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opening extract from

Why You Need a Passport When You're Going to Puke

written by

Mitchell Symons

published by

Doubleday Children's Books

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Why you need a passport when you're going to PUKE

Fascinating facts from around the world!

MITCHELL SYMONS

DOUBLEDAY

Introduction

Regular readers will have got the drill by now. Tons of amazing random facts, all put together in a colourful-looking book with a very naughty title. Thanks to Barry O'Donovan and James McCann for coming up with this title! Because that's what this book is: a geography book with all the boring bits taken out written by a man who failed every geography exam he ever took (yes, even the multiple-choice ones where you can usually guess your way to 20 per cent) because he was so bored by it all. You can read it from cover to cover (and I'm grateful to anyone who does just that) or else, like most people, you can dip into it for a few minutes at a time. Hopefully, most times you'll find something to justify the investment of your time.
In that sense, it's no different from *How to Avoid a Wombat's Bum*, *How Much Poo Does an Elephant Do?* and *Why Does Ear Wax Taste So Gross?*: loads of fascinating facts and lists – with the difference that they're all geographically themed.

If only I'd known what fun geography could be, perhaps I'd have become a geographer or even an explorer (albeit the sort who stays in nice hotels).

Now for some important acknowledgements. The first person I want to thank is my son Charlie: without his invaluable groundwork, I really don't know how I'd have even started the book. Other really REALLY important people to mention: (in alphabetical order): my brilliant editor Lauren Buckland, Annie Eaton, Nikalas Catlow and Penny Symons. In addition, I'd also like to thank the following people for their help, contributions and/or support: Gilly Adams, Luigi Bonomi, Paul Donnelley, Jonathan Fingerhut, Jenny Garrison, Bryn Musson, Nicholas Ridge, Mari Roberts, Jack Symons, Louise Symons, Martin Townsend and Rob Woolley.

If I've missed anyone out, then please know that – as with any mistakes in the book – it is, as ever, entirely down to my own stupidity.

Mitchell Symons
www.mitchellsymons.co.uk

That's surprising! (1)

A teenager in India has an unusual party trick. He can drink milk through his nose and squirt it out of his eyes through his tear ducts. Don't try this at home . . .



Only 8.5 per cent of all Alaskans are Eskimos.

The Dogon people use fried onions as a perfume. They rub them all over their body because they think the smell's so attractive.

In France, it's possible to marry a deceased person with the authorization of the President of the Republic – but only in exceptional cases.

Saparmurat Niyazov, the President of Turkmenistan from 1990 until his death

in 2006, declared that those who read *Ruhnama, the Book of the Soul* (his book of moral and spiritual guidance) three times a day would automatically go to heaven.

Saparmurat Niyazov was better known as President Turkmenbashi. He changed the calendar so the name of January became Turkmenbashi. And he had a melon named after him. That's right, a melon.

La Marseillaise, France's national anthem, was composed in Strasbourg (in 1792) and not, as you might think, in Marseilles.

The Indus River, from which India derived its name, is now entirely in the territory of Pakistan.

There is a street in Italy that is less than half a metre wide.

In Qatar, the weekend is Thursday and Friday rather than Saturday and Sunday.

A Belgian student couldn't afford a party to celebrate his 20th birthday so he had the

bright idea of offering his friends' foreheads for hire to advertisers on an internet auction site. A company paid them all to have its logo painted on their foreheads for the night of the party.

There is a house in Massachusetts US, which is made entirely from newspapers. The floors, walls, even the furniture is made from newspaper.



