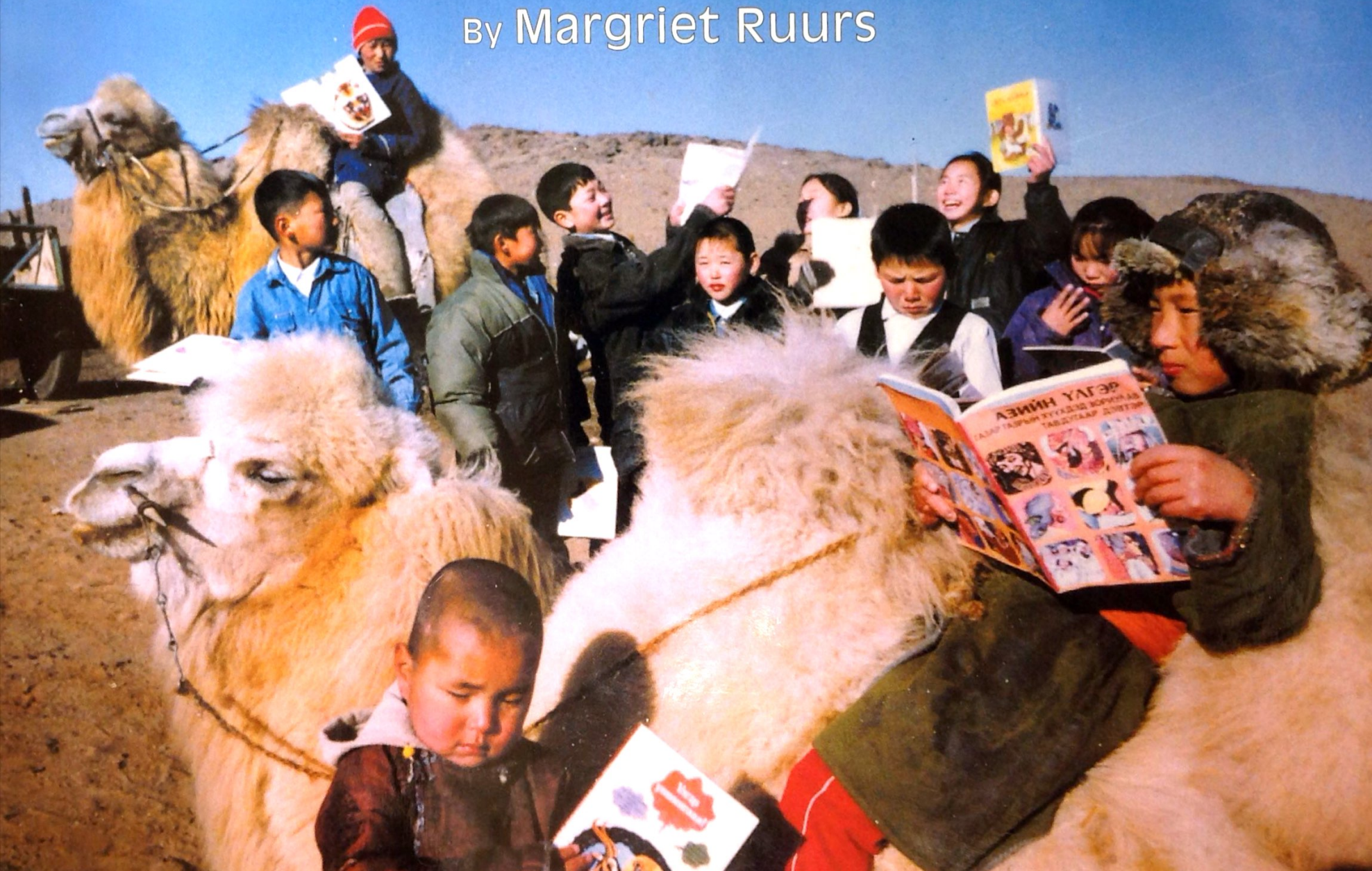


My Librarian Is a Camel

How Books Are Brought to Children Around the World

By Margriet Ruurs



INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, I read a newspaper article about a camel in Kenya that was used to bring books to young people who lived in remote desert villages. I wondered how else books might be brought to children in other parts of the world. My research turned up all sorts of “mobile libraries”: libraries that moved on legs, on wheels, and by other means.

