



The Camel who Crossed Australia

Jackie French

ISBN 9780732285432

Series:

Animal stars #3

About the author

Jackie French is a full-time writer who lives near Braidwood in the Araluen Valley, NSW. In 2000, *Hitler's Daughter* was awarded the CBC Younger Readers' Award. *To the Moon and Back* won the Eve Pownall Award in 2005. *Pharaoh, the boy who Conquered the Nile* and *The Shaggy Gully Times* have both been shortlisted for the 2007 CBC Awards.

About the novel

The story of the famous Burke and Wills expedition ... as it has never been told before.

The humans called him 'Bell Sing', but to the other camels he is known as 'He Who Spits Further than the Wind'.

Transported from the mountains and deserts of the 'Northwest Frontier' (present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan), Bell Sing accompanies explorers Burke and Wills as they try to cross Australia from south to north.

Bell Sing has never had a high opinion of humans — or horses. And this expedition is the worst managed caravan he's even been in. Camel handler Dost Mahomet and soldier John King are also beginning to wonder if their leader is competent, or crazy.

Bell Sing can smell water over the sandhills on the horizon ... and freedom too. Can the expedition succeed? And who — if anyone — will survive?

This is the gritty and true story about one of the most extraordinary and iconic events in Australia's history.

Ages 9 – 13

Praise for the *Animal Stars* series:

'an irreverent and informative charmer' *Sunday Age*

'This exciting story of adventure and survival against the odds with likeable main characters has greater power than text books to spark new interests and extend existing ones.' *Viewpoint*

'What a delight to read this book! ... I think this book could inspire much original history reading by young readers.' *Book News*

'This is history brought to life for the young reader.' *Reader's Feast Book Guide*

Before Reading

- Brainstorm, take class notes and discuss what students know about the Burke and Wills expedition. Refer to these notes again after reading the novel and undertaking some of the questions and activities. Discuss the children's earlier perceptions and some of the lesser-known aspects of the expedition.

Characters

Camels: Smelly Breath, Bell Sing, Rajah, Bunjib, Nero, Rangee, Shadow, Abdul, Gotch, Beer, Boocho, Rowa, Mustana, Simla, Siva, Nono, Landa, Jambel, Mochrani, Mutwala, Golah Sing, Burra, Gobin, Coppin, Janglee

Cameleers: Dost Mahomet, Nur, Simla, Esau Khan, Belooch

Other characters: Bilhari, Mr Landells, Robert O'Hara Burke, William Wills, Dr Ludwig Becker, Dr Herman Beckler, John King, Charles Grey, Brahe, Patton, Wright, Stone, Howitt, Sandy, Frank

Setting

India – Northwest Indian Frontier (1854-59), Karachi (1860), Lahore, Australia (1860) – Melbourne, Moonee Ponds, Bolinda, the Murray River, Swan Hill, Balranald, Gobanna, Kinchega on the Darling River, Menindie, Coopers Creek, Central Australia, Bulloo waterhole, the Gulf of Carpentaria

Themes

Exploration, survival, starvation, ignorance, prejudice, arrogance, determination, pride, friendship

Activities

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Read the dedication before and after reading the novel and discuss.
- Discuss the use of the camel, Bell Sing, as a narrator, and give an opinion on what kind of perspective he brings to the story.
- If students have read one or both of the previous books in the *Animal Stars* series, compare and contrast the animal characters that have narrated part of each story. Discuss the effect of using the voice of an animal and how and why we accept this as authentic.
- Brainstorm the major issues that lead to the failure of the expedition and then write about the changes in people's actions and behaviour that could have turned it around and made the expedition a success.
- Given what we know of Dost Mahomet following the expedition, how do you think he may have felt at never having had the opportunity to return to his homeland?

RESEARCH USING THE INTERNET OR OTHER SOURCE

- Find out about Australia and India in the 1850s and 60s and describe the lifestyle and characteristics of each country's inhabitants at that time.
- Look at paintings of Australia and the expedition, as well as the scientific illustrations of Ludwig Becker, and discuss how they represent the expedition itself, as well as the Australian landscape at the time.
- Follow the path of Burke's team on a map and mark all the locations they passed through. Find out about others who have retraced the explorers' steps.
- Find out about the differences between pack camels and riding camels and prepare a brief report to share with the class.
- Research how camels are used in Australia today and compare this with their uses in other parts of the world. Also look at the issue of feral camels in Australia.
- Use the internet, maps or tourist pamphlets to work out how your class or your family might follow the path that Burke, Wills and King took across Australia. What types transport could you use today? Where would you stay? How have the country they passed through, and the towns they

saw, changed since then? Would your journey be fun? Difficult? Exciting? Boring? What places would you most like to see on your journey?