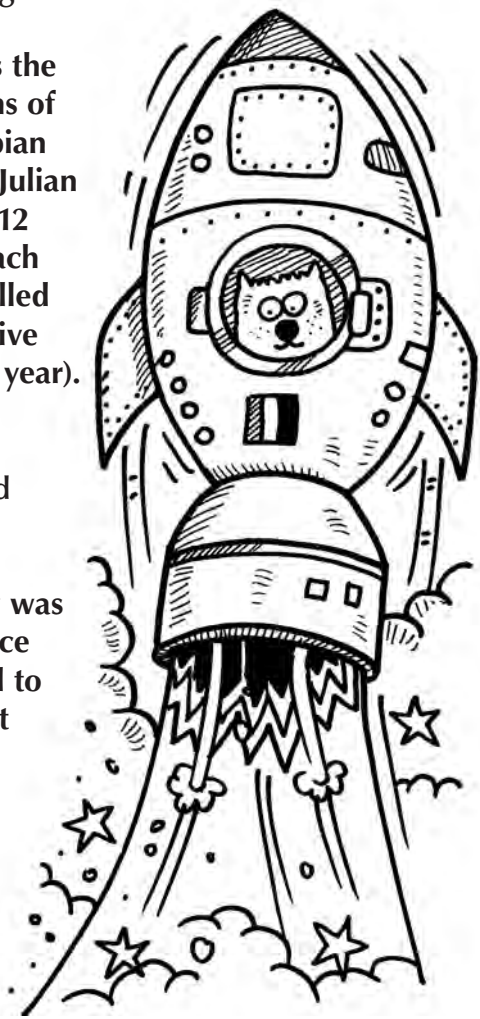
Another house, this one in Canada, is made of 18,000 discarded glass bottles.

Ethiopia is famous as the country of '13 months of sunshine'. The Ethiopian year is based on the Julian calendar, which has 12 months of 30 days each and a 13th month called Pagume, which has five days (or six in a leap year).

In 1963 the French launched a cat called Feliette into space.

The Statue of Liberty was actually built in France and then transported to America. It was a gift from the French to the Americans.

Bird droppings are the chief export of Nauru.



Vatican City only came into existence as recently as 1929.

All the earthworms in America would weigh 55 times more than all the American people combined.

In 1999 a three-headed turtle was discovered in Taiwan.

The natives of the Solomon Islands claim to be able to kill trees just by shouting at them.

In Kenya, a person's middle name is based on the time of day at which they were born.

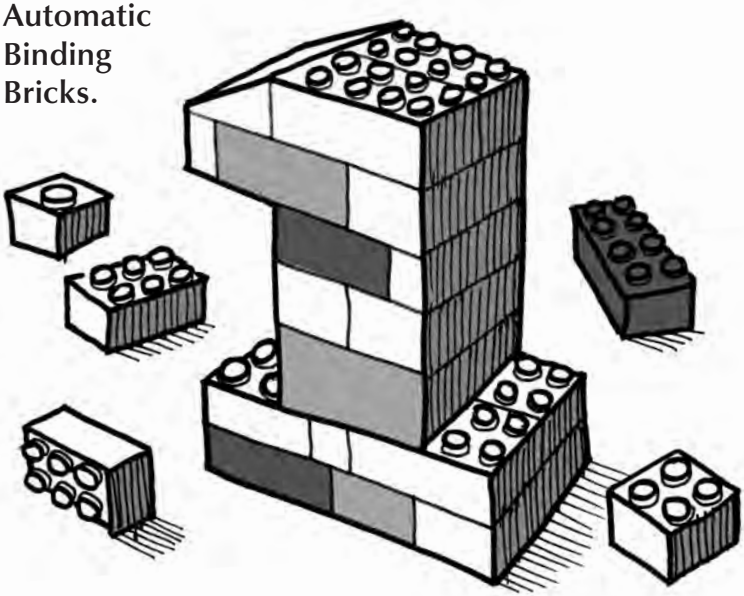
Malta is the nearest Commonwealth country to the UK.

Firsts

In 301, AD Armenia became the first country to make Christianity the state religion.

In 1869 Austria became the first country to use postcards. In 1937 Austria issued the world's first Christmas stamp.

Lego was invented in Demark in 1949. The pieces were originally called Automatic Binding Bricks.



The world's first scheduled passenger air service started in Florida in 1914.

In 1492 Christopher Columbus made his first landfall in the western hemisphere in the Bahamas.

The world's first newspaper was *Relation Aller Fürnemmen und Gedenckwürdigen Historien*. It was published in 1605 in Strasbourg (now part of France but then an imperial free city in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation).

In 2004 Bhutan became the first country in the world to ban cigarettes.

The first toothbrush was invented in China in 1498.

The world's first airline was started in Germany in 1909.

In the seventh century BC China became the first country to use banknotes.

