Chilcotin War

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The **Chilcotin War**, the **Chilcotin Uprising** or the **Bute Inlet Massacre** was a confrontation in 1864 between members of the [Tsilhqot'in](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsilhqot%27in%22%20%5Co%20%22Tsilhqot%27in) (Chilcotin) people in [British Columbia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Columbia) and white road construction workers. Fourteen men employed by [Alfred Waddington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Waddington) in the building of a road from [Bute Inlet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bute_Inlet) were killed, as well as a number of men with a [pack-train](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pack-train) near [Anahim Lake](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anahim_Lake%22%20%5Co%20%22Anahim%20Lake) and a settler at [Puntzi Lake](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puntzi_Lake%22%20%5Co%20%22Puntzi%20Lake).

Background

In 1862, [Alfred Waddington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Waddington) began lobbying the press and his political allies for support to a wagon road from [Bute Inlet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bute_Inlet) to Fort Alexandria where it would connect to the [Cariboo Road](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cariboo_Road) and continue on to the goldfields at [Barkerville](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barkerville%22%20%5Co%20%22Barkerville).[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-Hewlett_p.-3) He received approval for the construction early in 1863. According to Waddington, it would reduce land travel from 359 miles to 185 miles and the total days consumed in packing freight from 37 days to 22 compared to the Yale-Fraser Canyon route known as the [Cariboo Road](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cariboo_Road)favoured by [Governor Douglas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Douglas_%28governor%29). The Bute Inlet Wagon Road was to follow the [Homathko River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homathko_River) valley from the mouth of Bute Inlet and then swing northeast across the [Chilcotin Plateau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_Plateau%22%20%5Co%20%22Chilcotin%20Plateau) to join the Bentinck Arm Trail at Puntzi Lake and the mouth of the [Quesnel River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quesnel_River%22%20%5Co%20%22Quesnel%20River). It was also one of the routes considered and advocated by Waddington for the transcontinental railway eventually constructed to what became [Vancouver](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vancouver) instead.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-White_p.-4):192

Outbreak of violence

The violence began when road construction crews entered the territory of the [Tsilhqot'in](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsilhqot%27in%22%20%5Co%20%22Tsilhqot%27in) nation without permission.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-:0-5) Construction had been underway for two years when, on April 29, 1864, a ferryman, Timothy Smith, stationed 30 miles up the river was killed after refusing a demand from [Klattasine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klattasine%22%20%5Co%20%22Klattasine), Tellot and other Tsilhqot'in for food. Smith was shot and his body thrown into the river. The food stores and supplies were looted. A half ton of provisions were taken.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-Mole,2009,p.70-6) The following day the Tsilhqot'in attacked the workers' camp at daylight. Three men, Peterson Dane, Edwin Moseley and a man named Buckley, though injured, escaped and fled down the river. The remaining crew were killed and their bodies thrown into the river.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-Mole,2009,p.70-6)

Four miles further up the trail, the band came upon the foreman, William Brewster, and three of his men blazing trail. All were killed. Brewster's body was mutilated and left. The others' bodies were thrown into the river. The band also killed William Manning, a settler at Puntzi Lake.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-White_p.-4):192

A pack train led by Alexander McDonald, though warned, continued into the area and three of the drivers were killed in the ensuing ambush.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-White_p.-4):192 In all, nineteen men were killed.

In [New Westminster](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Westminster%2C_British_Columbia), [Governor Seymour](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Seymour), just a month into his term, received news of the attacks on May 14.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-7) The next day [Chartres Brew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chartres_Brew) and 28 men were sent to Bute Inlet aboard HMS Forward but they were unable to make their way up the trail from the Homathko valley to the scene of the incident and returned to New Westminster. A second party of 50 men under Gold Commissioner [William Cox](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_George_Cox) went to the area using an overland route, met an ambush and retreated. Brew, aboard [HMS *Sutlej*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Sutlej_%281855%29), along with the Governor and 38 men went out again to reach the Chilcoltin from [Bentinck Arm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dean_Channel). They arrived July 7 and met Cox. [Donald McLean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_McLean_%28fur_trader%29) led a scouting party to reconnoiter. A guide, hearing a rifle click, urged him to get down. He didn't and was shot through the heart.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-8)[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-9)