RESEARCH USING THE NOVEL

- Give examples from the novel that indicate what each main character thought of Robert O'Hara Burke. Then compare each of the narrators' opinions of him.
- Choose one of the themes from the novel and find examples that illustrate this theme.
- Reread Chapters 43 to 46 and describe what occurred on 21 April 1861 from each of the different narrators' perspectives.
- Despite their language differences, Dost Mahomet and the other cameleers managed to communicate with each other. However, they spoke little, if any, English. Imagine how difficult it would have been for them to comprehend what was going on during the expedition; discuss the prejudice they experienced from some of the English exploration team as a result of their language and cultural differences. Compare this with the way both they and the English were received and assisted by the Aborigines. (Refer Chapter 9 and/or Author's Notes.)

CRAFTS

- Make a camel from clay or papier-mâché.
- Using coloured pencils, draw your interpretation of the exploration party and the camels loaded with supplies, within a desert backdrop. When complete, place sandpaper underneath the picture and then using a crayon on its side, rub all over: a sand texture will appear on the paper. You can experiment with different weights of sandpaper beforehand.
- As a class, create a mural depicting a scene or section of the story.
- Make a camel sock puppet using an old sock, buttons for the eyes and some extra pieces of fabric for the ears, legs and hump. You can refer to the following weblink for inspiration:
<http://www.daniellesplace.com/HTML/puppets.html#camelpuppet>
- Make a folded paper camel. Refer to the following weblink for inspiration:
http://www.scissorcraft.com/pages/folding/camel_gif.htm
- Make a camel silhouette using black construction card. The children could draw their own template, or you could use one of the following templates:
<http://www.dltk-kids.com/p.asp?b=m&p=http://www.dltk-kids.com/animals/pcamel.asp>

<http://www.dltk-kids.com/t.asp?b=m&t=http://www.dltk-kids.com/animals/image/ccamel.gif>

WRITE

- Write a diary entry from the perspective of one of the travellers during a very difficult part of the expedition. Try and include a sense of place and some of the emotion and frustration that the character may have experienced.
- Reread Chapter 9 and write about the kinship Dost Mahomet spoke of and consider how important this is to his sense of who he is and where he comes from.
- Research the Muslim prayer customs practiced by Dost Mahomet and some of his companions. Describe how they might have felt at being compromised in their practice by their difficult circumstances.
- Write a poem to illustrate how differently Bell Sing felt before and after Dost Mahomet freed him. You could choose any kind of poem format such as a haiku, acrostic or free form rhyming or non-rhyming poem with one or more stanzas.
- Write your own interpretation of what might have happened to Bell Sing after he was freed.

Studying the Novel from different perspectives

THE CAMEL'S STORY

Chapter 1

- Give an opinion on the brief first chapter of the novel. What does it reveal about this narrator's character?

Chapter 2

- What were the origins of Bell Sing's name?

Chapter 3

- What lesson did Bell Sing learn in his infancy, which he was to remember all his life?

Chapter 4

- According to Bell Sing, how do camels learn?
- Describe how Smelly Breath averted a potential disaster.

Chapter 5

- Which camels are trained to carry loads and why were nose pegs inserted?
- According to Bell Sing, how was a good cameleer trained?

- In this chapter, Bell Sing learns his next lesson. What is it?
- Why was Bell Sing sold?

Chapter 7

- What occurred just prior to Landells' purchase of Bell Sing in the marketplace, and how might this have led to a different outcome for Bell Sing?

Chapter 10

- Describe the things Bell Sing missed as he began his new life.
- Outline Bell Sing's impressions of the sea and the ship.

Chapter 12

- Which incident forged an unlikely friendship between Rajah and Bell Sing at the end of the sea voyage?