I was thrilled to learn how far people would go to put books into the hands of young readers. I began to contact librarians in faraway places. They responded by sharing information, personal stories, and photos of their mobile libraries and of the young people who use them. Over time, I assembled a scrapbook of mobile libraries from all over the world.

Developing this book has been a rewarding and exciting experience. From Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe, I discovered people who are passionate about books and who understand the importance of libraries in our lives. One librarian in Azerbaijan explained that the library is “as important as air or water.”

Maybe you have been taking your local library for granted, just as I did. Next time you borrow books, think of how lucky you are to be able to choose from all of those free books and to take home as many as you wish.

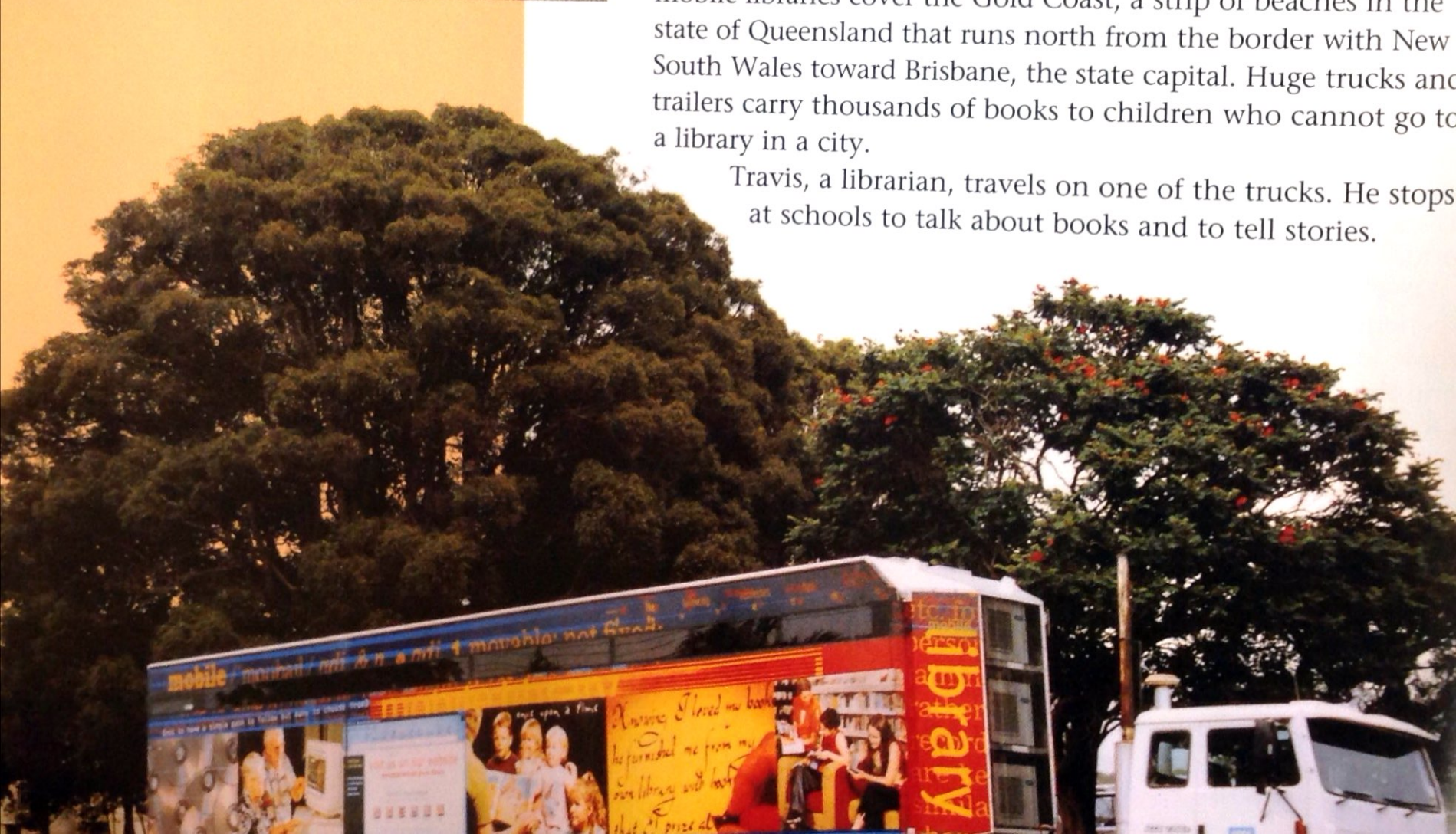
The librarians and volunteers who bring books by camel or elephant or by boat inspired me. I hope they inspire you, too.

