

Bookmobiles Around the World by Laura Whitehead

“Libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination. They open up windows to the world and inspire us to explore and achieve, and contribute to improving our quality of life. Libraries change lives for the better.” —Sidney Sheldon

But what happens if you live in a very remote area where there are no libraries? Or a not so remote area, but you do not have the transportation to get to your nearest library? Luckily, librarians are a very committed, determined, and creative group of professionals. If you cannot get to a library, they will find a way to bring the library and its services to you.

The most common and widely recognized way that librarians do this is with a bookmobile. Bookmobiles have been used by librarians since the mid-1800s. There are approximately 659 bookmobiles currently operating in the United States and we are fortunate enough to have our own bookmobile that delivers library services to Platte County residents.

While bookmobiles are a very important part of bringing library services to remote areas, they are generally difficult or impossible to maneuver into small, heavily congested, or pedestrian areas. For these situations, librarians use a bicycle bookmobile or book bike. The Omaha Public Library has been using a book bike since 2014. The specially designed bicycle pulls a trailer filled with books and is a mobile hot spot to make it easy for members of the community to download e-books.

However, some areas of the world are even too remote for a book bike. In Kenya, for example, there are few roads. The roads that do exist are underdeveloped and not always well-maintained. Reaching communities by traveling in a more traditional bookmobile would be impossible. So, in 1996, the Kenyan government began the Camel Library Service. Camels deliver books to semi-nomadic people who live in the remote areas of Northeastern Kenya.

Donkeys are also used to deliver library services in some parts of the world. Columbian, Venezuelan, and Ethiopian donkeys are outfitted with special packs to carry books and materials to rural villages. There was even a PBS film released in 2011, *Biblioburro: The Donkey Library*, that tells the story of Luis Soriano. He and his two donkeys deliver books to remote Columbian villages every weekend.

Zimbabwe takes their Donkey Drawn Electro-Communication Library Carts to an entirely new level. Solar units on the carts supply the power to provide radio, telephone, and internet services in addition to books, music, and videos.

Similar to Zimbabwe, Thailand also provides technology along with their books to remote villages. However, in Thailand, they use elephants instead of donkeys.

Norway has its own set of accessibility issues. In addition to the many mountains and fjords, weather is often an issue when attempting to travel to a library. In 1959, to bring library services to the remote areas of Hordaland County, a book boat was put into operation. The book boat serves as a floating library and now provides library services to two additional counties.

If you are fortunate enough to be able to regularly visit your library, your librarians will be happy to see you and will readily help you with your information needs. However, if you ever find yourself in a position where you are unable to get to the library, no matter what it takes—truck, bike, camel, donkey, elephant, or boat—your library will find a way to deliver library services to you.