Chapter 13

- How did Bell Sing respond and what were his feelings as he arrived in "*Smelbourne*"?

Chapter 16

- What was Bell Sing's impression of Melbourne?

Chapter 18

- Once in Melbourne, describe Bell Sing's impression of the spectacle at the commencement of the expedition.

Chapter 19

- Describe the contempt Bell Sing had for the horses and explain why he may have felt this way.
- How did Bell Sing make an enemy of Burke and what motivated his behaviour?

Chapter 33

- How was Bell Sing beginning to feel about the land in which he travelled?

Chapter 35

- At Cooper's Creek, what happened to three of the camels?
- Increasingly throughout the novel, what did Bell Sing yearn for?

Chapter 38

- How were the difficult conditions and lack of food beginning to affect the smaller camels?
- Why did Burke refuse to take Bell Sing on the journey to the coast?

Chapter 47

- What persuaded Brahe's group to search for their lost companions?

Chapter 49

- What happened on the way to Menindie?

Chapter 52

- Why did Dost Mahomet free Bell Sing and how do you imagine both he and the camel may have felt?
- Despite his weakness, what motivated Bell Sing to continue once he had been freed?

Chapter 56

- Where did Bell Sing finally find food and water and what effect did this have upon him?

Chapter 59

- After Dost Mahomet freed Bell Sing, how did the camel's life unfold?

Chapter 62

- How did Bell Sing interpret the explorers' behaviour?

DOST MAHOMET'S STORY

Chapter 6

- Describe Dost Mahomet's version of what the 'ferenghi' were offering him.
- How did Dost Mahomet feel about the prospect of travelling with the British? Why?
- What advice, in relation to the English, did Dost Mahomet's uncle provide?

Chapter 9

- Compare the similarities and differences between the cameleers Simla, Belooch, Esau Khan and Nur and describe the circumstances that would have made it difficult for them to communicate or understand one another.
- According to Nur, why had Landells found it difficult to hire men for the expedition?
- When Bell Sing and Rajah began to challenge each other, what fatherly advice did Dost Mahomet utilise?
- Describe Dost Mahomet's mixed feelings about the journey ahead of him.

Chapter 15

- How did Dost Mahomet initially find life in Melbourne?
- Why did Nur say to Dost Mahomet that he and some of the other cameleers had decided to go home before the expedition even began?
- Which arguments did Dost Mahomet use to try and convince his friend to stay?

Chapter 17

- Why did Dost Mahomet think Mr Wills "... *might not be as stupid as [he] thought*"?

Chapter 20

- Describe Dost Mahomet's reservations at the beginning of the expedition and list some of the things he worried about?
- What did Dost Mahomet believe might occur if he shared his true feelings with his fellow cameleers?

Chapter 21

- Why did Simla leave the expedition at Bolinda?
- Discuss why Dost Mahomet and Simla were able to work alongside each other as equals in Australia, but would have been unable to do so in their homeland.

Chapter 23

- Despite his fascination with Becker's illustrations, why did Dost Mahomet refuse Becker's offer to try out the charcoal?
- How was Dost Mahomet beginning to feel about Australia in this chapter?

Chapter 26

- Why did Burke sack Esau Khan and how might the cameleer have felt at this time? Give reasons for your answer.

Chapter 28

- Why did Burke order Becker and Beckler to cease their scientific investigations and how did Dr Becker respond?
- What was the cause of Burke and Landells' argument in this chapter?
- Why was Dost Mahomet worried about the camels? Were his thoughts justified?

Chapter 32

- According to Dr Becker, what alternative means of getting to Menindie would have made more sense?
- What did Becker say that made Dost Mahomet question whether he would ever be paid?
- Which decision did Burke make in Menindie that would lead to a potential disaster for those chosen to accompany him north?
- How did Belooch react to being left behind in Menindie and despite his anger, what did he promise to do for his friend, Dost Mahomet?
- Despite his fears and reservations about Burke, why was Dost Mahomet compelled to continue with the expedition?

Chapter 36

- What did Dost Mahomet notice about how Burke spoke to him?
- Describe how Dost Mahomet felt during the time spent in Cooper's Creek.

- How different is his life from what it was previously? What does he yearn for?
- Make a list of the things Dost Mahomet found difficult to understand while camped in Cooper's Creek.
- How were the black men treated when they offered food to the travellers at Burke's camp?

