

THE CONVICT BUSHRANGERS

The story of bushranging in Australia falls into three parts. The first part covers the period from the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 up to the 1840s, when nearly all the bushrangers were escaped convicts. They were called 'bolters' because they had bolted from captivity.

One of the first bolters was a West Indian negro called Black Caesar, who had been sent out with the First Fleet. He took to the bush soon after he arrived in Australia and remained free for several years.

Black Caesar became a hero to other convicts because he showed that it was possible to defy authority. Many people admired the exploits of bushrangers in this way long after Black Caesar's time, even though later bushrangers were much more brutal.

Convicts were required to do hard work that did not vary much. In this picture a group of convicts is carrying a huge timber beam to build a fence. From time to time some convicts ran away and hid in the bush. This was not difficult to do because they were not closely guarded all the time.

If they were caught, escaped convicts were often sent to Van Diemen's Land or Norfolk Island. These were very strict prison settlements which housed convicts who had committed serious crimes after coming to Australia. Both were very brutal places and although many prisoners tried to escape from them, very few succeeded. Those who did knew they would almost certainly be hanged if they were caught, so they were very determined to remain free, and would certainly kill if they had to.

Things to do:

- 1 The men in the picture are building a fence. Find out what sort of tools were used for this kind of work.
- 2 Imagine you are searching for an escaped convict. Write a short story or play about tracking down and capturing a 'bolter'.
- 3 In early Sydney, Pinchgut Island was used as a convict prison. Find out how the island got its name and what it is called today.