Bahrain was the first country in the Arabian

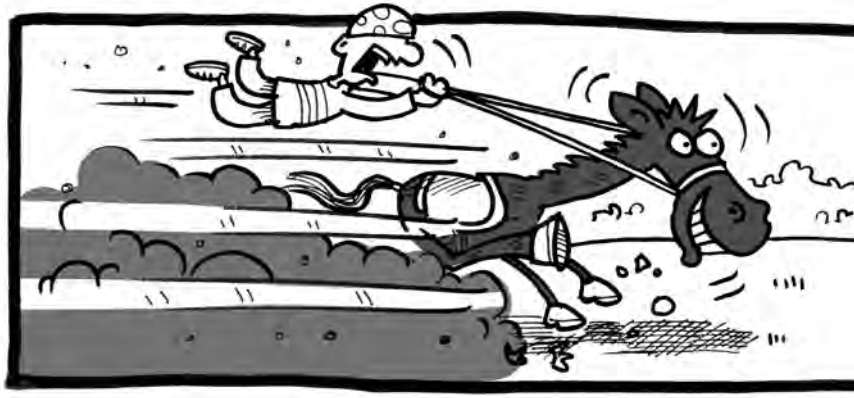
Gulf in which oil was discovered. It was originally discovered in 1902, although it was not fully exploited until the 1930s.

Yoga was first practised in India some 5,000 years ago.

The Egyptians created the first calendar and based it on the flowing of the Nile.

The Egyptians built the first sailing boats.

The first steeplechase for horses was run in County Cork in Ireland in 1752. It derived its name from the fact that riders rode towards a distant landmark like a steeple, jumping over hedges, ditches, banks and walls on the way.



The world's first police force was established in Paris in 1667.

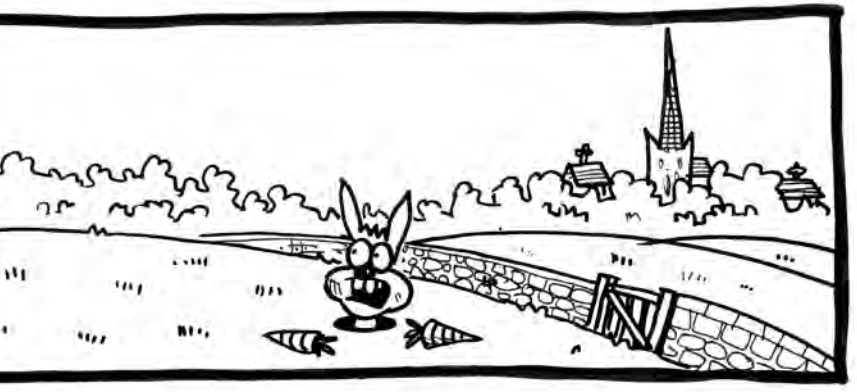
Germany was the first European country to have a McDonald's (in Munich in 1971).

Grenada was the first country to have an Elvis Presley postage stamp.

Coffee was first brewed in Ethiopia. The word coffee comes from Kaffa, the name of a province in southern Ethiopia.

Potatoes were first grown in Peru.

The area we now call Ethiopia is said to be where the very first human beings originated.



In 1986 Japan became the first country in the world to ban lead in petrol.

Mexico was the first country to produce chocolate on a large scale.

Namibia was the first country to make it a political priority to protect the environment.

The Dutch were the first Europeans to discover Australia and New Zealand.

The Norwegians were the first to reach the South Pole.

Oman was the first Arabic country to allow women police officers.

In 1922 Pitcairn Airlines became the first airline to provide sick bags.

You probably know that the Russians were the first to send a man into space (Yuri Gagarin in 1961), but they also sent the first dog into space. In 1957 Laika, a stray, was launched into space on *Sputnik 2*. Alas, she died a few hours after launch from

overheating, probably due to a malfunction in the thermal control system. However, the experiment proved that a living passenger could survive being launched into orbit and endure weightlessness.



In 2001 Singapore hosted the first ever World Summit on Toilets.

In 2010 South Africa will become the first African nation to host the FIFA World Cup.

The system of longitude was first discovered by charting the distance between Portsmouth, England, and Bridgetown, Barbados, using the position of the sun in relation to both locations.

Dr Christiaan Barnard performed the world's first heart transplant operation in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1967.

