Bushranger

A **bushranger** was a [thief](#) who lived in the [Australian](#) [bush](#). Bushrangers often stole expensive things from [banks](#) or [coaches](#). There were more than 2000 bushrangers during Australia's past. Most were simply [criminals](#) and thieves. A few bushrangers became famous and were seen as [heroes](#). They are part of a long history that has men such as [Robin Hood](#) and [Dick Turpin](#) in [England](#), or [Jesse James](#) and [Billy the Kid](#) in the [US](#).[1]

History

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The word "bushranger" was first used in [Australia](#) in 1805. It described three men who had stopped a cart near [Sydney](#). Then, the word was used for criminals who attacked people on the roads or in [the bush](#) (the Australian countryside away from towns).

The first bushrangers were escaped [convicts](#). One of the last bushrangers was [Ned Kelly](#) who was captured in 1880.[2]

1788 to 1840s: Criminals who escaped

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Criminals who escaped [stole](#) things from farms far away and people walking on the roads. Sometimes they sold the stolen things to other free [settlers](#).

[John "Black" Caesar](#) was the first bushranger.[2] He ran away from Sydney Cove many times before he was shot dead in 1796.

Bold [Jack Donahue](#)[2] appeared in [newspapers](#) around 1827 for bushranging on the [road](#) between [Sydney](#) and [Windsor](#). In the 1830s he was seen as the worst bushranger in the colony.[3] Leading a gang of escaped criminals, Donahue became an important person in Australian [folklore](#) as the Wild Colonial Boy.[2]

Bushranging happened all over Australia, but [Van Diemen's Land](#) (later known as [Tasmania](#)) produced the most violent and serious bushrangers.[2] Hundreds of criminals were at large in the bush, farms were given up, and the [army](#) was brought in to try and capture the bushrangers. [Indigenous Australian](#) bushranger [Musquito](#) led attacks on settlers.

1850s: gold rush era

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The bushrangers were busiest during the [Gold Rush](#) years of the 1850s and 1860s. Gold can be easily carried and also it can easily be turned into [cash](#). The goldfields were in remote places and there were not very many police to guard the gold.[2]

George Melville was killed by hanging in front of many people for stealing from the McIvor gold escort near [Castlemaine](#) in 1853.[2]

1860s to 1870s

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Bushranging numbers grew in [New South Wales](#) with the rise of the colonial-born sons of poor, often ex-convict farmers, who wanted a more exciting life than mining or farming.[2]

Much of the bushranging in these years was in the [Lachlan Valley](#), around [Forbes](#), [Yass](#) and [Cowra](#).[2]

[Frank Gardiner](#), [John Gilbert](#) and [Ben Hall](#) led the most notorious gangs of the period. Other active bushrangers included [Dan Morgan](#), based around the [Murray River](#), and [Captain Thunderbolt](#), killed outside [Uralla, New South Wales](#).[2]

1880s to 1900s

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The increasing push of settlement, increased police efficiency, better [rail transport](#) and communications, such as [telegraphy](#), made it increasingly difficult for bushrangers to evade capture.

Among the last bushrangers was the Kelly Gang led by [Ned Kelly](#), who were captured at [Glenrowan, Victoria](#) in 1880, two years after they were [outlawed](#).

In 1900 the [Governor Brothers](#) scared many people in the north of New South Wales.[2]

Public perception

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In Australia, bushrangers often attract public sympathy.

Entertainment

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In the same way that outlaws feature in many movies of the American [western genre](), bushrangers regularly feature in Australian literature, movie, music and television. These include:

- [Jack Donahue]() was the first bushranger to have inspired bush ballads.[3]
- *[Robbery Under Arms]()*, a [novel]() by [Thomas Alexander Browne]() (writing as Rolf Boldrewood) was published in serial form in the *[Sydney Mail]()* from 1882 to 1883.[4] It is an early description of the life and acts of fictional bushrangers. It has been the basis of several movies and a television series.[5]
- [Ned Kelly]() was the subject of the world's first feature-length movie, *[The Story of the Kelly Gang]()*, released in 1906.[6] In the 1970 release *[Ned Kelly]()*, Kelly was played by [Mick Jagger]() of [The Rolling Stones](). Kelly has been the subject of many more movies, television series, written fiction and music.
- [Dan "Mad Dog" Morgan]() was the subject of a feature movie, *Mad Dog Morgan* (1976), starring [Dennis Hopper]().[7]
- [Ben Hall]() and his gang were the subject of several Australian folk songs, including "*Streets of Forbes*".

Famous bushrangers

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Some bushrangers became famous as a result of their activities. They include:

- [Joe Byrne]()
- [Martin Cash]()
- [John Dunn]()
- [Ben Hall]()
- [Frank Gardiner]()
- [John Gilbert]()
- [Steve Hart]()
- [Dan Kelly]()
- [Ned Kelly]()
- [Moondyne Joe]() whose real name was Joseph Bolitho Johns
- [John O'Meally]()
- [Harry Power]()
- [Captain Moonlight]() whose real name was Andrew George Scott
- [Captain Thunderbolt]() whose real name was Frederick Ward
- [Michael Howe]()
- [Charles Russell]() known as the "Black Douglas."

References

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1. ↑ Davey, Gwenda; Graham Seal (1993). *The Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press. pp. 58–59. ISBN 0195530578.
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