Chapter 39

- How did the men and camels cope when they were left behind in Cooper's Creek while Burke's group headed north?

Chapter 45

- Why did Mr Brahe's group finally leave Cooper's Creek on 21 April 1861?

Chapter 48

- Which sad news greeted Dost Mahomet and his travelling companions when they were reunited at Bulloo waterhole?
- How did Dost Mahomet make sense of the deaths of Dr Becker and the other men travelling with Mr Wright?
- Describe how Dost Mahomet felt as the group left Bulloo waterhole.

Chapter 51

- Despite his misery, which two things provided comfort for Dost Mahomet?
- What did he believe would have saved the dying men and animals from their eventual demise?

Chapter 55

- As they staggered into Menindie, what was Dost Mahomet dreaming of when Belooch alerted him to the possibility that they were near water?

Chapter 60

- What did Dost Mahomet imagine Mr Howitt's rescue team might find when they set out to search for the lost explorers?
- What did Belooch tell Dost Mahomet he had decided to do following the failed expedition, and what was his friend's reaction?

JOHN KING'S STORY

Chapter 11

- Describe the circumstances that led to John King's involvement in the expedition.
- According to Landells, what made Melbourne "... *one of the richest cities in the world*"?
- Why did John King agree to join the expedition and what personal gain did he hope for?

Chapter 14

- Why was John King impressed by the preparations for the expedition and by Burke, the expedition leader?
- Describe why each of the men had been hired for the expedition by filling in a table like the one below.

Name	Role	Background
Robert O'Hara Burke		
William Wills		
Dr Herman Beckler		
John King		
Dr Ludwig Becker		

Chapter 25

- What did Landells and Burke argue about and what impact did their poor relationship have on the expedition?

Chapter 30

- What concerns did John King have about the expedition?
- How did Wills become second in command?
- Why was King given command of the camels?

Chapter 34

- Why, despite being offered the chance to leave, did some of the expedition members decide to continue?
- Describe King's feelings about the future in this chapter.
- How differently did Dost Mahomet and John King perceive the future of the expedition?

Chapter 37

- Why was John King distrustful of both the Indians and the natives?
- What caused a sense of urgency amongst the explorers, forcing them to split up, with Burke, Wills, Grey and King heading north?

Chapter 41

- During the trip from Cooper's Creek to the Gulf of Carpentaria, describe how John King felt and what he saw throughout the journey?
- How did King feel about Burke naming a gap after him, and how did this compare with what he had imagined for himself?
- What repercussions did the extended trip have on Burke's team?
- Which accolade did John King feel belonged to them?
- List some of the afflictions the travellers were forced to endure during this stage of the journey.
- Why did Burke savagely attack Grey?

- What was the fate of the camels Boocho, Gotch, Golah Sing and Burke's horse, Billy?
- Describe how the first human death of the expedition came about?

Chapter 46

- Describe the different reactions of Burke and King when they arrived in Cooper's Creek?

Chapter 57

- What did John King notice about the "savages" as compared to the men of his own race?
- Which generous gesture did the natives offer Burke, Wills and King?
- How did John King define Rajah?
- Why did Burke concede and allow Wills to search for the natives?
- How did King feel when he was forced to shoot Rajah?
- Following the camels' death, why were Burke and his companions unable to travel further?
- Which food did the explorers consume and how was it prepared? What were the explorers doing wrong that led to their starvation and growing weakness? (Refer to Author's Notes)
- Why did King and Burke abandon Wills at Cooper's Creek?
- When did King realise that the natives actually pitied the white men?
- Describe the circumstances surrounding Burke's death.

Chapter 58

- Before his death, Wills wrote a letter to his father. Discuss its contents.
- How was John King able to survive when his companions were not?

Chapter 61

- What were John King's thoughts when he was finally rescued?

