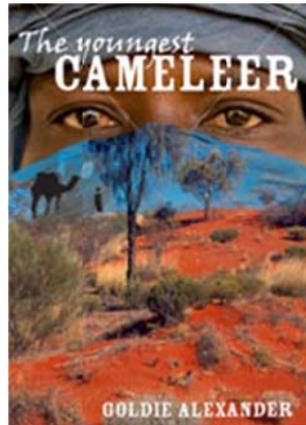


## TEACHER NOTES FOR THE YOUNGEST CAMELEER



This novel is intended to provide insight into the world of a Nineteenth Century Afghan newcomer. The aim is for young readers to be aware of the Afghan cameleers' contribution to opening up our interior and something about this exploration.

My guide is William Christie's *actual* journal of the exploratory party, the first non-indigenous group to find Ayers Rock, now better known as Uluru. Without the use of camels and cameleers the English explorers might not have survived the harsh conditions they encountered in the outback. Gosse did name 'Kamran's Well' for his leading Afghan cameleer and 'Allanah Hill' for the cameleer, Allanah. He was unswerving in his admiration of Kamran and it is the first time any Afghan was praised for helping open up the interior of the continent. Nevertheless the cameleers' achievements are not generally known.

The group that discovered Ayers Rock in 1873 included five Europeans: William Christie Gosse, Henry Gosse, Edwin Berry, Henry Winnall, Patrick Nilen, three cameleers: Kamran, Jemma Khan, Allanah, and the aboriginal boy, Moses. Taking horses, bullocks, wagons and four camels, this party followed the newly created (1872) Telegraph Line to Alice Springs. The explorers left this outpost on the 23rd April, 1873. In July 1873, Kamran and Gosse became the first recorded non-indigenous person to sight the great rock we know as Uluru. As well as a major Australian icon, Uluru is a repository of Aboriginal sacred belief. Its relevance to our national psyche cannot be overestimated, nor its importance to our tourist industry. But little is generally known about its discovery, nor the importance of cameleers and their camels in opening up our interior. This novel explores the way these Cameleers were perceived by the then mostly English speaking population. The Ghan train, which follows the old telegraph repeater stations, attracts great local and tourist interest. Those who travel on the Ghan will be interested to learn that they are following Gosse's exact route.

## **Afghan cameleers in Australia**

**<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/cameleers/>**

By the mid-1800s, exploration in Australia was at its peak with expeditions setting out almost monthly. The race to map the continent, locate natural resources or find new places to settle moved away from the coast and further into the inhospitable heart of Australia. It was soon obvious that the traditional horses and wagons used for such expeditions were not suitable in this strange and foreign land.

The solution to the problem of finding suitable transport for inland exploration was to bring in camels. As nobody knew how to handle camels, cameleers were also recruited to Australia. The introduction of 'Afghan' cameleers proved to be a turning point in the exploration and development of the Australian interior.

For a short period of time from the 1860s to the early 1900s, these cameleers and their 'ships of the desert' became the backbone of the Australian economy. They accompanied exploration parties, carrying supplies and materials where horses and oxen could not. They carted supplies, mail and even water to remote settlements. They transported the supplies, tools and equipment needed for the surveying and construction of some of Australia's earliest and greatest infrastructure projects, such as the Overland Telegraph and Trans-Australian Railway.

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### **The first cameleers in Australia.**

As early as 1839, camels were proposed as the solution to the problem of transport while exploring. The first expedition to use a camel was the 1846 Horrocks expedition. 'Harry', as the camel was named by the party, proved the worth of using camels in expeditions. In 1846 a Melbourne newspaper reported that 'the camels could carry from seven to eight hundred pounds weight ... they last out several generations of mules ...' Other small successes followed and by 1858, many prominent Australians were calling for their introduction.

In 1860, 24 camels and three cameleers from arrived in Melbourne to join the Burke and Wills expedition. Although this expedition ended in disaster with the loss of many lives,

including those of Burke and Wills, the camels again proved their ability to survive the harsh and dry conditions of the Australian outback.

By the late 1860s, most Australian states were importing camels and cameleers. In 1866, South Australian Samuel Stuckey, brought in more than 100 camels and 31 cameleers. Over the next decade, more and more camels and cameleers were brought to Australia as breeding programs and trading routes were established. It is estimated that from 1870 to 1900 alone, more than 2,000 cameleers and 15,000 camels came to Australia.

The cameleers were also instrumental in the success of some of early Australia's most ambitious infrastructure projects. They carried food and supplies to the surveying and construction teams working on the Overland Telegraph, which ran through the heart of the continent between Adelaide and Darwin. Once the project was completed, they continued to carry supplies and mail to the settlements and townships which sprang up along the line.

They also operated supply and equipment trains during the development of the rail link between Port Augusta and Alice Springs, which became known as the Afghan Express, and later the Ghan. The Ghan's emblem is an Afghan on a camel in recognition of their efforts in opening up the inhospitable interior to the rest of Australia.

