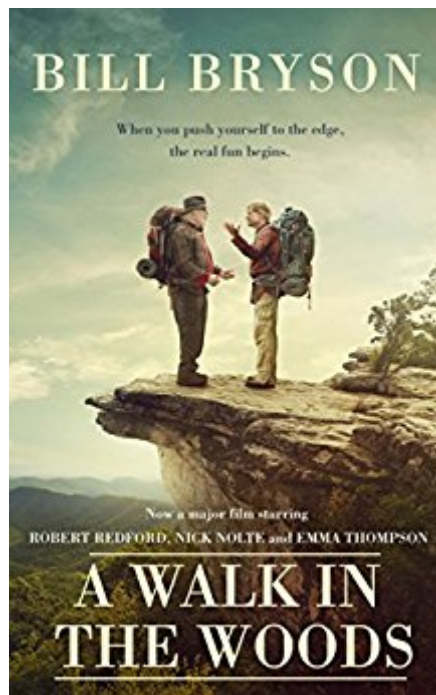




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A Walk In The Woods: The World's Funniest Travel Writer Takes A Hike (Bryson)



Synopsis

In the company of his friend Stephen Katz (last seen in the bestselling *Neither Here nor There*), Bill Bryson set off to hike the Appalachian Trail, the longest continuous footpath in the world. Ahead lay almost 2,200 miles of remote mountain wilderness filled with bears, moose, bobcats, rattlesnakes, poisonous plants, disease-bearing ticks, the occasional chuckling murderer and - perhaps most alarming of all - people whose favourite pastime is discussing the relative merits of the external-frame backpack. Facing savage weather, merciless insects, unreliable maps and a fickle companion whose profoundest wish was to go to a motel and watch *The X-Files*, Bryson gamely struggled through the wilderness to achieve a lifetime's ambition - not to die outdoors.

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Customer Reviews

I read "A Walk in the Woods" when it first came out and believe I reviewed it at that time. I'm a great admirer of Bill Bryson's work and this is one of his best. The writing is superb, the humor is everywhere, and the premise of two out-of-shape yahoos trekking through a formidable forest

environment is appealing to an armchair adventurer. I find the character of Steve Katz to be intriguing as apparently do many others. There is a discussion on .com about Katz, who he is, where he came from, and where he is. I know Steve Katz. He's a superior court judge in Kern County, California, and most surely was the inspiration for this lovable character.

Bill Bryson is put himself into the wilderness to tackle the infinitely long hike of the Appalachian Trail in the autobiography *A Walk in the Woods*. I chose this book mostly because I had just come from learning a little about the wilderness in school and I thought the class was interesting. The title made me think of the class, so I thought I should give it a try. The story follows Bill Bryson and his friend Katz as they scale the Appalachian Trail. It tells of the hardships he endures, the views he witnesses, and the people he meets along the way. I would recommend this book to read to people. Bill Bryson uses various elements to help try and bring his experience on the trail to life for the reader. He used styles such as similes and metaphors, and also he did a good amount of showing rather than telling. This is one description he uses to describe one part of the trail;

“They [woods] make you feel small and confused and vulnerable, like a small child lost in a crowd of strange legs,” (Bryson, 44). I found a lot of descriptions interesting and ones that pulled my attention. They were able to put pictures in my head of what the environment he was in was like. They might not be able to relate to younger audiences, but teens in high school and up would be able to enjoy and appreciate them. The author’s style of writing can also be tied into how he describes characters in the story. I do not think that I can relate to Bill Bryson’s experiences, because I have never been put into the wilderness like he has. He has done something that I do not think I could tackle right now. As for the characters in his book I feel that I can relate meeting people who act like some of the people that he did. I believe that the characters were well rounded and each had their own kind of personality. Katz, the hiking partner of Bryson, is one such character who I believe has a dynamic personality. In his first conversation with Bryson after meeting face to face Bryson adds that “He saw my look of wonder. ‘Snickers,’ he explained. ‘Lots and lots of Snickers,’” (Bryson, 22). He helps give us an accurate painting of the person by not only how they look, but also the conversations that they have with others. I found myself either liking a character or feeling neutral toward them, except in the case of one or two people Bryson meets along the way. The whole book is in chronological order; there is no trying to fill in what part of the story goes where to put it in order. Throwing the reader in the middle of the book may have not made much difference either

