BUSHRANGERS OF AUSTRALIA

Australians have been talking about bushrangers for 200 years, originally to describe predatory runaway convicts. More than 2000 bushrangers are believed to have roamed the Australian countryside, beginning with the convict bolters and drawing to a close after **Ned Kelly's** last stand at Glenrowan.
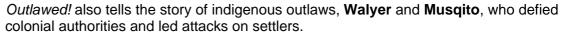
The Convict Bolters, 1788-1840s

John "Black" Caesar is generally regarded as the first bushranger. He bolted from Sydney Cove several times before being shot dead in 1796. In the 1820s bold **Jack Donahoe** led a band of escaped convicts, robbing from rich settlers around Sydney. Donahoe quickly became central to Australian folklore as the **Wild Colonial Boy.**

Bushranging was common on the mainland, but Van Dieman's Land produced the most violent and serious outbreaks of convict bushrangers. Hundreds of convicts were at large in the bush, farms were abandoned and martial law was proclaimed.

Outlawed! also tells the story of indigenous outlaws, **Walyer** and **Musqito**, who defied colonial authorities and led attacks on settlers.

The Golden Age, 1850s

The discovery of gold gave bushrangers access to great wealth that was portable and easily converted to cash. Their task was assisted by the isolated location of the gold-fields and a police force decimated by troopers abandoning their duties to join the gold rush. **George Melville** was hanged in front of a large crowd for robbing the McIvor gold escort near Castlemaine in 1853.

The Wild Colonial Boys, 1860s to 1870s

Bushranging numbers flourished in New South Wales with the rise of the young, colonial-born sons of poorer, often ex-convict squatters. Bushranging offered a more glamorous life than mining and farming and the serious bushranger quickly graduated from just stealing cattle.

Much of the activity focused on the Lachlan Valley, around Forbes, Yass and Cowra. **Frank Gardiner, John Gilbert** and **Ben Hall** led the most notorious gangs. In two years the Gilbert-Hall Gang reportedly robbed 10 mailcoaches, held up 21 properties, stole 23 racing horses, took over the village of Canowindra three times and killed two policemen. Other active bushrangers included **Dan Morgan,** who rampaged around the Murray River, the **Clarke Brothers** of the Monaro and **Captain Thunderbolt,** killed outside Uralla. Cattle thief **Henry Readford** became folklore when in 1870 he drove 1000 head of stolen cattle from Queensland to South Australia. He later pioneered stations in the Northern Territory.

The Last Hurrah, 1880s to 1900s

Bushranging faded as police efficiency increased and rural communications improved. Among the last bushrangers was the **Kelly Gang,** captured at Glenrowan in 1880, two years after they were outlawed.

In 1900 the indigenous **Governor Brothers** terrorised much of northern New South Wales. One of the last known references to bushranging is found in a 1980 edition of the *Bulletin,* when 50 police were reportedly hunting two bushranging brothers on the central Queensland gemfields.

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