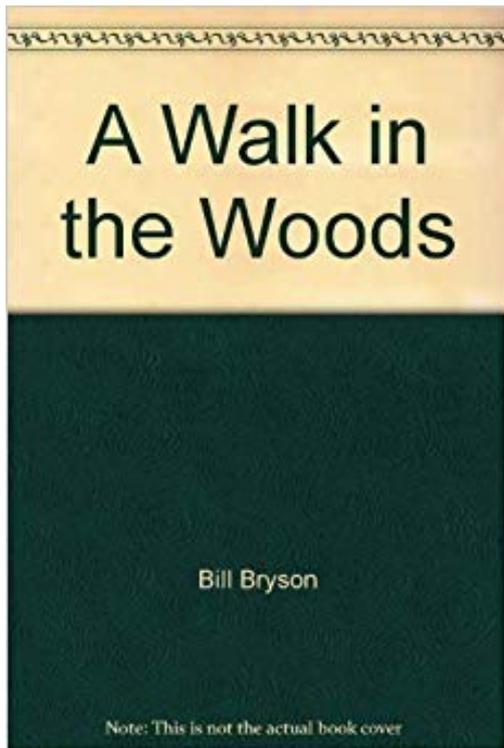


A Walk in the Woods *by* Bill Bryson



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Reviews of the *A Walk in the Woods* *by* Bill Bryson

Conjuril

A little voice in the head of Bill Bryson presented appeals to hiking the AT when he initially came across it - getting fit, improve his wilderness skills, get to know the country he had been away from for 20 years, and giving him some 'street cred' at the Four Aces Diner when all the guys started to talk. While the allure of the trail for him was a bit different than the little voice presented for me, it was still there. Another difference? He actually set about to do it. Sort of.

What Bryson actually did was mention to a few different people that he was planning to do it. Then he did research into it and realized what he had actually gotten himself into. Of course, he could not back down now. He had already told everyone, including his publisher, that he was going to do this. So that is what he set out to actually do. A Walk In The Woods follows his journey from the first concept through to the end reflections.

If you are looking for a guide to hiking the Appalachian Trail, a step by step guide to preparing and hiking through, then this is not the book for you. If, however, you are looking for a true account of an average guy, someone who does not spend his weekends hiking a 100 miles in all sorts of weather while foraging for wild plants to eat, then you have stopped at the right place.

Every step of the way Bill gives a realistic, and humorous, account of his experiences and conclusions.

For example, more than once his hiking partner grew frustrated and chucked portions of their food and supplies off into the woods, leaving them to eat noodles for days. Given that noodles was about the only thing either of them knew how to cook, at least they were already resigned to a non-varied trail diet. The loss of cookies, jerky and canned meat during these fits, though, was felt all the more. Bill seemed to sort of shrug it off, resigning himself to the new reality. I am not so sure I would have reacted as calmly to these particular episodes as Bill did. Maybe that is what makes him a better fit for writing this book than I would. His ability to kind of roll with things, seeing the humor in them, meant he was able to keep going.

As Bill and his hiking partner worked their way along the trail, having to actually leave it a few times due to previously scheduled engagements, I was impressed with how they kept getting up and going. With no real previous preparations, here were two guys hiking a trail that other decades younger were doing and found challenging.

Toward the end of *A Walk In The Woods* I was sure they were almost to the end of the trail and I was waiting for the big "We Did It!!" conclusion. It never came.

At first, I felt like it had all been a failure. After all the struggles of their hike and my time spent reading this book ... it was supposed to have a happy, wrapped up with a bow on top, ending. Then I thought about it for a few hours and slept on it. The next morning I viewed it a bit differently.

Here were two guys, stepping outside their comfort zones, actually doing what I have dreamt of doing more than once but never even started. They faced personal challenges both physically and mentally, making it out the other side viewing the world around them differently. They learned things about themselves they had not known before. How is that not success?

It really was about the journey, not the destination.

Where I would have had a set plan and freaked out when it did not happen the way I thought it should, Bill stepped back and took another look at them. His ability to think through things and see them from a detached view mean he did not over react and make the trip a horrible one. Yes, it was not a luxury cruise, but it could have been a lot worse.

Whether this attitude was due to writing the book after the fact, or if it is his personality, I am not sure. What I do know is that it made me stop and think more than once about my seriousness to events in life. To reflect on what the purpose really is. Is it the journey or the destination?

The ending of the book could have been more conclusive, rather than an abrupt stop that left me hanging. Perhaps it was done that way on purpose, to make me think. However, it could have been done in a better fashion.

I received this book from Blogging for Books for this review.

Ariurin

This is the 6th Appalachian Trail book that I have read. My "goal" when reading books on the AT is to read about the experiences... the people they've met, the conditions they've faced, and what obstacles got in their way. I like to hike vicariously through the author, and frequently find myself following along on Googlemaps looking at the overhead view as the story progresses. I especially enjoy reading about their experiences in the parts that I have hiked throughout New York and Connecticut.

In Bill Bryson's book there is very little mention of other hikers. In fact, when it comes to interactions with other people, more is said about the people that he and Katz (his hiking companion) met in the towns that the AT passes through, than is said about the other hikers that he met along the way. This is a book about Bill and his hiking companion. To the best of my knowledge, Bill never even had a trail name. He doesn't finish the trail, and in fact doesn't even do half of the trail. He never touches New York or Connecticut, and quite often you only have a vague idea of exactly where he is on the trail as he progresses. He frequently writes about historical events that happened in the areas of the trail that he is on, and spends a little too much time talking about the demise of various trees and animals that have gone extinct in the areas that the AT passes through. Usually this demise is due to the dreaded acid rain.

That said, I rate the book 4 stars. I do so because the "faults" that I listed above are based on the preconceived notion about what I expected to read. I have no right to fault Mr. Bryson for not living up to those notions. Of the 6 AT books I've read, this one is the most well written. Bill is obviously an author that hiked the trail, and not a hiker that wrote a book. There is plenty of historical education in this book, plenty of humor, and even some suspense.

If you are planning to hike the trail and want to read everything you can before heading off, then this book might not be right for you. In fact, it might be detrimental to your hike. To anyone else, I would recommend this book.

Uleran

Right. Well this book completely derailed my reading list for the summer. I was supposed to be catching up on Criminal Justice texts and memorizing terms from Barron's Law Dictionary... Instead, I purchased Notes from a Small Island and things went out of control from there. It is literally the first time in my life that reading a book made me laugh out loud and uncontrollably, to TEARS. This gem was highly recommended by English friends as a must-read before I make the move to the UK for my year of study abroad this fall. I obliged. Not even halfway through the book, I decided to order more of his books right away in order to have them ready when I finished with this one. That is how my Bill Bryson binge began. Currently I am on my third book (by order of what arrives in the mail first) called A Short History of Nearly Everything.

Bryson is merciless in his observations of British towns and the British in general, but it's all in the spirit of that endearingly cynical, self-deprecating, quintessential British humour. (see what I did there?!) His way of writing puts you at ease and it's like a cross between travel guide, government & history lesson and stand up comedy, as Bryson loves to go off on barely relevant and hilarious tangents. You never get the sense that he is trying too hard or being pretentious, either. A bonus is the glossary he provides in the back of the book for British words like "dual carriageway" and "naff."

The fact that it was recommended to me by English and Welsh friends is testament to the authenticity of Bryson's observations and his comedic genius. Seriously recommend this read if you're an Anglophile or just enjoy a good, fun read.

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