

Media Release

Ben Hall Rides Again This Summer!

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**Ben Hall statue unveiling and book launch at the Old Forbes Railway Stn,
10am Dec 1, 2005**

Exactly 140 years after his death, a life-size bronze statue of Ben Hall is to be unveiled in Forbes, his home town and the area he plundered during the 1860's. The statue will be unveiled by Ben Hall jnr, great grandson of the infamous bushranger.

The dedication will be followed by the launch of a new book, *You'll Never Take Me Alive – The Life and Death of Bushranger Ben Hall*, written by Sydney author Nick Bleszynski and published by Random House (\$32.95).

Described by Bryce Courtenay as “A ripper yarn,” *You'll Never Take Me Alive* is historical fiction set against a backdrop of the gold rush and the “roaring days” of bushranging that followed. It tells the powerful and tragic story of Ben Hall; from his childhood, right through his bushranging years, to his death following a shoot-out with police on May 5th 1865.

“The story of Ben Hall is an amazingly moving and very human tale of betrayal, guilt and vengeance. He was a prosperous landowner and a cattleman who took up ‘the game,’ ” says Nick Bleszynski.

“He came to the attention of police and was wrongfully jailed. After that he believed he ‘might as well have the game as the blame.’ The Ben Hall gang went on to commit more bail-ups than any other bushrangers in Australian history. During their three-year reign they averaged a robbery a day.”

Like Nick Bleszynski's previous book, *Shoot Straight You Bastards! – The Truth Behind the Killing of Breaker Morant*, which raised questions in Parliament, *You'll Never Take Me Alive* is not short on controversy. During his research Bleszynski came across startling new historical information.

“Folklore has it that Ben Hall was driven to bushranging by the NSW police and that they murdered him. The research I uncovered supports both those claims,” said Bleszynski. Details will be revealed at the launch.

The statue ceremony and book launch will be held at Forbes Tourist and Craft Centre (the old railway station) at 10am on December 1st.

It will be only the second time in Australian history that a statue has been erected to a bushranger. The other is to Captain Thunderbolt in Urulla, northern NSW.

The launch program will feature speeches by Forbes Mayor Alister Lockhart, Ben Hall jnr. and Nick Bleszynski. The highlight will be the re-enactment of a bushranger bail-up, complete with horses and Cobb & Co. coach. A selection of Ben Hall poems and ballads from local artists will give the ceremony some local colour.

“There has been intense debate in the town about putting up a statue to a bushranger, but the release of the book and the anniversary of his death seem to have tipped the balance,” said Bleszynski.

According to Bleszynski, the history of any nation is made by both the villains and the heroes and many men were a bit of both. “Back in the pioneering days of the 1860’s things were not as black and white as they are today, they were a very murky grey,” he says.

“I think Ben Hall was a far more significant character than history suggests. He knew the system was corrupt and it’s clear from his actions that he challenged the status quo.”

“I hope this book brings Ben Hall out of the shadow of Ned Kelly. Ben Hall was the original. Ned acknowledged him as his hero and copied many of his moves. Don’t be surprised if the Victorians go and put up a statue to Ned now.”

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