stone Mountain Memorial Association fires Borglum. He destroys his models for the monument there and leaves Georgia.

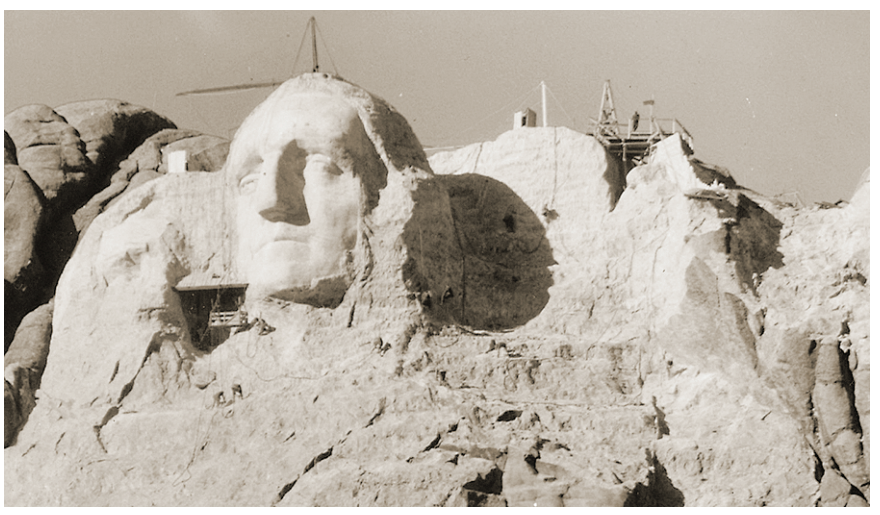
AUGUST 1925
Borglum agrees to work on a carving for Mount Rushmore but significantly revises their concept. He proposes a monument to four presidents who played a huge role in the nation's expansion across the continent: George Washington, representing the nation's birth, Thomas Jefferson, who doubled the size of the country with the purchase of the Louisiana Territory, Abraham Lincoln, who preserved the nation from splitting during the Civil War and Theodore Roosevelt, who had overseen the building of the Panama Canal.



Borglum



Mount Rushmore — originally called the Six Grandfathers by the Lakota — before construction began on Oct. 4, 1927.



Borglum's plan called for Jefferson to appear to the left of Washington but that had to change when the work crew found the rock there too soft. Jefferson's nose began to crack. They dynamited the head off the mountain and Borglum revised his plan.



The four 60-foot-high faces on Mount Rushmore required the removal of 450,000 tons of stone — most of which simply slid down the mountain.

OCT. 4, 1927
Borglum begins working on a carving at Mount Rushmore. Eventually, his work crew will grow to 400 men.

JULY 4, 1934
The first head completed, that of Washington, is dedicated in a public ceremony.

1936
The first of several efforts is made to add faces to the monument. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt supports legislation to include women's rights activist Susan B. Anthony.

AUGUST 1936
President Franklin D. Roosevelt attends a ceremony dedicating the head of Jefferson.

SEPT. 17, 1937
Lincoln's head is dedicated.

JULY 1938
Borglum had originally hoped to portray the presidents down to their waists and to then add descriptions of their accomplishments next to them. As work continues, he realizes he's out of room and blasts a 70-foot tunnel behind the faces for what he calls a Hall of Records that could hold historical artifacts. Work on that tunnel progresses 70 feet into the granite mountain before Borglum dies in 1941.

JULY 2, 1939
Roosevelt's head is dedicated.

MARCH 6, 1941
Borglum is still working on the four heads when he becomes ill and dies. His son, Lincoln, continues his work.

OCT. 31, 1941
With funds depleted, work on the monument is declared finished.

1959
Alfred Hitchcock films scenes for his movie "North by Northwest" in the memorial's parking lot and cafeteria. He agrees to not use the monument itself for violent scenes. However, he has a replica of the monument itself built in a studio that most viewers assume is the real thing. A displeased National Park Service demands MGM Pictures remove a credit at the end of the movie thanking them for their cooperation.

JUNE 30, 1980
The case of United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians is settled when the U.S. Supreme Court awards $17.1 million in damages to the Lakota. The Lakota decline compensation, insisting instead the Black Hills of South Dakota be returned to them instead.



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

AUG. 9, 1998
The National Park Service finally addresses Borglum's old Hall of Records concept by placing a titanium vault in the floor and filling it with information on Mount Rushmore and the presidents depicted there. The room isn't open to the public.

Sources: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Smithsonian magazine, National Geographic, History.com, the New York Times

ALL PHOTOS FROM THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE