

Father Belcourt's Account: 1845 Buffalo Hunt

In the autumn of 1845 Father Belcourt “went to the prairies” for six weeks as chaplain to the half-breeds on their semi-annual buffalo hunt and, in a letter published two years later at Quebec in connection with the Northwest missions, gave a vivid pen-picture of the excitement and spirit of adventure connected with it. He amplified the description in a letter to Bishop Loras of Dubuque in 1850 which was printed in the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* for July, 1851. During the hunt 1776 buffaloes were killed by 55 hunters in six weeks and the choice meat, valued at 1700 pounds sterling, dried, ground to powder and mixed with fat and berries, made into pemmican for winter use in the settlement. He was back at Baie St. Paul on October 24, and spent the winter teaching the Oblate Fathers who had recently arrived the Chippewa language: Among his pupils was the youthful Father Taché destined to succeed Bishop Provencher and to be the first Archbishop of St. Boniface.

Rev. Father George A. Belcourt first visited the Butte de Morale, in Wells County, North Dakota in October, 1845, when accompanying the Pembina half-breeds on a buffalo hunt near Dog Den Butte.

It is noteworthy that in September of 1845, Father Belcourt, while travelling with the Red River buffalo hunt to the Cheyenne River, noted a considerable group of Metis around the Souris River where they had established their hivernant camps.¹ Five years later, Belcourt again noted a concentration of Metis around the area of Turtle Mountain and on the Souris plain. They were in the process of gathering their winter provisions and erecting their winter shelters. He noted 30 houses at the foot of Turtle Mountain, 15-20 more families further up the Mountain, and as many as 400 Metis camped on or near the Souris River. They located here in winter because of the abundance of buffalo who also found winter shelter and pasturage in this locale.²

See also:

Buffalo Hunting Trail: Metis Hunt of 1845:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/51461416/Buffalo-Hunting-Trail-1845>



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute

¹ Letter of G.A. Belcourt, St. Paul, November 25, 1845. Printed in House of Representatives Executive Document, No. 51, 31st Congress, 1st Session, 44.

² G.A. Belcourt to Bishop of Dubuque, 16 Feb. 1850. *Ann. de la Prop. de la Foi*, 106-110.