AUSTRALIA



In Australia, there are more than five thousand libraries. About seventy-two of those libraries are on wheels. Some mobile libraries cover the Gold Coast, a strip of beaches in the state of Queensland that runs north from the border with New South Wales toward Brisbane, the state capital. Huge trucks and trailers carry thousands of books to children who cannot go to a library in a city.

Travis, a librarian, travels on one of the trucks. He stops at schools to talk about books and to tell stories.



"Some stories leave children with something to think about," says Travis. "Others bring laughter or tears." Stories can get kids excited about books and reading, so they borrow lots of books.

The mobile library that Travis runs is more than a truck. It is a solar-powered high-tech library. The solar panel is on the top of the truck. Inside are six computers and a printer powered by a UPS (uninterrupted power supply) unit, which is charged from a bank of batteries.

The truck comes with three air-conditioning units, two banks of fluorescent lights, nine spotlights, and a stereo system with surround sound. It also features a wheelchair lift, a microwave oven, a small refrigerator, a toilet, and two sinks. All of these units are powered by a bank of constantly recharging batteries. The solar panel provides a small current to the batteries that keeps them alive and running.



Australian readers borrow books from their solar-powered library truck.



Commonwealth of Australia

Capital: *Canberra*

Estimated population: *20,000,000*

The smallest continent in the world, Australia lies southeast of Asia. Because the continent is in the Southern Hemisphere, the seasons are opposite to those in the Northern Hemisphere. Summer begins on December 1. Winter begins on June 1. The official language is English, but there are also hundreds of Aboriginal languages spoken, the languages of Australia's native people.



AZERBAIJAN



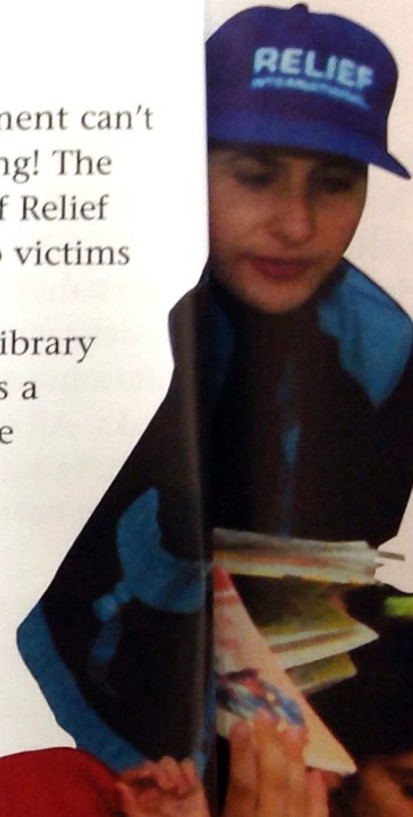
The children in the Kelenterli refugee settlement can't sit still when they know that the blue truck is coming! The blue truck library is here, thanks to the hard work of Relief International, an organization that provides relief to victims of natural disasters and civil conflicts.

These children live in poverty, but the blue library truck brings a surge of happiness and curiosity. "It's a big event when the library comes to town," says the librarian. "It's a bit of happiness for children who normally don't have much to look forward to."