way. The book was able to hold my attention for the most part, but some times I did find myself wishing I could skip over a section of the reading. These parts are placed at the beginning of the chapters. They do not pertain to the story so much. They are around for background information about the Appalachian Trail or something that is related to it. The information was helpful in some case, but they also seemed stretched out and long. However, the book was interesting and I was tuned into reading when the actual story was brought back. It became more interesting when he started talking about the views he experienced in the forest. In one part the author describes the trail by saying, "Best of all, there were views, luscious and golden, to left and right" (Bryson, 124). It was at these parts that I was brought back into the story. The book tells an interesting story of one person's experience in the woods and is humorous in sections of the reading. However, I do not believe that everyone will get into this book. I did enjoy my mountaineering class in school, but I did find this book hard to stick with at some parts. This book may only be for those who find hiking enjoyable and want to learn about a trail of the U.S. that is not heard about that much.

Very breezy, quick read. I enjoy his sense of humor (occasionally sarcastic and curmudgeonly) and his writing style. I think some of us like to live vicariously through him, since he occasionally says stuff that we may be too polite to say (but wish we could). As a hiker, I've noticed some criticism regarding his descriptions of things that his partner did (essentially, disposing of trash and unneeded stuff improperly). From what I could tell, Bryson wrote about these incidents for humorous effect, and nowhere does it indicate his approval or disapproval of Katz's actions. While I'd certainly have preferred Bryson to register his objection (at least to the reader), I can understand how it may have blunted the humorous effect intended for the narrative. It's pretty clear to me from the rest of the book that he cares about the Trail, and of course, ultimately it's Katz's responsibility for what he did. By the way, it's stuff like improperly disposing of food and food-related trash that fosters animal problems (esp. black bears) on the Trail. So it bugs me too - but there's only so much one person can do to control the behavior of a fellow hiker, esp. if you're stuck with them (and must rely on them) for some time to come. Regarding NPS management competency, Bryson may be better at diagnosis than prescription. True for most of us, probably. Overall it's worthwhile read, laugh out loud funny about every 10-15 pages, and it'll get you enthusiastic about getting out on the trail. Just don't expect many hours of reading for your dollar. Not because it's a thin book - it's not - it's just that it is a super-quick read. Easy to knock off 100 pages at a sitting, even if your norm is about 10. As much as I enjoyed it, it didn't last. The flavor was a bit like

I'm a sexagenarian who, on a recent vacation, happened to walk out and back on the first three miles or so of the southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail (Springer Mtn, GA) and, in a fit of exhilaration, decided then and there that I would, by golly, hike the AT before I died. I was even so foolish to announce this on social media, which provoked a flood of suggestions that, before making any rash decisions, I read Bill Bryson's "A Walk in the Woods." And so I did. Having years ago read and enjoyed his "Notes from a Small Island," I was not surprised that "A Walk" kept me chuckling--sometimes laughing uproariously. Nor was I surprised by Bryson's skillful wordcraft--the man is a masterful phrase turner. And yet there's more. As I was joyfully entertained by his incisive sense of humor, I was simultaneously and seriously learning history, biology, geology (and several other -ologies) as well as being discomfited by Bryson's documentation of our culture's dismissive practices regarding ecology. Bill Bryson is very witty, to be sure, but he's also very knowledgeable, does thorough research, and subsequently marshals and seamlessly expresses what he's learned. In other words, he's a very good teacher. I much recommend this book. And, yes, I'm still planning to hike the AT.

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