The cameleers were collectively known as 'Afghan' cameleers. While some were originally from Afghanistan, others came from Baluchistan, Kashmir, Sind, Rajasthan, Egypt, Persia, Turkey and Punjab, so they spoke a variety of languages. Their common bond was their Islamic religion and the fact that they were almost exclusively young or middle-aged men. Almost all of the cameleers who came to Australia during this period faced enormous hardship. While their skills were needed and mostly appreciated, they were largely shunned by the European communities. Indeed, racism and anger towards them was rife.

They were either given living quarters on a breeding station, such as Thomas Elder's Beltana, or marginalized on the outskirts of towns and settlements. It was not uncommon for outback towns to have three distinct areas—one for Europeans, one for Aboriginals and one for cameleers, which became known as Afghan, or Ghan, towns. This social division was even reflected in the town cemeteries, such as those of Farina and Marree.

But while it was extremely rare for the cameleers to interact with Europeans, there was more acceptance by the local Aboriginal populations.

In the so-called Ghan towns, cameleers would often build a mosque that would not only serve as a place of worship, but as a gathering place that offered the cameleers a sense of community that they could not find elsewhere. The remains of the oldest mosque in Australia are near Marree in South Australia. This was once one of the country's most important camel junctions and in its heyday was called Little Afghanistan.

In some instances, European attitudes to the cameleers focused on their religion. In other cases, it was related to their perceived pride and independence as at the time, Afghanistan was really only known to most Australians as the country that had, unlike British India, resisted the British forces. This perception was further enhanced in the settlers' eyes when cameleers on Beltana station went on strike—one of Australia's first successful strikes.

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#### **A brief history of Afghanistan (source: wikipedia)**

**Afghanistan** is a landlocked country is bordered by Pakistan in the south and east, Iran in the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north, and China in the far northeast. This country has long been an ancient focal point of the Silk Road. Archaeologists have found evidence of human habitation from as far back as 50,000 BCE.

The land has seen many invaders. The political history of modern Afghanistan begins in the 18th century with the rise of the Pashtun tribes (known as *Afghans* in Persian language), when Ahmad Shah Durrani created the Durrani Empire in 1747 which became the forerunner of present Afghanistan. In the late 19th century, Afghanistan became a buffer state in the "Great Game" between the British and Russian empires. On August 19, 1919, following the third Anglo-Afghan war, the nation regained control over its foreign affairs from the British.

Since the late 1970s Afghanistan has experienced a continuous state of civil war punctuated by foreign occupations in the forms of the 1979 Soviet invasion and the October 2001 US-led invasion that overthrew the Taliban government. The country is being rebuilt slowly with support from the international community while dealing with the Taliban insurgency.

The vast majority of Pashtuns are found in an area stretching from southeastern Afghanistan to northwestern Pakistan. With around 7 million by some estimates, the city of Karachi in Pakistan has one of the largest Pashtun populations in the world. In addition, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, and Lahore also have sizable Pashtun populations. In Afghanistan, Pashtuns make up an estimated 42% of the 28 million population. A total of around 49 million Pashtuns live across the world.<sup>[1]</sup>

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### **Synopsis of ‘The Youngest Cameleer’**

**Australia, 1873.** Ahmed Ackbar, a fourteen-year-old Afghan and the ‘youngest cameleer’ speaks Pashtu and a little English. He is the only surviving male in his immediate family. In late 1872 he sails into the prosperous city of Adelaide to help look after four camels. But he has other things on his mind. What if his uncle Kamran isn’t as innocent of his brother’s death as he seems? As the expedition treks into the interior, Ahmed must cope with the cameleer Jemma Khan’s enmity, his own homesickness, and the difficulties of exploring unknown territory.

Pashtu is one of Afghanistan’s two main languages. Because Afghanistan has for many centuries suffered from unwelcome invaders, these cameleers would have brought some of these intrigues to Australia. Please note that the various members of this exploration (both European and Afghan) did exist and are based on W.C. Gosse’s journals. However Ahmed Ackbar is purely a figment of this writer’s imagination.

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**RATIONALE:**

The concept behind THE YOUNGEST CAMELEER is to present history in an accessible and interesting format.

In a fiction based on history, the trend is that it

- starts with the premise ‘what if you were there at the time’
- describes a society which is based on fact
- is set in the past
- has total internal logic

### **Themes and Issues.**

History is the narrative of mankind. It provides answers as to how people lived in the past as well as provides for us the roots of certain ideas concerning laws, customs, and political ideas.

The old adage, “you can’t know where you are going unless you know where you have been” is accurate. A true scholar of history realizes history does repeat itself. This repetition has importance in all societies. It teaches the value of certain social changes and governmental policies. A good example is the Aborigines of Australia who managed to hang onto their history for 40,000 years by word of mouth. A knowledge of history clearly proves early man’s love of the arts and demonstrates that once a civilization is able to maintain a steady food supply, that their creative ideas flowed whether it appeared on rock walls, papyrus, or cedar bark.

