Estéban José Martinez Encyclopedia Article

Estéban José Martinez

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1742-1798

Spanish explorer who established the first Spanish base at what is now Vancouver Island on the Pacific coast of Canada. Juan Perez had claimed the island for Spain in 1774, but English and American traders began trapping animals in the area after the English explorer James Cook visited in 1778. In 1789 Martinez was sent to enforce Spain's trading rights to the island. Relations with foreign traders there quickly soured, and trade disputes eventually led to Spain abandoning its exclusive claims to territories north of what is now Oregon.