This library-in-a-truck has been bringing books to children for several years. Designed to provide a wide variety of books to young people, two library



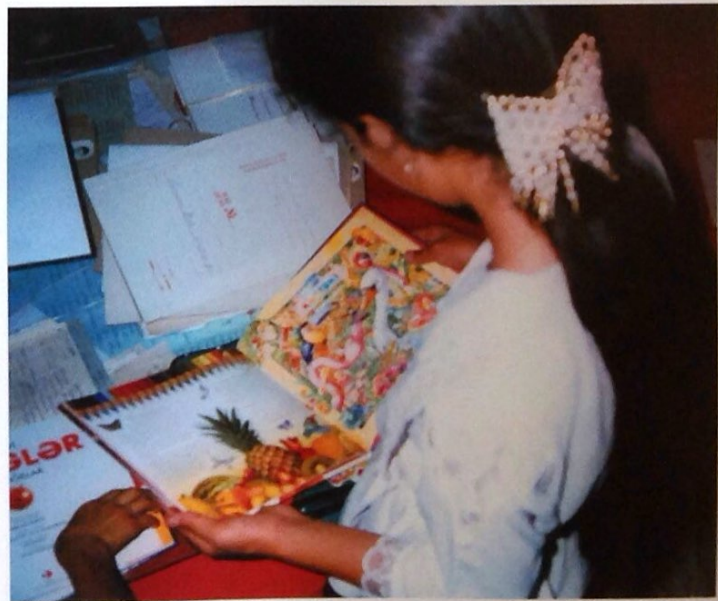
When the blue library truck arrives, Azerbaijani children are eager to get their books.





trucks serve over sixteen hundred students in about twenty-three refugee schools. Their goal is simple: for a few hours each week, the children of Kelenterli and other settlements are given the opportunity to borrow books. In doing so, they may feel they are part of a new generation growing up in a new Azerbaijan. The trucks travel through only two regions of Azerbaijan. There are children in other areas of the country who would love to see the blue truck pay them a visit. But unfortunately, there are not enough trucks, or books, to reach them all. Relief International is working to change that.

"For us," says the librarian, "the mobile library is as important as air or water."



Children in Azerbaijan learn about their country's history through books written in their own language.



Azerbaijani Republic

Capital: *Baku*

Estimated population 8,347,000

Azerbaijan (Az-ere-bye-SHON) lies in southwest Asia. This former republic of the Soviet Union became independent in 1991. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has been torn by civil conflict. People speak Azerbaijani, but Russian is also spoken, mostly in the capital of the country.

A photograph of a woman and a young child wearing heavy, fur-lined winter parkas. The woman, in the background, has dark hair and glasses. The child, in the foreground, is smiling. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

CANADA

Nunavut, which means “Our Land” in the language of the Inuit people, is a huge territory in Canada’s north. The arctic region stretches from the North Pole to Arviat in the south, and from Kugluktuk in the west to Panjnirtung in the east. The distances are huge, and many villages are very isolated. The Northwest Territories reach from Nunavut in the east to the Yukon in the west.

Larger towns like Iqaluit, Tuktoyaktuk, and Yellowknife have their own public-library buildings, but many communities are just too small. Some communities, like Fort Liard, have a virtual library, which offers Internet access. But even if the community does not have any kind of library building, the Northwest Territories public library system offers books to everyone in the far north through their Borrower-by-Mail program.

Tyson Anakvik, Colin Igutaaq, James Naikak, and Cameron Ovilok are friends in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. They request library books by e-mail or by phone. A mobile library doesn’t bring the books to their village; the books are sent through the mail. The Borrower-by-Mail program will send children any books they’d like to read. If the library doesn’t have a book in its system, librarians

will borrow the book from another library in Canada and mail it. They even include a stamped, addressed envelope, so the children won't have to pay to return the book.

The boys take their young friend Liza for a ride on their sled as they walk to the post office to pick up their books. The boys look forward to reading that night. On winter days, the sun does not come above the horizon, and when the thermometer reads minus 50 degrees, the children like to curl up with a good book by the woodstove. While the northern wind howls across the tundra, they read fantasy and action novels. Liza is excited about finding good picture books in the package.