Arrest and execution of Tsilhqot'in chiefs

In 1864, Chief Alexis and a slave of [Klatassine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klatassine%22%20%5Co%20%22Klatassine) met with Cox and were given assurances of friendship by Cox.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-10) Tsilhqot'in chiefs believed that they were going to attend peace talks.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-:0-5) The next day Klattassine, Tallot and six others arrived. They were arrested. Although denied by Cox, they claimed to have been offered immunity. The prisoners were returned to [Alexandria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandria%2C_British_Columbia). Five of the Tsilhqot'in men (Telloot, [Klatassine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klatassine%22%20%5Co%20%22Klatassine), Tah-pitt, Piele, and Chessus) were arrested and charged with murder.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-11)[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-12) They were tried in September 1864 at [Quesnel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quesnel%2C_British_Columbia%22%20%5Co%20%22Quesnel%2C%20British%20Columbia) by Judge [Begbie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_Baillie_Begbie%22%20%5Co%20%22Matthew%20Baillie%20Begbie). In defence of their actions, Klatsassin said they were waging war, not committing murder. The five were found guilty and sentenced to hang.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-Ormsby_p.-13):207 The day they were executed is now a day of mourning in the Tsilhqot'in Nation.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-Swanky_p.-14)A sixth chief was executed a year later in [New Westminster](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Westminster).[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-:0-5)

The incident cost the colony about $80,000. A petition to the Imperial parliament to share this cost was declined. Donald McLean's widow was given a pension of ₤100 per year for five years. Waddington sought compensation of $50,000 from the colony saying that his party had been given no protection. The colony declined saying none was requested and that no state could guarantee its citizens safety from murder.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-White_p.-4):194

Waddington was of the view that fears of the introduction of smallpox was the cause of the unrest. [Frederick Whymper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Whymper), an artist attached to Waddington's crew, attributed the unrest to the provision of firearms to the Chilcotin at a time when they were suffering from lack of food. Judge Begbie concluded that the most important cause of the unrest was concern over title to land rather than "plunder or revenge".[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-Ormsby_p.-13):206 Others say that the native packers in Brewster's crew were starving while the white members of the crew were well supplied. There were also grievances about desecration of graves and interference with valuable spring waters.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-White_p.-4):195

Review of trial

The arrest, trial, and execution of the six Tsilhqot'in chiefs as criminals was challenged by the Tsilhqot'in nation on the basis that the violence was a war between two [sovereign nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_nations).[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-:0-5)

In 1993 Judge Anthony Sarich, wrote a report commissioned by the government of British Columbia, of an inquiry into the relationship between the Aboriginal community in British Columbia and the justice system. As a result of the recommendations in the report, the Attorney General apologized for the hanging of the Chilcotin Chiefs and provided funding for an archaeological investigation to locate their graves.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-Committee_on_the_Elimination_of_Racial_Discrimination_p.-15) The British Columbia government also installed a commemorative plaque at the site of the hanging of the Tsilhqot'in chiefs.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-:0-5)

In 2014, the British Columbia government exonerated the Chilcotin leaders. Premier [Christy Clark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christy_Clark) stated, "We confirm without reservation that these six Tsilhqot'in chiefs are fully exonerated for any crime or wrongdoing." [[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-Cordasco_p.-16) This exoneration was reciprocally made by Prime Minister [Justin Trudeau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justin_Trudeau), on behalf of the Government of Canada, on March 26, 2018, in a speech to Parliament.[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-17)

On November 2, 2018, Trudeau fulfilled a promise made in his apology speech in March and became the first prime minister to visit the land of the [Tsilhqot'in](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsilhqot%27in%22%20%5Co%20%22Tsilhqot%27in)people, where he made another apology speech, this time to the Tsilhqot'in community and its leaders. Trudeau rode into the valley on a black horse, symbolizing the ones ridden by the wrongfully executed chiefs and participated in a [smudging](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smudging) ceremony during his time there.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilcotin_War#cite_note-:0-5)