The world's first coffee house was opened in Damascus, Syria, in 1530.



The world's first church was built in Turkey.

In 1930 Uruguay became the first country to host the FIFA World Cup. They also won it.

Fascinating facts!

There's a river in Nicaragua called the Pis Pis River.

There was once an internet rumour that Belgium doesn't exist. That's right, that Belgium – as in the country – doesn't exist. I'll believe it if you do!

The first astronauts to go to the Moon trained in Iceland because the terrain there was reckoned to be similar to the Moon's surface.

Mozambique has all five vowels in it.

If you buy a map of South America in Peru, it'll differ from one sold in Ecuador. This is because there's a big row between the two countries as to who owns the area around the Amazon headwater.

There is no known case of a vegetarian dying from a snake bite in America.

Liechtenstein used to have the world's smallest army. There was one soldier. He served his country faithfully until his death at the age of 95. Then Liechtenstein went from having the world's smallest army to no army at all.

Waikikamukau – pronounced 'Why kick a moo cow?' – is the expression New Zealanders use for a particularly remote rural town. Sadly, there's no actual place with that name!

Girls and women aren't allowed to walk on Mount Athos in Macedonia. In fact, even female animals are not allowed there.

There are people who claim that it's illegal to dress up as Batman in Australia. This is because of an obscure law which prohibits the wearing of dark clothes all over the body for fear that someone will look like a cat burglar. Given that the Batman costume is pretty much all black, some people insist that it is covered by this law and that therefore it must be illegal to dress up as Batman.

In Tibet, some women have special metal instruments they use for picking their noses.

Tobago was Daniel Defoe's inspiration for the island which Robinson Crusoe found himself washed up on.

In the 19th century a French mime artist accidentally got stuck in his imaginary glass box and starved to death. Think about it . . .



There was once a Togolese man with 17 wives and 60 children.

Countries found in England

America, Cambridgeshire
Canada, Hampshire
Egypt, Buckinghamshire
Gibraltar, Buckinghamshire
Greenland, South Yorkshire
Holland, Surrey
Ireland, Bedfordshire
New Zealand, Buckinghamshire
Scotland, Lincolnshire

Foreign places in the UK

California, Buckinghamshire
Dresden, Staffordshire
Jerusalem, Lincolnshire
Maryland, Gwent
Moscow, Scotland
New York, Tyne and Wear
Normandy, Surrey
Pennsylvania, Gloucestershire
Quebec, County Durham
Toronto, County Durham

Way back when

Madagascar became an island 60 million years ago. Before then, it was part of India.

Antigua was first inhabited by the Ciboney (or 'Stone People'), whose settlements date back to at least 2400 BC.

Baghdad was once the centre of the Mesopotamian Empire. The ancient name for most of modern Iraq is Mesopotamia, a Greek word meaning 'between two rivers' – those two rivers being the Euphrates and the Tigris. Most Iraqis still live in this region.

The Faroe Islands were first settled by Irish monks in the sixth century AD.

New Zealand was initially administered as a part of the colony of New South Wales (in Australia). It only became a separate colony in 1840.

Laos was once known as Lan Xang, meaning 'Kingdom of a Million Elephants'.

Martinique was called 'Madinina' (the Island of Flowers) by the Caribs.

Yemen was known to the Romans as 'Arabia Felix' (Happy Arabia) because of the riches it provided for them.

Before the last Ice Age, the islands of Trinidad and Tobago were joined on to the continent of South America.

There's evidence to suggest that some 600,000 years ago, humans inhabited the desolate Sahara of northern Niger.

Moscow's Kremlin was originally a wooden fortress, built in 1156. Over the centuries it was enlarged and is now an enormous complex of government buildings.

The roman names for countries and regions

Latin Name	Current Name
Aegyptus	Egypt
Armorica	Brittany
Belgica	Belgium and the Netherlands
Britannia	Britain
Caledonia	Scotland
Cambria	Wales
Cornubia	Cornwall
Dania	Denmark
Finnia	Finland
Gallia	France
Germania	Germany
Helvetia	Switzerland
Hibernia	Ireland
Hispania	Spain
Islandia	Iceland
Judaea	Israel
Lusitania	Portugal
Norvegia	Norway
Tingitania	Morocco
Tripolitana	Libya