They can keep their books for up to six weeks. After that, they'll pack them up and walk to the local post office to mail the books back to the library. Then they'll check the mail every day . . . until another big brown package arrives with new books to devour in their remote corner of Canada's Arctic.



Canada

Capital: *Ottawa*

Estimated population: *30,532,900*

Canada, located in North America, is the second-largest country in the world. The most easterly point of Newfoundland is closer to England than it is to Calgary, Alberta. From east to west, Canada is so wide that there are six time zones within its borders. Canada has two official languages, English and French, and native Canadians also speak their own languages. The original people of the North are called Inuit, and they speak Inuktitut.



ENGLAND

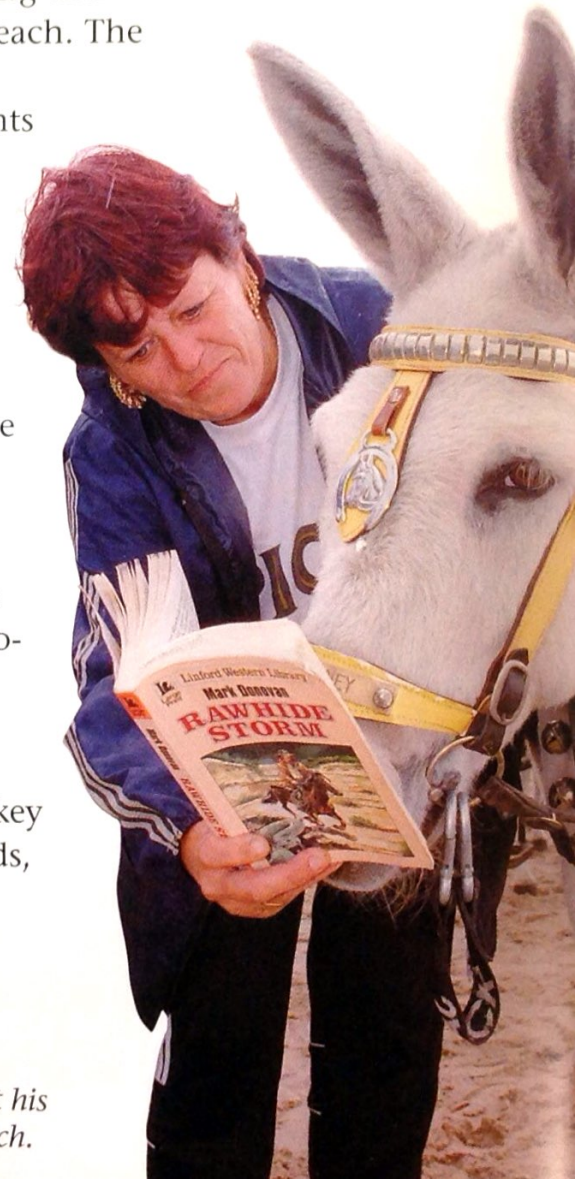


The Blackpool Library distributes the joy of reading from a wheelbarrow on the beach.



The Blackpool Beach Library brings books directly to people who are enjoying their summer holiday at the beach. The library is a wheelbarrow!

Two library assistants cart the books up and down the beach. Borrowers needn't join the Blackpool Library. When they finish reading the books, they simply return them to the wheelbarrow when it comes by another day. The people at the Blackpool Library believe that it is important to promote the joy of reading. "Libraries are services, not buildings," says one librarian. So, besides donkey rides and lemonade stands, this beach offers books!



Even a donkey likes to put his nose in a book on the beach.



Gloucester's mobile library.



England

Capital: *London*

Estimated population: *59,000,000*

England is part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The United Kingdom lies off the northwestern coast of Europe. England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland form the United Kingdom. The official language is English, but some people in Wales speak Welsh, and some people in Scotland speak Gaelic.

England has other types of mobile libraries as well. Share-a-Book is a children's mobile library van in Gloucester, a county in England. A librarian travels with the van to the countryside, where children don't have access to a regular public library. Many children don't have books at home to read and share with their parents.

Share-a-Book has special books for children for whom English is a second language. They also offer toddler story times and take part in special celebrations in the area.

Inside the Share-a-Book library, kids and grown-ups love to share books.