Young readers might like to track Ahmed’s journey on a map and discover what has happened to the places mentioned in this novel since 1873. They could delve into how our Aboriginal people behaved when they came across any explorers, suggest reasons for this, and even what the aboriginals might have looked like. They can research contemporary Uluru, both as an icon and tourist attraction and discover its original name. What route does the Ghan railway take? What was there before the railway? There’s lots of other research, such as the climate and terrain around Alice Springs and what happens to that land when it rains. I would like to think that this book can be used as forays into geography and history as well as literature.

### **RESEARCH:**

1. Any newspapers of the time. These are too old to be found on the Internet. Rather you can view them in public libraries on microfiche.
2. However there is a lot of information on the net about the early history of these explorations that you might like to research.
3. Research Australia’s small and predominantly Anglo- Saxon population and how they viewed.
4. Research Australian cuisine. Then and now.
5. Find out something about Afghan cuisine.
6. Other better known explorers of Australia include Tasman, Burke and Wills, Mitchells Oxley, Stokes, and Sturt. Discover for yourself how these brave men opened up this continent for others to follow.

7. William Gosse's cameleers were not the first to come to Australia. Research earlier records.
8. Research the history of Uluru, before this exploration and after. Why is it considered one of Australia's major icons? Why might many tourists consider it a site worth visiting?
9. Uluru is often in the news, but not always to the benefit of the local human and animal population. Research these. There is presently a push to allow marriages to take place there. Do you think this a good idea?
10. Riding a camel is now a great tourist attraction, particularly in the Northern Territory. Have you, or anyone you know, ever ridden one?
11. As a result of camels being left to forage for themselves, great bands of feral camels have become a nuisance in the outback. There are many proposals to export or cull. Explore some suggestions.

### **TALKING POINTS:**

**Imagine that it is the second half of the nineteenth century.**

You are living in urban Australia.

- Describe Adelaide, or any other Australian city, in 1872. How does it differ from a town or village in Afghanistan?
- War is still raging in Afghanistan in 2010. Research some of this country's history in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. How might these have led to this country's present problems? Why might Afghanistan's geographical position have placed it 'in the line of danger'?
- Ahmed talks about the Sunnis and Pashtus. You might like to find out more about these Muslim divisions.
- School in 19<sup>th</sup> century Afghanistan differed widely from school in Australia today. Can you outline some of these differences?
- Readers might track Ahmed's journey on a map
- Readers can delve into how our indigenous folk behaved when they came across many expeditions and give some reasons why.
- They can research contemporary Uluru as an icon and tourist attraction. Why was this rock originally given another name?
- What route does the Ghan railway take and why did it get its name?

**ACTIVITIES:**

- Make a story-board or collage to convey COURAGE.
- Mock up an interview with Ahmed with you as the interviewer.
- Then change roles.
- Illustrate a cover for this story.
- You are a TV producer who has just bought the rights to this novel. Your budget only allows for three settings. What are they?

**WRITING EXERCISES:**

- Research and write a non-fiction piece called EVENTS LEADING TO THE OPENING OF AUSTRALIA.
- Choose a second cover for this story.
- Find another title.
- As Ahmed, write a letter to your family in Afghanistan describing the Gosse brothers and the other cameleers.
- Write a letter to a newspaper pleading that Afghans be shown more tolerance.
- Write a letter arguing for **more** migrants to Australia.
- Write a letter arguing that Australia should take **less** migrants.

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**WHAT INSPIRED THIS STORY.**

If we don't have Aboriginal ancestors, we are all migrants. My parents arrived in Australia in the first part of the twentieth Century and settled happily in Melbourne. Our great migrant waves have occurred at various times: during the gold-rush, straight after World War Two, and in the seventies when the 'boat people' arrived. However, other times we have turned away needy people. Presently we are not always tolerant of 'boat people' – many who come from Afghanistan - rather we view them as 'foreign' and 'undesirables'. It is salutary to recall that Afghans have been responsible for opening up our vast continent and that without cameleers and camels the task would have been harder than it already was. Also, it's amazing how few people are aware of the achievements of William Gosse and his brave party in coming across one of our major icons. Hopefully this little book will help clear up some misconceptions.

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My previous published novels for young readers based on our history include:

- Mavis Road Medley. Margaret Hamilton Books 1991.(Melbourne in the Depression 1933) CBC Notable Book. Listed by Victorian State library as one of their best 150 Young Adult books.
- My Australian Story: Surviving Sydney Cove. Scholastic Australia. 2000 (Our First Fleet. Sydney 1790) 10th reprint. CBC Notable Book
- Body and Soul. Indra Publishing 2003 (Melbourne before the outbreak of WW2. 1938
- Gallipoli Medals Anzac Society, 2011. (Junior novel appearing later this year)