Further Reading – Books by Jackie French

Animal Stars series

- *The Goat who sailed the World*
- *The Dog who loved a Queen*

Historical Fiction

- *Hitler's daughter*
- *Tom Appleby, Convict Boy*
- *They Came on Viking Ships*
- *The White Ship*
- *How the Finnegans Saved the Ship*

- *Soldier on the Hill*
- *Daughter of the Regiment*
- *Walking the Boundaries*
- *Beyond the Boundaries*
- *Somewhere around the Corner*
- *Valley of Gold*
- *They Came on Viking Ships*
- *Macbeth and Son*
- *Pharoah*

Other Historical fiction titles

- *The Goldseekers* by Greg Bastian

My Story series:

- *On Board the Boussole* - sailing with La Perouse to Botany Bay. 1785 - 1788
- *Surviving Sydney Cove* - the youngest female convict in the First Fleet, Elizabeth Harvey's fictional diary. 1790
- *The Rum Rebellion*. 1807 - 1809 in the Colony of NSW
- *A Banner Bold* - Goldfields 1854
- *New Gold Mountain* - Lambing Flats riots. Chinese immigration to the goldfields. 1860
- *Riding With Thunderbolt* - Northern NSW bushranger 1865
- *Yankee Whaler* - Whaling off NSW 1876
- *Plagues and Federation* - Bubonic Plague in Sydney, The Rocks, and Federation 1900
- *Fords and Flying Machines* - Ford and Qantas 1919-21
- *Our Enemy, My Friend* - Wartime in Australia - German immigrants treated as aliens. 1915
- *A Different Sort of Real* - The Infuenza epidemic after WW1 1918
- *Our Don Bradman* - The Cricketer and the Depression in Australia 1932
- *Who Am I?* - The Stolen Generation 1937
- *The Bombing of Darwin* - WW2 1942
- *A Marathon of Her Own* - Melbourne Olympics and Greek immigrants. 1956
- *The Snowy* - Snowy River Scheme 1958

- *A Tale of Two Families* - Post Vietnam War and families are adjusting to new ideas. Differing ideas over the Vietnam War and Women's liberation. Thought provoking. 1970's
- *Outback* - a boy living in the outback of Australia. 1927

Author's Note

- Read the section at the back of the book and discuss how this information enriches the story.
- Describe the difference between fiction and fact and give an opinion on the historical fiction genre.
- Research some other historical fiction novels by Jackie French and other authors. Choose one of those novels to read and write a review to share with your class.

Further research links

Burke & Wills

<http://www.burkeandwills.net.au/>

<http://www.burkeandwills.org/>

<http://www.wilmap.com.au/burkwil.html>

<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A030280b.htm?hilite=robert%3Bo%27hara%3Bburke%3Band%3Bwills>

<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A060444b.htm?hilite=wills>

<http://images.google.com.au/images?um=1&hl=en&cr=countryAU&sa=X&oi=spell&resnum=0&ct=result&cd=1&q=australian+paintings+burke+and+wills&spell=1>

The Route taken by Burke and Wills

<http://images.google.com.au/images?um=1&hl=en&cr=countryAU&q=route+burke+and+wills&btnG=Search+Images>

http://www.burkeandwills.net.au/Expedition_Map/retracing.htm

Ludwig Becker

<http://www.teachers.ash.org.au/dnutting/germanaustalia/e/becker.htm>

<http://www.teachers.ash.org.au/dnutting/germanaustalia/e/burwills.htm>

<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A030120b.htm>

<http://images.google.com.au/images?um=1&hl=en&cr=countryAU&q=ludwig+becker&btnG=Search+Images>

Google Images and paintings of the expedition

<http://images.google.com.au/images?hl=en&q=burke%20and%20wills%20expedition%20ludwig%20beckler&cr=countryAU&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=wi>
<http://www.pictureaustralia.org/nolan/nolan021.html>

Camels

<http://www.abc.net.au/creaturefeatures/facts/camels.htm>
<http://camelphotos.com/>

The one humped camel - Camelus dromedarius

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/camel/pubs/camel.pdf>
http://birdingwa.iinet.net.au/mammals/species/camelus_dromedarius.htm
<http://www.arab.net/camels/welcome.html>
<http://www.wildcamels.com/>

The two-humped camel – Bactrian camel

<http://fohn.net/camel-pictures-facts/bactrian-camels.html>

Cameleers

<http://www.abc.net.au/gnt/history/Transcripts/s1231969.htm>
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/12/11/2115630.htm>
<http://uncommonlives.naa.gov.au/contents.asp?sID=29>