

Jean-Baptiste Boucher, *dit* Waccan. (1789-1850)

A Franco-Cree Métis who was the most influential and respected Metis west of the Rocky Mountains. In 1806, he accompanied Simon Fraser when the explorer discovered Stuart Lake. After that, Boucher settled permanently in the Far West. Two years later, he was still with the same explorer on his fateful voyage from May to August 1808 along the river that now bears his name. In January 1811, Boucher was the first foreigner to come from the east who took a wife from among the natives, but the union which he entered into at that time with a Carrier woman must not have lasted long, since shortly after he married Nancy, the Métis daughter of trader James McDougall, with whom Boucher had been associated.

He served as an interpreter for the North West Company in New Caledonia during the winter of 1813-14. Boucher, or more exactly “Waccan,” since he was more commonly called by his Cree name, was brave to the point of recklessness. As such, he quickly acquired an unparalleled influence in the local tribes. In 1828, his half-brother, Duncan Livingston, was killed by Babine Indians. Without hesitation, Waccan left alone on a one hundred thirty-mile trip to seek revenge. He went straight at the murderer in front of several of his friends, shot him point blank and wounded one of the witnesses who appeared to be coming to his aid. Everyone else who was present stayed back, too stupefied by such daring to even think of touching him.

It was not surprising that when the foreman in charge of a fort established among these Indians was killed in 1843, Waccan was the leader of the group of Canadiens sent from Stuart Lake to avenge his death.

If Indians stopped off near Fort Saint James, where he resided, Waccan was entrusted with the task of making them give up the games of chance and getting them to go out and trap furs. Whenever an employee deserted his post, Waccan was sent to pursue him, and rarely returned without his man. If a convoy of rations needed special care, it was entrusted to Waccan. At the fort, he often replaced the commander during his many absences, even though technically he was only the head interpreter.

“Wakan” Boucher can be found in the parish records for the Saint Paul mission in the Willamette in 1846. Boucher died of measles in the spring of 1850, the last surviving member of Simon Fraser’s expedition. He had been at Stuart Lake no less than forty-four years.



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